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Representations of Identity: Ethnicity, Race, Class, Gender and Religion. An Introduction to Conceptual History

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Prior to considering the relationships between the different constructions or markers of collective identities of ethnicity, religion, class and gender in European historiographies, some conceptual clarification is needed on the concept of identity in general and of *historical* identity in particular. In the case of identity this clarification is particularly important as the use of this notion has grown exponentially since the 1980s and with it a growing ambiguity in its meaning.² The first section of this chapter will therefore present a conceptual analysis of identity. In the second a short history will be presented of the concepts of ethnicity, race, class, gender and religion – the fundamental concepts of this volume. They will be analysed as ‘essentially contested concepts’ and their histories will clarify some of the interconnections between these ‘codes of difference’. These histories will explain why these contested categories have such notorious fuzzy boundaries. This second section will also identify a common development in the discussions about the concepts of ethnicity, race, class, gender and religion; that is, a change from ‘essentialism’ to ‘social constructivism’. This development is highlighted as it is essential for an understanding of the current debate about ‘The Nation and its Others’, and thus for the present volume.

The concept of historical identity

When we talk of the identity of individuals and collectives, we refer to the properties that make them different from each other in a particular frame of

¹With thanks for the financial support of the Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung and for the hospitality of the Berliner Kolleg für Vergleichende Geschichte Europas in spring 2007.

²Fundamental is E. Angehrn, *Geschichte und Identität* (Berlin and New York, 1985). For the inflationary use of ‘identity’ in the social sciences, R. Brubaker and F. Cooper, ‘Beyond “Identity”’, *Theory and Society* 29 (2000), 1–47.

reference. It is on the basis of their particular set of properties that we can identify them *as* individuals or collectives within specific sets and thus distinguish them. Identity and difference, sameness and otherness, are therefore reciprocally related; without identity there is no difference, and without difference there is no identity. For example, the notion of personal identity or a Self presupposes the notion of a non-Self or an Other. Therefore, there can be no Other in any *absolute* sense, because the concepts of Self and Other are conceptually related.³ This provides a solid argument to frame the chapters of this volume in the form of comparisons. On closer analysis, identity and difference thus turn out to be fundamentally *relational* concepts. *Essentialist* notions of identity, which, for example, imply that nationhood and ethnicity are pure and invariant essences, are thus based on conceptual confusion, although this does not lessen the practical consequences of such essentialist confusion (e.g. ethnic cleansing).⁴

This relational quality of identity also holds for the notion of *collective identity*. We can identify an 'in-group' – a 'we' – only *in relation to* an 'out-group' – 'they'. As the Greeks in antiquity were aware, there were only Greeks in relation to barbarians, and there was only an Orient in relation to an Occident. There can only be *inclusion* in a collective if there is at the same time *exclusion*.

In history, we can observe the relational character of collective identity concretely because we can trace the demarcations of in-groups from out-groups *in statu nascendi*. The discourses on ethnic and national identities are a case in point, as Joep Leersen highlights in his chapter on 'historicist nationalism' in this volume. For instance, the discourse on German national identity in the early nineteenth century was conducted by opposing characteristics of the Germans to characteristics of the French and Slavs. Similar observations pertain to the discourse on the Greek identity, where the Turks often functioned as the identity *ex negativo*, and vice versa. So we can observe that representation of collective identity is closely related to particular *other* collective identities in a *negative* way.⁵ As Spinoza, Hegel and Foucault have argued, this is the case because identity is constructed by negation. This also holds for the special cases in which a new identity is constructed by negating one's own former identity. This phenomenon is not unusual in the aftermath of traumatic experiences: both individuals and collectives may try to start a 'new life' by adopting another identity. This transformation is usually accompanied by publicly acknowledging past 'mistakes' and by trying to make up for them. The Federal

³S. G. Crowell, 'There is no Other. Notes on the Logical Place of a Concept', *Paideuma* 44 (1998), 13–29.

⁴See N. Naimark, *Fires of Hatred. Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Harvard, MA, 2001).

⁵See C. Koller, *Fremdherrschaft. Ein politischer Kampfbegriff im Zeitalter des Nationalismus*, (Frankfurt/M., 2005).

Republic of Germany offers a clear historical example because it defined itself politically as the democratic negation of totalitarian Nazi Germany while simultaneously negating 'the other German state' – the GDR – as simply another brand of totalitarian rule. All post-communist states and post-dictatorial states could furnish other examples.

In history, this negative bond between collective identities is often connected to some sense of being under threat and is therefore embedded in power struggles. In the early nineteenth century the Germans, for instance, had recent negative experiences with Napoleonic France. This is also true for many of the Slavonic nations in East-Central Europe *vis-à-vis* both their German (including Habsburg-German) and Russian neighbours during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This negative bond between different collective identities – the need of a 'negation' in articulating one's own identity – also helps to explain another important historical phenomenon in the process of nation-building: the collective exclusion of minorities by majorities – ranging from discrimination to expulsion and annihilation – especially in periods of crisis. During crises, linguistic, cultural or religious minorities are usually represented as *aliens* or *strangers*, who pose a threat to the very identity of those who are represented as a (typically homogeneous) 'majority'.⁶ The simultaneous rise of nationalism and of popular anti-Semitism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries illustrates this, with anti-Semitism particularly virulent in regions with suppressed forms of nationalism, such as East-Central Europe.

Exclusion, necessary for the construction of collective identity, thus turns into a practical danger when the demarcation between an in-group and an out-group develops into a moral demarcation that excludes the out-group. According to Jan Assmann, this has been the case since monotheisms displaced polytheistic religions in antiquity. Religious monism has, as such, unwittingly fostered moral intolerance by introducing the notion of 'false gods'; this is the price we pay, so to speak, for monotheism. By linking the demarcation between the in-group of true believers and the out-group of believers in 'false gods' to moral demarcations, monotheistic religions have paved the way for the 'immoral' practices of nationalism, including 'ethnic cleansing':

The distinction ... is the one between true and false in religion Once this distinction is drawn, there is no end of re-entries or sub-distinctions.

⁶E. Balibar, 'Fictive Ethnicity and Ideal Nations', in J. Hutchinson and A. D. Smith (eds), *Ethnicity* (Oxford 1996), pp. 162–8 asserts that the idea of (ethnic) homogeneity of 'nations' is a 'fabrication' of states when they nationalise their populations, a position also represented by Eric Hobsbawm in *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge, 1990). Within the discourse of 'The Nation' there is no space for 'overlapping' national identities.

These cultural or intellectual distinctions construct a universe that is full not only of meaning, identity, and orientation but also of conflict, intolerance and violence.⁷

So there is a profound analogy between religion and nationalism as forms of collective identity, especially according to those who interpret nationalism as a secular religion.

Before we turn to the concept of *historical* identity, it is important to bear in mind that it is just one type of identity. Individuals can also be identified through their *biological* identity – their fingerprints, DNA profile or iris scan. Similarly, in a not so distant past, serious attempts were made to identify collectives in terms of racial or class identities, when race was seen as an atemporal, biological category and class as a quasi atemporal one (at least between ‘primitive communism’ and ‘real communism’). Therefore the identification of individuals and collectives in terms of *historical* identity is not self-evident and requires explanation.⁸

What is specific for the *historical* identity of individuals and collectives is that this type of identity is defined by its development in time. The paradigm case of historical identity since the nineteenth century has therefore been conceived on the model of personal identity, although we must be very careful not to attribute the properties of individuals to collectives.⁹ The historical identity of a subject consists of the set of distinct characteristics which are developed over time through interaction with a particular environment. In the case of individuals we usually call this *personal identity* – their ‘personality’ or ‘character’. However, in the case of collectives we usually call it *historical identity*, although in the past the term ‘character’ has also been used in national contexts (as in ‘national character’) and to define a national ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’ (*Volksgeist*).¹⁰

This set of characteristics is not random, and must relate to important characteristics developed over time. Personal and historical identity does not mean just telling individuals and collectives apart from each other (i.e. describing their *numerical* identity); rather, it means a characterisation of their *individuality*

⁷J. Assmann, ‘The Mosaic Distinction: Israel, Egypt, and the Invention of Paganism’, *Representations* 56 (1996), 48–67, 48.

⁸For an exploration of the various functions and justification of history, see C. Lorenz, ‘History, Forms of Representation and Functions’, in N. Smelser and P. Baltus (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* vol. 10 (Oxford, 2001), pp. 6835–42.

⁹On the many pitfalls of constructions of collective identity, see L. Niethammer, *Kollektive Identität. Heimliche Quellen einer unheimlichen Konjunktur* (Reinbek, 2000).

¹⁰See J. Bos, *Reading the Soul. The Transformation of the Classical Discourse on Character, 1550–1750* (Leiden, 2003).

(i.e. describing their *qualitative* identity). It is no accident, then, that the biography, in which an individual develops a personal identity in time – its defining characteristics *as a person* – has often been regarded as the paradigm of doing history as such (by Wilhelm Dilthey, for instance). On closer analysis, historical identity thus has a paradoxical quality because it is identity through *change in time*. When we are referring to the historical identity of Germany or Poland, for instance, we are referring to a (national) collective, which *retained* a particular identity over time in its interactions with its environment, although both also changed at the same time. The assumption that history equates to change thus presupposes that the subject of history – of change – remains stable and therefore at the same time retains its identity. As such, history simultaneously presupposes *absence* of change, a quality usually associated with *myth*; the historical presupposes the unhistorical. Historical identity is essentially *persistence through change* or the *identity of identity and non-identity*, to quote the apt Hegelian formulation of Odo Marquard.¹¹

Since historical identity is persistence through change in time, it is conceptually linked to the notions of origins and continuity – two constitutive concepts of history as a ‘discipline’ and very present in national history. We expect that a history of the German or French nation will inform us about where the Germans or French came from. Historians achieve this by identifying their origins in time and by showing how these origins are linked to later developmental forms of the German or French nation by constructing lines of continuity. However, the question ‘where did the German nation or French nation come from and how did it develop?’, as we have seen, presupposes what must be clarified: the *existence* of a German and a French nation. This is the ‘unhistorical’ or ‘mythical’ aspect of ‘scientific’ history, also identified by Pierre Nora.

Temporal continuity in histories can be constructed in three forms. First, in the form of a *cycle*, where the subject of history after a period of time returns to its original state. This was the dominant temporal structure in classical antiquity. Second, in the form of linear *progress*, where the subject of history develops towards an ideal end-state. This is the temporal structure of Christian and Enlightenment thinking, which is basically a secularised version of the Christian view of history.¹² Third, in the form of linear *decadence*, where the subject of history develops towards a state of dissolution. This temporal structure is exemplified by histories of empires in decline. Most national histories are typically histories of progress, although episodes of decadence – due to

¹¹O. Marquard, *Apologie des Zufälligen* (Stuttgart 1986), p. 361.

¹²See J. K. Wright, ‘Historical Thought in the Era of the Enlightenment’, in L. Kramer and S. Maza (eds), *A Companion to Western Historical Thought* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 123–43.

catastrophic events – are usually interwoven in the ‘progressive’ story-line, such like histories of nations with former empires (e.g. Spain).

Typically, national historians have not, to any significant extent, reflected on the temporal structure of their histories or on the ‘mythical’, ‘unhistorical’ component of historical thinking. Harold Mah has traced this symptomatic blind spot back to the origins of *Historismus* in Herder and Möser, noting that their:

historicist histories required the assumption of a mythical past. A mythical event or development functioned for them as a privileged origin establishing a standard whose continuous influence was then perceived to be disseminated throughout the rest of history, so that subsequent events or developments could be measured against it or legitimated by it. That originating event or development thus overshadowed what came after it; it reduced or even cancelled out the historical significance of subsequent events. German tribalism thus defined the truly German, while the French culture that many of Germany’s rulers had adopted in the eighteenth century was rejected as alien or anti-German. ... Historism [= *Historismus*], in other words, can paradoxically be seen as the expression of a desire to overcome history, whether it was the cosmopolitan influence of French culture or other undesirable developments and political life The importance of this ahistorical classical thinking in a deeply historicising philosophy is a paradox that suggests the same motive that is suggested in historicist myths of origin – namely, that one attends to historical development in its most elaborate way in order to overcome history, to transcend its contradictions, transience, and mortality.¹³

Hence, although ‘scientific’ national history, based on *Historismus*, claimed to ‘historise’ the whole past, it has refrained stubbornly from ‘historising’ *itself*, from analysing its own origins and from reflecting on the motives behind its ‘historicising’ drive.¹⁴ On closer analysis, paradoxically, these motives turn out

¹³H. Mah, ‘German Historical Thought in the Age of Herder, Kant, and Hegel’, in Kramer and Mah (eds), *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, pp. 143–66, esp. pp. 160–1. Compare Mark Phillips’ similar observations concerning the authoritative formulation of historicism in the Anglo-Saxon sphere in Collingwood’s *Idea of History* in Phillips, ‘Distance and Historical Representation’, esp. pp. 135–8. Michel Foucault has therefore proposed to supplant history by ‘genealogy’, see T. Flynn, ‘Foucault’s Mapping of History’, in G. Gutting (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 29–48.

¹⁴This blind-spot of ‘scientific’ history also is found in the very marginal position of historiography within the profession. Historiography as a specialisation only originated in the late nineteenth century and is typically not regarded as ‘real’ history.

not to be so different from the motives of the ancient Greeks to prefer 'poetry' over history, critiques of 'ahistorical' thinking from antiquity to the Enlightenment notwithstanding, to get some existential foothold in this transient world of mortal souls in the form of general truths.¹⁵ The main difference between the mindset of the ancient Greeks and the 'scientific' historians since the nineteenth century is that the former were candid about their desire for general truths while the latter prefer to cloak their desire for 'lessons of history' in the form of 'the origins' and 'the catastrophic events' of their nations.¹⁶ Therefore, the difference between the 'pre-national', ancient 'regime of historicity' – based on the idea of *Historia magistra vitae* – and the modern, 'national' 'regime of historicity' – based on the idea that the future gives meaning to the past – may not be so rigid in their practical aspect after all.¹⁷

After clarifying the concept of historical identity in general we can now turn to the concepts of collective identity specific to this volume.

Ethnicity/race, class, religion and gender as essentially contested concepts

Like 'the nation', ethnicity, race, class, religion and gender belong to the type of notions W. B. Gallie has called 'essentially contested concepts'. As such, a characteristic of these concepts is that there are always equally plausible rival interpretations that ensure consensus cannot be established. Debates concerning the ('right') meaning and definition are therefore ongoing and sustained by respectable arguments and evidence. All the basic concepts of political discourse and of social scientific and historical discourse belong to this category. Gallie illustrates his argument on the basis of notions such as 'freedom' and 'democracy', but nation, ethnicity, class and race would have sufficed (as would 'tradition', 'community' and 'citizenship' which are not accidentally related to the discourse on the nation).¹⁸

All these concepts are used as both *analytic categories* of social scientific and of historical analysis and as what Pierre Bourdieu has called *categories of*

¹⁵See M. Finley, 'Myth, Memory and History', in *History and Theory*, 4, 3 (1965), 281–302.

¹⁶See E. Runia, 'Presence', in *History and Theory*, 45, 1 (2006), 1–30. Runia signals the discourse of trauma as the dominant present form in which meaning is mobilised in historiography without making this explicit (p. 4).

¹⁷See also, R. Koselleck, '*Historia Magistra Vitae: The Dissolution of the Topos into the Perspective of a Modernized Historical Process*', in R. Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA, 1985), pp. 21–38, esp. p. 32.

¹⁸W. B. Gallie, 'Essentially Contested Concepts', in idem, *Philosophy and Historical Understanding* (New York, 1964), pp. 157–91.

practice, that is categories in which 'lay' actors represent themselves in order to identify with others and undertake social and political action.¹⁹ So, in these cases there is a very close connection between the first-order concepts of social actors and the second-order concepts of social scientists and historians, to use another useful distinction made by Alfred Schütz.²⁰

Moreover, the second-order concepts of social scientists and historians can be and are regularly transformed into first-order concepts in which social actors interpret themselves as groups *vis-à-vis* others.²¹ This transformation process can be located on an axis with 'completely forced' and 'completely voluntary' as its poles, dependent on whether the codes of difference are adopted voluntarily by the actors themselves ('group identification') or are imposed by others ('social categorisation'). The latter was, for example, the case with 'the gypsies' (who identified themselves as 'Sinti' or 'Roma') and with the assimilated Jews in Europe during the Nazi period, who used to identify themselves in terms of their nationality, but who were classified according to their 'race'.

In short, concepts like nation, ethnicity, race, class, religion and gender are used as collective 'codes of difference', both as *self*-representations of what social actors regard as their relevant collective identities and as representations of collective identities *by others*, not least by states, social scientists and historians.²² In both sorts of representation 'codes of difference' identify '*a difference that makes a difference*', but the two kinds of representation do not necessarily coincide, as the history of nationalism amply testifies. As Hegel long ago and Charles Taylor more recently have argued, representations of identity have to be *recognised* by others in order to be socially 'effective'.²³ This

¹⁹See for this distinction, Brubaker and Cooper, 'Beyond "Identity"', esp. pp. 4–6.

²⁰A. Schütz, 'Concept and Theory-formation in the Social Sciences', in idem, *Collected Papers*, vol. 1 (The Hague, 1973), pp. 48–67.

²¹As to the concepts of 'group' and 'collective' or 'group identity', we follow the anthropologist Frederick Barth's basic definition of social groups: 'If a group maintains its identity when members interact with others, this entails criteria for determining membership and ways of signalling membership and exclusion'. See F. Barth, 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries', in Hutchinson and Smith (eds), *Ethnicity*, p. 79.

²²R. Kastoryano, 'Définir l'Autre en France, en Allemagne et aux États-Unis', in R. Kastoryano et al. (eds), *Les Codes de différence. Race – origine religion. France – Allemagne – États Unis* (Paris, 2005), p. 14. He notes 'Définir l'Autre c'est surtout dessiner des frontières réelles ou symboliques. Ces frontières conduisent à des différenciations internes par catégories sociales, culturelles et morales'.

²³C. Taylor, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton, NJ, 1992). See also Kastoryano, 'Définir l'Autre', 16: '[–] la question se pose est de savoir quelle identité devient légitime pour une reconnaissance publique [–] Bien entendu, toute relation dans l'altérité n'implique pas nécessairement le conflit, mais elle traduit de fait une relation de pouvoir qui génère souvent des conflits'. Also see J. Leerssen, 'The Politics of National Identity', in idem, *National Thought in Europe. A Cultural History* (Amsterdam, 2006), pp. 105–73.

recognition can be and regularly was/is denied – all ‘ethnic’ groups that have failed to be recognised as a ‘nation’ (such as the Kurds in Turkey and Iraq or the Catalans in Spain) are a case in point. Therefore, all representations of collective identity are embedded in a *politics* of recognition. This helps to explain why all codes of difference have been related to political movements and to political struggles, and why they keep being ‘contested’ in both political practices and the social sciences.²⁴

With the help of Michel Foucault we could characterise ethnicity, race, class, religion and gender as a *discursive field*, the field of the non-spatial Others of the nation or of the non-spatial collective identities (which, as discussed below, does not mean that these concepts lack spatial *aspects*). In this discursive field we can also locate other related ‘codes of difference’, or Others, which we will not deal with explicitly in depth. Before we elaborate on the issues discussed already, we shall briefly address the other ‘codes of difference’ not yet identified in order to prevent false expectations. All history is necessarily selective and all we can do is to make our choices explicit; this also holds for the analytical kind of history we have been pursuing in this volume.

First, we have not been explicitly dealing with the distinction between coloniser and colonised, because in NHIST this distinction has been classified as a spatial distinction, dealt with in the context of the (colonial) empire as a (spatial) alternative to the nation.²⁵ Of course, there is also ‘internal colonisation’ *within* the framework of the nation – Irish and Baltic histories are cases in point – but this phenomenon enters our field of vision only if it is relevant from the viewpoint of ethnicity. As a consequence, we will neither deal with the interesting interrelationship between the racial construction of (European) whiteness and (colonial) colouredness,²⁶ nor go into the related distinctions between (European) ‘civilisation’ and (‘primitive’ or ‘uncivilised’) ‘barbarism’.²⁷

²⁴See M. Castells, *The Power of Identity. The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. Volume II* (Oxford, 1997).

²⁵See, for the example of the Habsburg Empire, J. Feichtinger (ed.), *Habsburg Postcolonial: Machtstrukturen und kollektives Gedächtnis* (Innsbruck, 2003). See, for an overview of the postcolonial themes, ‘Postcolonial Studies’, in G. Bolaffi et al. (eds), *Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity and Culture* (London 2003), pp. 222–7.

²⁶For an overview of whiteness studies, see D. Dworkin, *Class Struggles* (Series History: Concepts, Theories and Practice) (Harlow, 2007), pp. 162–89. For further reading, see G. Lerner, ‘Gender, Class, Race, and Ethnicity, Social Construction of’, in N. Smelser and P. Baltus (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* vol. 10, (Oxford, 2001), p. 5989.

²⁷For the notion of ‘civilisation’, see Jürgen Osterhammel, *Europe, the ‘West’, and the Civilizing Mission* (London 2006). See, for claims to civilisational superiority outside Europe, especially in China, P. O’Brien, ‘Historiographical Traditions and Modern Imperatives for the Restoration of Global History’, *Journal of Global History*, 1 (2006), 3–39.

Last but not least, we will leave aside the issues of 'multiculturalism' and the 'new ethnicities'. This volume thus remains 'Eurocentric' in an old-fashioned sense, because it does not deal with the entanglements of Europe and the rest of the world, including Europe's colonial legacies and the legacies of the former colonies in Europe.²⁸

Second, we do not deal with *all* aspects of gender in history. The construction of masculinity and femininity – both important in national histories – will not receive any significant systematic attention as we choose to focus only on the analysis of the gendered nature of national *narratives*. Nor will we deal with the construction of heterosexuality and homosexuality in national histories or with the gender relations in the colonial setting for the very same reasons. This is also the case for the question of whether or not gender is a more fundamental code of difference in comparison to class, race and ethnicity. We subscribe to Kathleen Canning's argument that 'the use of gender as an analytical tool does not *per se* connote a primacy of gender relative to other forms of inequality, such as race, class or ethnicity; rather it suggests the inextricable links between gender and other social identities and categories of difference'.²⁹

Third, we do not deal with the distinction between patriotism and nationalism, including the question of whether a distinction between a 'legitimate' and 'healthy' measure of nationalism called 'patriotism' and 'unhealthy' variants called 'nationalistic' exists. Of course, the question of 'constitutional patriotism' enters our field of vision through the lens of 'civic nationalism', but this is the only exploration of this issue in this volume. We also approach the related distinction between ethnocentrism and ethnicity, and racism and race, in a similar manner.³⁰

So this is what we will *not* do. Now we will elaborate on what we will do, thereby introducing the concepts to be explored and their interrelationships. Thus we hope to clarify why the codes of difference we are dealing with have very permeable boundaries of meaning and why most of them have been sliding into one another. The key to this problem lies in the history of these concepts.

²⁸For a fundamental critique of Eurocentrism in European history, see D. Sachsenmaier, 'Recent Trends in European History: The World Beyond', *Journal of Modern History* (forthcoming 2008).

²⁹K. Canning, 'Gender History', in Smelser and Baltus (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* vol. 10, p. 6009; K. Canning, *Gender history in Practice: Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class, and Citizenship* (Ithaca, NY, 2006); Dworkin, *Class Struggles*, pp. 137–62.

³⁰See R. A. LeVine, 'Ethnocentrism'; G. M. Frederickson, 'Racism, History of', in Smelser and Baltus (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* vol. 10, pp. 4852–5 and pp. 12716–20; B. Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, (Princeton, NJ, 2004), pp. 15–39.

Ethnicity/race, class, religion and gender: a short conceptual history

Having labelled our key concepts as 'essentially contested', the observation that they all lack an unambiguous definition will come as no great surprise. As a consequence, their interrelationships have also been contested and sliding – to the point where some have argued that *all* our codes of difference are 'intersectional', meaning that they cannot be established independently of each other because they are interacting and mutually constitutive. According to this argument, gender and race are mutually constitutive, for instance, because unitary categories like 'woman/women', 'man/men' and 'black/blacks' conceal actual heterogeneity.³¹ The gender ideal of 'womanhood', embodying purity and dependency on male protection, was long defined exclusively for *white* women only, while women of colour were represented as economically self-supporting and open to sexual access by white men. The reverse was true for the black male in the Antebellum South; the black man was represented as economically dependent on his white owner and as sexually craving for white women. Gender and racial codes of difference must therefore be analysed as 'intersectional'. The same arguments have been developed for gender and class.³²

According to the same argument, nationality and religion are interdependent and not codes of difference *in themselves*. Whether a Jewish German emigrating to the United States was classified as a German or a Jew varied with the socio-political context; during the mid-nineteenth century s/he was categorised as a German and in the 1930s as a Jew. Similar arguments apply to Jamaicans, who were classified as 'white' in Jamaica but as 'coloured' in England.³³ This complexity does not of course mean that these concepts are meaningless in themselves, but only that they acquire their concrete meaning in varying socio-political contexts. So, in analysing codes of difference, it is

³¹Canning, 'Gender History', p. 6006. See also Stuart Hall, 'The New Ethnicities', in Hutchinson and Smith (eds), *Ethnicity*, pp. 161–2.

³²B. Robnett, 'Race and Gender Intersections', Smelser and Baltes (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* vol. 10, pp. 12681–4; R. Crompton, 'Social Class and Gender', in Smelser and Baltes (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* vol. 10, pp. 14233–8; Dworkin, *Class Struggles*, pp. 135–212; 'Ethnicity and Race' and 'Religion and Ethnic Conflicts', in G. Bolaffi et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity and Culture*, (London, 2003), pp. 99–102 and 283–90.

³³Lerner, 'Gender, Class, Race, and Ethnicity, Social Construction of', pp. 5984–9; G-A. Knapp, 'Traveling Theories: Anmerkungen zur neueren Diskussion über "Race, Class, and Gender"', *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* 16, 1 (2005), 88–111.

necessary to relate them to their specific contexts, as is usual in the history of ideas and in intellectual history.³⁴

Ethnicity and race

The ‘contested’ quality of ‘codes of difference’ has recently been confirmed by R. M. Williams in relation to ethnicity: ‘Struggles over definitions in this field have a long and complex history. Because the objects of interest are inherently complex, the search for the One True Definition will evidently fail.’³⁵ Williams notes (as does Joep Leerssen in this volume) that ‘the term has been used variously to signify “nation”, “race”, “religion”, or “people”, but the general generic meaning is that of collective cultural distinctiveness’, usually linked to ideas of common descent and of shared history. Therefore, ‘An *ethnie* here is a culturally distinctive collectivity, larger than a kinship unit, whose members claim common origin or descent.’³⁶

J. Hutchinson and A. Smith also emphasise the idea of common cultural or biological characteristics of an *ethnie* and its ‘medium-sized’ scale, somewhere between the local and the national. They describe ‘ethnies’ with the help of six ideal-typical characteristics:

- 1 a common *proper name*, to identify and express the ‘essence’ of the community;
- 2 a myth of *common ancestry*, including a myth of a common origin in time and place, which gives an *ethnie* a sense of fictive kinship – a kind of ‘super-family’ (this family model also holds for ‘the nation’);
- 3 shared *historical memories*, or better, shared memories of a common past or pasts, including heroes, events and their commemoration;
- 4 one or more *elements of common culture*, which need not be specified but normally include religion, customs, or language;
- 5 a link with a *homeland*, not necessarily its physical occupation by the *ethnie*, only its symbolic attachment to the ancestral land, as with diaspora peoples;

³⁴See R. Kastoryano, ‘Définir l’Autre en France, en Allemagne et aux États-Unis’, pp. 20–1: ‘La question est de savoir comment sont construites ses catégories [of difference], et à quoi elles correspondent. La tâche est difficile, car les concepts varient dans le temps, s’appliquent à des populations diverses et impliquent des interactions spécifiques entre les groupes et le pouvoir’. For intellectual history, see F. Oz-Salzberger, ‘Intellectual History’, in Smelser and Baltus (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* vol. 10, pp. 7605–12; Q. Skinner, ‘Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas’, in idem, *Visions of Politics, Vol. 1: Regarding Method* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 57–90.

³⁵R. M. Williams, ‘Ethnic Conflicts’, in: Smelser and Baltus (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* vol. 10, p. 4806.

³⁶Williams, ‘Ethnic Conflicts’, p. 4806.

6 a *sense of solidarity* on the part of at least some sections of the ethnies' population.³⁷

Through the idea of a 'homeland', an ethnie also has a clear spatial dimension. Barth too emphasises this spatial aspect.³⁸ Many ethnies claim to be nations, but this is not necessarily the case. Moreover, for many nations, claims have been made that they originate in multiple ethnies; the Dutch nation, for example, has been represented as descending from three ethnic groups: the Frisians, Saxons and Franks. The Swiss and the Belgian cases are other obvious examples of multi-ethnic nations.

Hutchinson and Smith argue that ethnicity is typically a code of difference applied to others and is not used for self-representation. This usage goes back to the Greeks, who used the term *ethnos* for others and not for themselves:

This dichotomy between a non-ethnic 'us' and ethnic 'others' has continued to dog the concepts in the field of ethnicity and nationalism. We find it reproduced in the ways in which the Latin *natio* applied to distant, barbarian peoples, whereas the Roman term for themselves was *populus*. We find it also in the English and American (White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) tendency to reserve the term 'nation' for themselves and 'ethnic' for immigrant peoples, as in the frequently used term of 'ethnic minorities'.³⁹

Given the contemporary omnipresence of the notion of 'ethnicity', it is surprising that the term was a latecomer, first making a regular appearance in English dictionaries in the 1950s and replacing the notion of race in the social sciences only from the 1960s.⁴⁰ The English term 'ethnic', however, goes back to the Middle Ages, derived from the Greek *ethnikos*, which in turn was a translation of the Hebrew *goy*.⁴¹ Its meaning shifted from 'non-Israelite, gentile' to 'non-Christian and non-Jewish' pagan; hence originally ethnic was a religious code of difference. Only from mid-nineteenth century did the current meaning of 'ethnic' to refer to a secular group of people emerge.⁴²

³⁷Hutchinson and Smith (eds), *Ethnicity*, pp. 6–7.

³⁸Barth, 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries', p. 79.

³⁹Hutchinson and Smith (eds), *Ethnicity*, p. 4; S. Olzak, 'Ethnic Groups/Ethnicity: Historical Aspects', in Smelser and Baltus (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 10, p. 4814.

⁴⁰D. Schnapper, 'Race: History of the Concept', in Smelser and Baltus (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 10, p. 12702; Olzak, 'Ethnic Groups/Ethnicity: Historical Aspects', p. 4814, remarks, however, that the English word ethnicity was first recorded in 1772 in the sense of 'heathenish superstition'.

⁴¹Olzak, 'Ethnic Groups/Ethnicity: Historical Aspects', p. 4813.

⁴²Hutchinson and Smith (eds), *Ethnicity*, p. 4; Olzak, 'Ethnic Groups/Ethnicity: Historical Aspects', p. 4814.

Max Weber used the term 'ethnic' as interchangeable with 'racial'; ethnic groups were

those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or of both, or because of memories of colonisation and migration; this belief must be important for the propagation of group formation; conversely, it does not matter whether objective blood relationship exists.⁴³

Weber also discussed ethnic groups under the term 'nationalities', so the notion of 'ethnic' – originally a religious distinction – has slid in the direction of both 'race' and 'nation'.⁴⁴ With his emphasis on 'subjective beliefs' as constitutive for 'ethnic/racial' groups, Weber anticipated what later became known as 'social constructivism' (see below).

A typical example of the semantic slippage between the ethnic and national codes of difference is that only since the 1980s have archaeologists – under the influence of anthropology – started to use the concept of ethnicity where they formerly used nation or people. However, in anthropology, 'ethnic group' was a relative newcomer as until 1945 anthropologists used the notion of 'race', 'tribe' and 'culture'. 'Race' was only dropped after 1945 and, because of the colonial taint, the notion of 'tribe' was increasingly replaced by 'ethnicity' from the 1960s onwards.⁴⁵

The rising popularity of 'ethnicity' after the Second World War was directly connected to the sudden unpopularity of the other concept used interchangeably with ethnicity in this discursive field – 'race'. Ethnicity only made its appearance in a world where Hitler had given racism a bad name. Therefore Jürgen Habermas, Daniel Levy and Nathan Sznajder argue that 1945 has been the real watershed in the twentieth century. The question, then, is in which respect are the codes of difference 'ethnic' and 'racial' identical and in which are they different? In order to answer this we need to trace the history of the concept of 'race'.⁴⁶

⁴³Olzak, 'Ethnic Groups/Ethnicity: Historical Aspects', p. 4815.

⁴⁴Also see C. Calhoun, 'Ethnonationalism: Cultural Concerns', in Smelser and Baltus (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* Vol. 10, pp. 4870–4.

⁴⁵See Jenkins, 'Ethnicity: Anthropological Aspects', p. 4824.

⁴⁶See J. Habermas, 'Geschichtsbewußtsein und posttraditionelle Identität. Die Westorientierung der Bundesrepublik', in idem, *Eine Art Schadensabwicklung Kleine Politische Essays VI*, (Frankfurt/M. 1987), p. 165: 'Auschwitz hat die Bedingungen für die Kontinuierung geschichtlicher Lebenszusammenhänge verändert – und nicht nur in Deutschland'. Habermas therefore argues that 'Auschwitz' has become 'zur Signatur eines ganzen Zeitalters'; In translation in J. Habermas, *The Postcolonial Condition. Political Essays*, (Cambridge, MA, 2001). Also see D. Levy and N. Sznajder, *The Holocaust and Memory in a Global Age* (Philadelphia, 2005); Kastoryano, 'Définir l'Autre', p. 21: 'l'ethnicité apparaît comme une invention en réaction à la "race"'.

Although 'proto-racist' practices go back to antiquity – when blacks were already stigmatised – the origins of the modern idea of race can more plausibly be traced to Spain at the end of the fifteenth century.⁴⁷ During the *Reconquista*, for the first time a *social* categorisation was introduced on a supposedly *biological* basis when 'pure-blooded' Old Christians were set apart from New Christians of 'impure blood', by which was implied recent converts to Catholicism of Muslim and Jewish origin. This 'impure blood' could not be erased and was thus hereditary. The idea that the biological determined the social would remain the distinctive feature of racial thinking, as was the idea of racial hierarchy. So, just like the idea of 'ethnicity', the idea of 'race' was a code of difference with a religious origin before it was transformed into an autonomous code of difference from the sixteenth century onwards. Therefore, the history of race and of racism is often linked to the history of anti-Semitism (although anti-Semites did not necessarily refer to the 'Jewish race'), going back to the Europe-wide discrimination against and demonisation of the Jews by the Christian Church from the late Middle Ages onwards.⁴⁸

This new idea of 'race' would also produce the justification of black slavery for Christians. Although the standard Christian justification for enslaving Africans was that they were 'heathens' and that enslavement would make heaven accessible to them, converted slaves were kept in bondage because of their 'heathen ancestry': 'Like with the doctrine of the purity of blood in Spain descent rather than performance became the basis for determining the qualifications for membership in a community that was still theoretically based on a shared Christian faith.'⁴⁹

From the sixteenth century, the English- and German-speaking regions increasingly interpreted their histories in terms of 'race'. The British claimed that their political superiority was due to their Saxon 'blood ties' and the superiority of the liberty-loving 'Germanic race', as Tacitus had described them in Roman antiquity. The same *topos* led in France to the myth of two 'peoples' – the aristocracy claimed superior Germanic 'blood ties', while the rest of the French descended from the Gauls, who had been defeated by the German invaders.⁵⁰ So in the British case the meaning of 'race' slipped into that of 'nation' while in the French case it slipped into that of 'estate' – a social category.⁵¹

⁴⁷Frederickson, 'Racism, History of', p. 12716. For 'proto-racism' in antiquity, see Isaac, *The Invention of Racism*.

⁴⁸Frederickson, 'Racism, History of', p. 12716. The Jews were represented by the Christian Church as having a pact with the devil and plotting the destruction of Christianity; Hutchinson and Smith (eds.), *Ethnicity*, pp. 238–78.

⁴⁹Frederickson, 'Racism, History of', p. 12717.

⁵⁰Schnapper, 'Race: History of the Concept', p. 12701; Frederickson, 'Racism, History of', p. 12717; 'Race', in Bolaffi et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity and Culture*, pp. 239–45.

⁵¹In the nineteenth century, however, in France too the term 'race' was often used synonymously with 'nation'. See Kastoryano, 'Définir l'Autre', p. 19.

From the eighteenth century onwards, with the ever-growing European expansion over the rest of the globe, ethnologists started to think of human beings as part of the natural world and to subdivide man into (usually three to five) races. The term race came to designate constant human types which not only described but also explained human diversity: 'people who look different belong to different races, and they are different because they belong to different races. That view is still widespread.'⁵² So the racial codes of difference are based on a set of presumably typical physical features, primarily skin colour, shape of skull and of nose, eye fold and hair texture. Significantly, no genes determining these morphological features have ever been identified, and if the existence of one significant genetic difference were the criterion for defining races, 'every village would be occupied by a different race'.⁵³

The biological taxonomy of nature in classes introduced by Karl Linnaeus (1707–78) was the foundational event in the history of racial thinking as he was the pioneer in defining the concept of 'race' as applied to humans. Within *homo sapiens* he distinguished four categories: *Americanus*, *Asiaticus*, *Africanus* and *Europeanus*. They were first based on place of origin, and later on skin colour, mediated by the concept of climate. This link between climate and geography anchored 'race' in space; each 'race' supposedly occupied a distinct geographical territory. So, like ethnicity, race has its spatial aspects.⁵⁴ Each race had certain characteristics, caused by the climatic environment and having become hereditary, that were endemic to individuals belonging to it. Linnaeus' races were clearly skewed in favour of Europeans, so his work represents the theoretical origin of racial hierarchies in which Europeans always were at the top.⁵⁵ Elites in Europe used this hierarchical classification to justify their conquering or subjugation of members of the 'lower' races, including the institution of slavery. So thinking in races implied thinking in racial hierarchies. This is perhaps not strange given the fact that the term 'race' was used for people sharing the same 'blood', that is, to genealogically related individuals, especially those of *noble* families. Only in the 1930s did biologists start to criticise the notion of human 'races' in the plural.⁵⁶

⁵²G. Barbujani, 'Race: Genetic Aspects', in Smelser and Baltus (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 10, pp. 12694–700, 12695.

⁵³Barbujani, 'Race: Genetic Aspects', p. 12699. See also T. Duster, 'Race Identity', in Smelser and Baltus (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 10, pp. 12703–6, esp. p. 12704: 'the biological concept of race as applied to humans has no legitimate place in biological science'.

⁵⁴Barbujani, 'Race: Genetic Aspects', p. 12695.

⁵⁵Isaac, *The Invention of Racism*, p. 12, argues that this tradition to regard one's own people as 'the best' goes back to Greek and Roman Antiquity.

⁵⁶Schnapper, 'Race: History of the Concept', p. 12701.

This *polygenetic* view meant a breach with the *monogenetic* Christian insistence on the essential unity and homogeneity of the human race and its collective elevation above the animal kingdom based on the Bible. This Christian view did not necessarily have egalitarian or emancipatory implications, although it had this potential too, as was later exemplified by the movement for the abolition of slavery. Indeed, most Christian thinkers held that white was the original or 'real' colour of humanity and that blackness and brownness resulted from a process of degeneration caused by climate and conditions, as Georges Louis Buffon (1707–88) had argued in his *La Dégénération des animaux* (1766). Buffon's book is also considered as a starting point of modern racism because he considered the black 'race' to be a degenerate form of the white 'race', just as he regarded apes to be degenerate men. Although he acknowledged that all human 'subspecies' belonged to the same race, like Linnaeus he posited a definitive hierarchy in which some are closer to animals than others.⁵⁷

From the end of the eighteenth century full-fledged variants of racial thinking developed until, from the 1870s, Social Darwinism was established as 'the science of race'. Feeding on Romantic ideas of cultural or 'ethnic' nationalism, implying, for example, that only individuals of 'Germanic', Teutonic', 'Aryan' or 'Nordic' ancestry were part of the 'German race', alias the 'German nation', ethnic nationalism and racism became hard to distinguish for some time and not only in the German lands. Exclusion of those labelled as belonging to other 'races' – 'the Jews' and 'the gypsies' for instance – thus became only 'natural'.

The same obsession with 'purity' – with 'pure' ancestry and 'pure' legacy – could be found in Great Britain, the US (where it manifested itself in discrimination against native Americans, blacks and later immigrants from eastern and southern Europe) and France (where it manifested itself in overt anti-Semitism). It was no coincidence that a French thinker, J. A. de Gobineau, in 1853 was the first to postulate the 'natural' hostility of the human 'races' and who warned that their 'intermingling' by marriage would lead to 'impurity', followed by inevitable 'decline'. The risks of 'impurity' made quite a few racial thinkers wary of the colonial enterprise, although this did not inhibit the British from using the myth of the 'Aryan race' to legitimise their domination of 'the empire'.

Another French thinker, Gustav LeBon, postulated in 1894 that 'distinct races are unable to feel, think and act in the same manner, and subsequently are also

⁵⁷Isaac, *The Invention of Racism*, pp. 8–10. Isaac also points to thinkers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, ranging from Paracelsus to Giordano Bruno, who *identified* for instance Indians and pygmies with animals, denying them humanity; Frederickson, 'Racism, History of', p. 12718. See also Barbuji, 'Race: Genetic Aspects', for the varying number of human 'races' 'discovered', as between 3 and 53, during the period 1735–1962.

unable to understand one another'. Race thus developed into a category explaining all historical phenomena. De Gobineau, for example, explained the political revolutions of 1848 in terms of race.⁵⁸ This idea that biological 'race' determines the social and cultural – turning the racial code of difference into the ultimate, foundational one – would eventually lead to the idea and the practices of 'racial hygiene' and of 'eugenics' in the twentieth century, culminating in the genocide of the 'Jewish race' in Europe by Nazi Germany. The concept of 'racism', however, in 1910 had not yet made it into the *Oxford English Dictionary* – it only originated in the 1930s.⁵⁹ Characteristically, the 'Jewish race' was an invention based on the transformation of a religious code of difference into a (biological) 'racial' one. Maybe it is one of the ironies of twentieth-century history that although 'race' as a code of difference outlasted the Holocaust – in the US well into the 1960s and in South Africa into the 1990s – 'scientific racism' did not.

Ethnicity and race after 1945: from essentialism to social constructivism

With the downfall of 'race' as a scientifically and morally acceptable code of difference after 1945 and the rise of 'ethnicity', their discursive field also changed gradually but fundamentally. This was mainly the consequence of growing awareness that 'race' represented a *social* – relational – rather than a *biological* code of difference. Social scientists drove the message home that racial thinking had constructed and *produced* 'races' and not the other way round. This constituted little less than a Copernican Revolution. Conceptualising 'races', 'ethnies' and 'nations' as objective entities, 'out there', which can be defined in terms of racial, ethnic and national essences gave way to conceptualising them in terms of the social construction of codes of difference of Selves in relation to Others. Essentialism or primordialism thus also gave way to relationism, social constructivism, instrumentalism or situationalism; positions associated with Eric Hobsbawm in history and with Benedict Anderson in anthropology.⁶⁰ With the benefit of hindsight it can be concluded that the 'trick' of essentialism had been to naturalise (codes of) differences which were no more than historically, culturally and politically contingent.

One of the consequences of this move from essentialism to social constructivism was that in the social sciences the study of 'races' gave way to the study of 'race relations'. Another was that now race had evaporated as a category

⁵⁸Schnapper, 'Race: History of the Concept', p. 12702.

⁵⁹Isaac, *The Invention of Racism*, p. 1; <http://www.answers.com/topic/racism?cat=health> (accessed 6 July 2007)

⁶⁰Hutchinson and Smith (eds), *Ethnicity*, pp. 7–10; Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe*.

with 'objective' (biological) characteristics, its distinction with ethnicity had to be rethought. In the US context, the distinction between ethnicity and race has recently been located in their distinctive *assimilationist potential*, primarily related to state policies. Where (white) ethnic identities have developed into 'an option rather than an imperative' (e.g. the 'ethnic cuisine'), 'boundaries between racial groups were tenaciously maintained by social institutions, sanctioned by state policies and legitimised by racial ideologies'. While (white) ethnic identity, according to some, has tendentially transformed into an issue of self-definition (e.g. 'Irish-American' or 'German-American'), this 'voluntary' character is missing in coloured racial identities (e.g. 'Black-American' or 'Native American').⁶¹ As a consequence, although claims to racial identity are identical in form to claims to ethnical identity – and both have proved to be malleable and related to political movements – 'race' has proved to be the more 'inflexible' code of distinction than 'ethnicity'.⁶²

'Ethnicity' as a code of difference was also rethought in the social sciences in constructivist ways from the 1960s onwards. Instead of looking for 'essential' characteristics of an 'ethnie' and its distinct 'culture', as Hutchinson and Smith did, the anthropologist Frederick Barth warned against the presumption that social reality is made up of 'distinct named groups' – of 'islands' – with fixed characteristics, such as cultural difference, social separation and language barriers: 'while purporting to give an ideal type model of a recurring empirical form, it implies a preconceived view of what are the significant factors in the genesis, structure and function of such groups'. Instead, Barth insisted that ethnic identity was produced and reproduced in routine social interaction and social practices, in which boundaries between Self and Others are constructed. Instead of taking boundaries between 'ethnic groups' as givens, Barth focuses on *boundary construction* and *boundary maintenance*.⁶³ In socio-

⁶¹Hutchinson and Smith (eds), *Ethnicity*, p. 12, who refer to anti-essentialist social scientists who argue 'not only that all ethnic communities are deeply divided, but also that ethnicity itself is an optional identity and is often overshadowed by other (gender, class, regional) identities'. See also Jenkins, 'Ethnicity: Anthropological Aspects', p. 4827, who argues that in the 'modern' world 'the contours and contents of national identity, and the contexts of its uses and justifications, may be more visible than ethnicity'.

⁶²'Ethnicity and Race', in: Bolaffi et al. (eds), *Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity and Culture*, p. 101. An example of the interrelatedness of racial categories and politics is M. Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community* (Athens, OH, 2005).

⁶³Barth, 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries', pp. 75–82.

⁶⁴E. Goffmann, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York and London, 1959); P. L. Berger and T. Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York, 1966).

logy, similar ideas were simultaneously developed by Ervin Goffman, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman among others.⁶⁴

Jenkins has summarised Barth's social constructivist approach of 'ethnicity' in six points:

First, the analysis of ethnicity starts from the definition of the situation held by the social actors. Second, the focus of attention then becomes how ethnic boundaries are maintained or changed in the structured interaction between 'us' and 'them' which takes place across boundaries. Third, the ethnicity of actors is not necessarily fixed: it is defined situational. Fourth, the ethnic identity depends on ascription, by members of the ethnic group in question and by outsiders with whom they interact. Fifth, ethnicity is not a matter of 'real' cultural differentiation; differences are in the eye of the beholder, the 'cultural stuff' which had hitherto believed to determine group identification is somewhat irrelevant. Finally, ecological issues are influential in producing and reproducing ethnic identity: economic competition for scarce resources plays an important role in the generation of ethnicity.⁶⁵

A similar development from essentialism to relationism and social constructivism has characterised the code of difference of 'gender', to which we turn now.

From 'women' to 'gender'

The conceptual history of 'gender' is much shorter and therefore somewhat simpler than those of 'race' and 'ethnicity'. The word 'gender' comes from the medieval English *gendre*, which comes from the Latin *genus*, all meaning 'kind', 'sort' or 'type'.⁶⁶ In French, it is related to the *genre*, as in type or kind. The term 'gender' was first introduced in its modern meaning by the psychologist and sexologist John Money in 1955 to describe the behaviour of 'intersexual' persons (also known as hermaphrodites), that is, people who lack a clear physical sexual identity as male or female, but who nevertheless have an unambiguous representation of their sexual identity: 'He used the term *gender role* to signify all those things that a person says or does to disclose himself

⁶⁵Jenkins, 'Ethnicity: Anthropological Aspects', p. 4825.

⁶⁶According to the *Middle English Compendium*, 'gendre'/'gender' means: 1. (a) A class or kind of individuals or things sharing certain traits [sometimes distinguished from *species*, which denotes a class based upon different criteria]; (b) a race or nation; (c) a sex; (d) ~ of *wilde swin*, a herd of wild swine [cp. *gendren* v.]; 2. *Gram.* (a) The category of gender in the morphology of nouns and pronouns; (b) the category of voice in the morphology of the verb. See <http://ets.umdl.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?size=First+100&type=headword&q1=gendre&rgxp=constrained> (accessed 1 May 2007).

or herself as having the status of boy or man, girl or woman, respectively. It includes, but is not restricted to, sexuality in the sense of eroticism.⁶⁷

Such representations had been labelled under 'sex role' or 'sex identity', but in the 'intersexual' cases these terms lack a clear meaning because the 'sex' of the persons in question cannot be determined on the basis of the identifying physical counterparts. It is essentially this meaning of the term 'gender' that has been adopted by 'gender historians' from the 1980s, who substituted 'gender' for 'women' as the object of their specialisation. As Canning notes, 'Gender is a category of social analysis which denotes the social and cultural, as opposed to natural or biological, relations of the sexes.' Later, 'gender' came to include 'the symbolic system or signifier of relations of power in which men and women are positioned differently'.⁶⁸ So 'gender' – unlike 'race', 'class', 'religion' and 'nation' – is *not* both an analytic category and a category of social practice (in Pierre Bourdieu's terms), but only an analytic category. This sets gender as a code of difference apart from the others.

Basically, the rise of 'gender' and the disappearance of the distinction 'woman/man' – which was and is a category of social practice – as the fundamental code of difference in the study of the sexes represented the same *transformation of 'essentialism' to 'relationism' and 'social constructivism'* we have signalled above in the study of 'race' and 'ethnicity' – and 'nation' for that matter. Instead of taking the differences between men and women as a given, rooted in nature, from now on the differences between the two sexes were seen as the outcome of social, cultural and political relations and processes in which the differences between 'femininity' and 'masculinity' are discursively produced. The historian Joan Scott is usually credited with this transformation with her essay 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis' (1986), although she referred to others using the gender notion, such as Natalie Davies.⁶⁹

This transformation implied not only a break with (biological) 'essentialism', but also *with the concept of class* which had been important in 'women's history'. In the 1960s and 1970s, sex and class had often been represented as

⁶⁷See 'Gender', <http://www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/GESUND/ARCHIV/SEN/CH11.HTM#b3-GENDER> (accessed 1 May 2007).

⁶⁸K. Canning, 'Gender History', p. 6006; J. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, (New York, 1988), pp. 28–31.

⁶⁹See Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, pp. 28–50, esp. p. 32: "'Gender" as a substitute for "women" is also used to suggest that information about women is necessarily information about men, that one implies the study of the other'. For the transformation of women's history into gender history, see also R. Habermas, 'Frauen- und Geschlechtergeschichte', in J. Eibach and G. Lottes (eds), *Kompass der Geschichtswissenschaft* (Göttingen, 2002), pp. 231–45.

parallel forms of oppression; the female sex was often viewed as a subordinate class, subjugated by a dominant class of men. The transformation of 'women' into 'gender' also implied a break with the unitary view on 'women' and 'men', often based on the notion of 'experience', and a break with the history of the 'oppression' of 'women' by 'men' that overlooked differences in race, class, ethnicity and sexual preference.⁷⁰ Class analysis was criticised heavily by feminist historians because it was usually based on the male 'breadwinner model' of the division of labour whereby the class position of women was identified with the position of their male 'breadwinner'. This thus effectively excluded women from class analysis. Moreover, this model became increasingly inadequate as more women entered the labour market as well as with the increasing number of single households, although class theorists have developed several counter-arguments in order to adapt to this type of critique.⁷¹

From the 1990s, the analysis of gender as a code of difference however came more into line with the constructivist analysis of race, as sex and sexuality too came to be seen by some as discursively constructed and no longer the biological basis of gender (just as in racial analysis 'colour lines' – that is, differences in colour – were no longer seen as the biological basis for distinctions between 'races', but as socially constructed). Gender theorists like Judith Butler no longer posit a fixed relationship between sex and gender, and criticise this presupposition as a hangover of thinking in the 'unitary' and 'binary codes' of heterosexuality:

Gender can denote a *unity* of experience, of sex, gender, and desire, only when sex can be understood in some sense to necessitate gender – where gender is a psychic and/or cultural designation of the self – and desire – where desire is heterosexual and therefore differentiates itself through an oppositional relation to that other gender it desires. The internal coherence or unity of either gender, man or woman, thereby requires both a stable and oppositional heterosexuality.⁷²

Given the existence of non-heterosexuality (in several varieties), the 'discursivation' of sex and gender, and of the body (transforming the body into

⁷⁰K. Canning, 'Gender History', p. 6006; Lerner, 'Gender, Class, Race, and Ethnicity, Social Construction of', pp. 5984–9.

⁷¹Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, pp. 53–93; Canning, *Gender History in Practice*, pp. 123–39; Crompton, 'Social Class and Gender', p. 14235.

⁷²Therefore, Butler argues that 'traditional' feminism and gender theory stayed within 'the epistemic regime of presumptive heterosexuality' and 'heterosexism'. See J. Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London, 1999), pp. 30–1.

'processes of *embodiment*') basically *detaches* sex and gender from notions of physical difference. It thus takes the fundamental ambiguity of the 'intersexual condition' as the general model of gender analysis. This may be a plausible point of departure for some, but for others it is clearly a 'bridge too far'. Crompton, for instance, argues that 'to recognise the biological roots of gender, however, is not to collapse into a biological determinism or essentialism'.⁷³

Following Butler, the fundamentally gendered *and* ambiguous nature of representations of the nation has become an important topic of gender history. While the nation as a place of origin and source of being is often represented in female terms – from 'Mother Russia' to '*la patrie*' in France – the nation as an active subject is simultaneously represented in male terms – as a 'band of brothers' or 'Founding Fathers'. The trope of the 'rape of the nation' is also heavily and ambiguously gendered; in war the female nation is threatened by foreign men. When men are asked to 'sacrifice' themselves in war for the nation they are actually asked to protect their women and children. Like ethnicity, nationhood is thus represented on the model of the family. So the relationship between warfare and nation-building has also been analysed from a gender perspective. The equation of the bearing of arms with masculinity and citizenship in any case explains the less than full inclusion of women in many nations, as is manifested by their late and often incomplete admission to full citizenship rights.⁷⁴

The rise and fall of class

It is not uncommon to connect the spectacular rise of ethnicity/race and gender as codes of difference with the same spectacular fall (or even 'death') of class as a code of difference in history and in the social sciences, especially after 1990.⁷⁵ There is ample evidence to support this thesis directly related to the disintegration of the labour movement and of socialism in the West, although Marxism has simultaneously been inspiring new avenues of social analyses.⁷⁶ The word 'class' derives from the Latin *classis*, which could mean a

⁷³Crompton, 'Social Class and Gender', p. 14234.

⁷⁴A. M. Alonso, 'Nation-states, Nationalism and Gender', in Smelser and Baltus (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* vol. 10, pp. 10376–80; Canning, *Gender History in Practice*, pp. 192–239.

⁷⁵Dworkin, *Class Struggles*, p. 76, however rightly observes that class analysis 'has a history of being pronounced dead, something that should be kept in mind when considering its current obituaries'.

⁷⁶See Dworkin, *Class Struggles*. Any comparison of the number of entries containing the word 'class' with those containing the word 'ethnic' and 'gender' underscores the picture of the former's 'fall'.

'fleet', an 'army' or a 'division' in school (= school class).⁷⁷ Next to these meanings, the word is used only in the formal sense of a 'division' from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries to indicate a set of objects identified by specific formal criteria (e.g. 'species', 'genus' and 'type').

The first social 'filling' of the concept of 'class' goes back to Livy, who described the division of the Roman people by Servius Tullius into six 'classes' according to their military function and property. In the eighteenth century, this social 'filling' returned as the word 'class' was regularly used to indicate a subcategory of an 'order' (*Stand; état*) – the traditional social 'code of difference' in Europe before the French Revolution.⁷⁸ The concept of 'class' was first introduced as an analytical social category by the French physiocratic economist François Quesnay, who developed an economic model of society in 1758–9 in which he divided the population into three 'classes' on the basis of their economic activity: 'the productive class' (the tenants), 'the class of landowners' and 'the sterile class' – in Quesnay's view all those who work outside the domain of agriculture. Alongside these three classes he distinguished those 'who just work and consume'. This was the majority of the population, but they did not fit into Quesnay's class scheme based on ownership of land and on agricultural labour – the only productive sector according to physiocratic theory.

The first transition from physiocratic theory to 'modern' class analyses – that is, to Marx's theory of 'class' – is represented by the work of the Scottish economist Adam Smith. In his famous *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) he argues that all labour, not just agricultural labour, is productive and distinguishes three 'orders of people' based on their source of income: wages, profits and rent of land. So although Smith still uses the concept of 'order', this is distinct from the traditional meaning of 'order' based on notions of 'honour', 'birth', 'dignity' and 'loyalty'. 'Order', according to Smith, is already defined in economic terms and therefore pre-dates Marx's economic concept of 'class'. Occasionally, Smith uses the term 'class' itself, but less often than his use of 'order'. Social analysts in the nineteenth century would continue using both 'order' and 'class' next to each other – in the German *lands* often synonymously – although 'class' in general became more prevalent in the course of time.⁷⁹

A second transition to Marx's theory of class is represented by the economist David Ricardo (1817) in *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation*. In contrast to Smith, Ricardo argued that the interests of the three classes dis-

⁷⁷R. Walter, 'Stand, Klasse', in O. Brunner, W. Conze and R. Koselleck (eds), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, vol. 6 (Stuttgart, 1990), pp. 218–19.

⁷⁸Walter, 'Stand, Klasse', pp. 218–21.

⁷⁹Walter, 'Stand, Klasse', pp. 227–8. See also the chapter on nation and class below.

tinguished by Smith were not only *contradictory* but in fact *irreconcilable* – anticipating Marx’s notion of ‘opposite class interests’ and ‘class antagonism’. Moreover, unlike Smith, he regarded the ‘class’ that lived off rent as ‘not working’ and ‘parasitic’, thus introducing an antagonistic two-class scheme. This scheme was explicitly specified by William Thompson in *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth Most Conducive to Human Happiness* (1824), where he distinguished two ‘classes’: the ‘producer and the non-producer’, i.e. ‘the owners of labour on one side and the owners of the means of labouring on the other’. They did not form homogeneous blocs, but were multi-fractured along lines of occupation, income, etc. Thompson also developed the view that economic class antagonism reproduced itself on the political level in the opposition between the ‘governing classes’ and ‘the majority of the productive classes’ who lacked political influence. Therefore, decades before Marx, the connection to productive labour was represented as the basis of ‘classes’ and of class antagonism, in the spheres of economics and politics. Indeed, France Sismondi had done just that in 1818.⁸⁰

According to E. P. Thompson the explanation for the development of class theory around this time is simple: it is the circumstance that the English working class was ‘making itself’ and was thus ‘in the making’ at the end of the eighteenth and in the first decades of the nineteenth centuries.⁸¹ So, unlike the later anti-Marxist critique that ‘classes’ had only been an ‘invention’ of the Marxist tradition, it was ‘the social question’ that had produced ‘social’ and ‘socialist’ thinking in terms of ‘classes’. In this respect there is a huge difference between ‘class’ and ‘race’ as codes of difference, although, of course, both ‘class’ and ‘race’ are discursively constructed.

This is not the place to go into the extensive and wide-ranging debates about Marx’s theory of class in all its complexity, or into the wide variety of its applications to history. Marx’s own statements remained rudimentary and the relationship between his theoretical formulations and historical analyses is strained.⁸² We will summarise the essentials of Marx’s concept of ‘class’ here in five points:

- 1 Although different classes have different levels of income and different lifestyles, the crucial determinant of class is ownership or non-ownership of the means of production. This view of ‘class’ distinguishes Marxist concepts of ‘class’ fundamentally from Max Weber and the Weberian tradition in

⁸⁰Walter, ‘Stand, Klasse’, pp. 250–3.

⁸¹E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963).

⁸²For a systematic overview and analyses of Marx own writings on ‘class’, see D. McLellan, *The Thought of Karl Marx: An Introduction* (New York, 1971); for the recent debates, see Dworkin, *Class Struggles*.

- sociology (although Weber also subscribed to the view that property and lack of property are the basis of all class situations).
- 2 Class is not just a 'position' which individuals occupy in society, but the structural relationship of the group of owners of the means of production to the group of non-owners. The class relationship between labour and capital is one of exploitation and therefore is *antagonistic*. Class analysis thus is always a form of *relationism*. You cannot have one class in a society because in class relationships it takes (at least) two to tango.
 - 3 Class is not just an analytical category developed by social scientists and historians; class relations exist in reality and exert 'objective', causal effects on those who 'occupy' the class positions, whether they are conscious of it or not. For Weber, groups – including 'classes' – exist only if groups of individuals share common ideas about their group membership. From the mid-nineteenth century, class also became a category of social practice.
 - 4 Class struggle is a feature of every society since the development of settled agriculture, and also where social divisions seem to be based on factors other than the ownership or non-ownership of the means of production (e.g. in caste societies or in feudal societies). Class struggle is thus an inherent feature of all class societies and is the 'motor' of history. This is an *essentialist* idea about how history as a process is structured and differs fundamentally from Weber's nominalism and his rejection of any one-sided materialist philosophy of history.
 - 5 Class struggle under capitalism will lead to a polarising relationship between the class of owners and the working class, eventually leading to a revolution in which capitalism will be supplanted by socialism.⁸³

Although each of these characteristics – individually or taken together – has been criticised and/or abandoned by most later Marxists, the combination of *essentialism*, *relationism* and *antagonism* can be seen as the kernel of Marx's own analyses of classes. Furthermore, just like race, ethnicity and gender, essentialism in class analysis has clashed with social constructivism since the 1980s. As – in the case of Marxist class analysis – essentialism was a form of relationism from the start – in contrast to the *non-relational* essentialism of race and ethnicity – the abandonment of essentialism could not consist of a transformation to relationism, as had been the case with race, ethnicity and gender. The problem for class analysis was this: all forms of essentialism imply determinism – that is, determination of

⁸³See P. Saunders, 'Class, Social', in Smelser and Baltus (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* vol. 10, p. 1934. For an extended argument, see Dworkin, *Class Struggles*. Eric Hobsbawm (1917–) is probably the most famous living Marxist historian, who has also been subscribing to its Leninist amendments. See E. Hobsbawm, *On History* (London, 1998).

collective identities like ethnies, races and sexes by their supposed essences. This also holds for the relationist form of essentialism – in the Marxist case the determination of (the working) class by its relation to the other (capital-owning) class.⁸⁴ The essence of Marx's form of class analysis was that it posited a determining antagonistic relation between the (economically defined) classes, independent of the 'subjective' ideas and 'subjective' political and cultural experiences of the 'incumbents' of the 'class positions'. This had created the notorious problem of 'false consciousness', a tenet that would continue to haunt Marxists and explicitly be dropped by the later 'cultural' brands of Marxism, starting with Antonio Gramsci and E. P. Thompson who expanded on Marx's notion of ideology. According to Thompson, the working class had 'made' itself as much as it had been made by capitalism during the early Industrial Revolution, and as far as it was 'class consciousness', this was the product of their own political and cultural experiences.⁸⁵

Since, according to Marx, essentialism was internally linked to antagonism, simultaneously with essentialism another pillar of Marxist class analysis was undermined. The strong internal coherence of Marx's class theory also made it vulnerable when confronted with fundamental critique. This may help explain why, from a theoretical point of view, Marxist class analysis was hit harder by the 'constructivist turn' than traditional conceptions of ethnicity, race and gender. As soon as 'class' and 'class interest' were represented as a (historically contingent) product of 'class discourses' and 'the language of class', class changed into something that was in need of an explanation instead of representing the explanation itself. In the words of Gareth Stedman Jones:

Language disrupts any single notion of the determination of consciousness by any social being because it is itself part of social being. We cannot therefore decode political language to reach a primal and material expression of interest since it is the discursive structure of political language which conceives and defines interest in the first place. What we must study therefore is the production of interest, identification, grievance and aspiration within political languages themselves.⁸⁶

However, as soon as class changed from being the *explanans* to being the *explanandum*, the questions 'What's the point of class analysis?' and 'What

⁸⁴Essentialism had been one of the constitutive ideas of the Aristotelian concept of science: relationism was one of the core ideas of classical mechanics. See E. J. Dijksterhuis, *Mechanization of the World Picture* (Oxford, 1961).

⁸⁵Thompson criticised the modern 'structuralist' variants of Marx class analysis (Louis Althusser, Nicos Poulantzas, Perry Anderson) in *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays* (London, 1978).

⁸⁶Quoted in Dworkin, *Class Struggles*, p. 113.

remains of Marx?’ were unavoidable. From the 1980s, they were acknowledged by historians such as Stedman Jones and Patrick Joyce who had formerly subscribed to class analysis and who had been ‘Marxists’. The ‘discursive turn’ in class analysis was sometimes also seen as a form of ‘class treason’ as it more or less implied the ‘burial’ if not ‘the death’ of class. This postmodern version of Marxism, however, did not make many converts.

The absence of a visible growth in antagonism between the working class and the capitalist class in the West, also evidenced in the ever-growing ‘middle classes’, seemed to undermine the basis of Marx’s class analysis in time. This was furthered by the fundamental change from an industrial to a service economy – continuously eroding the classical industrial ‘proletariat’ – and the ideological hegemony of neoliberalism since the 1980s. The conversion of Western social democracy to a neoliberal worldview after 1990, the critique of class analysis by gender and postcolonial studies and, last but not least, the implosion of ‘real socialism’ did not make the attraction of class analysis greater. The net result is that after 1990 class analysis, and social history based on this notion, looks to many as outdated as religion did to most in the 1970s. As a consequence, a ‘new’ cultural history has taken centre stage, although there is already a counter-movement against the ‘excesses’ of culturalism.

This takeover was accelerated by those postmodern critics, such as Jean Baudrillard and Zygmunt Baumann, who argued that the notions of ‘society’ – the object of sociology and of ‘the social’ and thus class as a useful code of difference – were limited to the era of ‘modernity’ and of the nation-state. Seen from this perspective the semantic sliding between the notions of ‘class’ and of ‘nation’, as identified by Welskopp and Deneckere in this volume, was far from accidental. According to these critics, class has simply outlived its legitimate lifespan in the era of ‘postmodernity’ and ‘globalisation’.

The critique of class as a code of difference also received impetus from post-colonial theorists who criticised the hidden spatial dimension of class. They argued that Marxism and class analysis are fundamentally ‘Eurocentric’ as they are based on the history of Europe, especially in its Enlightenment version.⁸⁷ This ‘Eurocentric’ version of world history had from its very beginning turned a blind eye to the *racial* character of capitalism, denying the fundamental role of slavery in the genesis of capitalism and of the ‘Black

⁸⁷In this respect Marxism belongs to the family of modernisation theories originating in the Enlightenment and shares its fundamental problems. See C. Lorenz, “‘Won’t you tell me where have all the good times gone?’ On the Advantages and Disadvantages of Modernization Theory for History”, in Q. E. Wang and F. L. Fillafer (eds), *The Many Faces of Clio: Cross-cultural Approaches to Historiography* (New York and Oxford, 2007), pp. 104–27.

Atlantic'.⁸⁸ Geoff Eley, therefore, has argued that a new analysis of capitalism and its origins is called for that takes both the postcolonial and the gender critique of classical Marxism seriously – and thus the role of slave labour and female labour beyond wage labour (especially servant labour).⁸⁹

From religion to religion?

As a genuine contested concept, the concept of religion has been discussed for more than 150 years and is still lacking the most basic consensus. In contrast to 'race', 'ethnicity' and 'class', even the etymology of the word 'religion' is uncertain and has been the object of discussion for almost two centuries. The English word clearly derives from the Latin *religio*, 'reverence (for the gods)' or 'conscientiousness'. The origins of *religio*, however, are obscure. The most important etymological interpretations are:

- 1 From Latin *religare*, reconnection to the divine – referring to the ritual duties in Roman religion. This was Cicero's (106–43 BC) interpretation.
- 2 From Latin *religere* – treating carefully or considering carefully. This was Lactantius' (c. 250–c. 325) interpretation.
- 3 From *religare*, re-connection to the divine – from Latin *re* (again) + *ligare* (connect, as in English ligament). Since the eighteenth century 'religion' first only referred to Christianity and later on also to other societies of believers.

Given the lack of agreement on the etymology of *religio*, it will come as no surprise that the definitions of religion also vary widely.⁹¹ Byrne distinguishes four basic types, while O'Toole mentions the first two only:

- 1 *substantive definitions* define religion in terms of the typical content of its beliefs. A classic example is Tylor's definition of religion as 'belief in spiritual beings'. Modern examples focus on such elusive phenomena as the sacred, the transcendent, the supernatural or the superempirical;

⁸⁸For a summary of the debate and the literature see Dworkin, *Class Struggles*, pp. 85–133; J. M. Bryant, 'The West and the Rest Revisited: Debating Capitalist Origins, European Colonialism, and the Advent of Modernity', *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 31 (2006), 403–44.

⁸⁹G. Eley, 'Historicizing the Global, Politicizing Capital: Giving the Present a Name', *History Workshop Journal*, 1 (2007) 154–88.

⁹⁰See Karl-Heinz Ohlig, 'Religion', in Alf Christophersen and Stefan Jordan (2008) *Lexikon Theologie. Hundert Grundbegriffe* (Stuttgart, 2008), pp. 258–61.

⁹¹See Daniel Pals, 'Is Religion a sui generis Phenomenon?' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 55 (2) 1951, 259–84. See also R. O'Toole, 'Religion, Sociology of', in Smelser and Baltes (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* vol. 10, pp. 13106–12, esp. p. 13109, where O'Toole observes that 'scholars are travelling in all directions at once and that every assertion eventually evokes its exact opposite'.

- 2 *functional definitions* define religion by reference to the role religion plays in personal and social life or the structure of religious thought and action. A celebrated example is Durkheim's definition of religion in terms of a symbol system based on and enforcing a distinction between the 'sacred' and the 'profane' reality which unites members of society into a moral community by providing answers to questions concerning the meaning of existence;
- 3 *experiential definitions* demarcate religion by reference to a putative common, or core experience religious actors participate in.⁹² An example is Müller's definition that religion amounts to an ability to experience the infinite in the finite;
- 4 *family resemblance definitions* reject the search for the necessary and sufficient conditions for the classification of an institution as religious. There is no attribute or set of attributes common to all things we call 'religious' because they form a loose set; there is merely a network of overlapping similarities and there is no common 'essence' to all religions. Definitions of religion, as with the other codes of difference, thus move from essentialist definitions (1–3) to social constructivism (4).

Although definitions of religion usually do not specify special spatial markers, *institutionalised* religions usually do have 'holy' or 'sacred' places. Some are related to the life and death of their founder(s), others to places of worship (temples, churches), places of conservation (of relics and corpses), sites of commemoration and places of pilgrimage. Therefore religion too, although treated in this volume as a 'non-spatial' Other of the nation, has its spatial aspects. The scholarly interest in the study of religion was, like race, also one of the consequences of Europe's encounter with the non-European Other, although intellectual reflection on religion(s) can be traced back to scholars in Greek and Roman antiquity and was also heavily conditioned by

⁹²P. Byrne, 'Religion: Definition and Explanation', in Smelser and Baltus (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* vol. 10, pp. 13061–2; O'Toole, 'Religion, Sociology of', pp. 13107–8; also D. Silver, 'Religion without Instrumentalisation', *Archives européennes de sociologie*, 47, 3 (2006), 421–34. On religious experience, see F. Watts, 'Religion, Psychology of', in Smelser and Baltus (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* vol. 10, pp. 13102–6. Cf. D. Pollack, 'Sacred and Secular', *Archives européennes de sociologie* 47, 3 (2006), 417, who states that 'more and more social scientists presume that religion is indefinable by definition, that categories cannot be applied universally, but rather need to be placed in specific historical contexts ...'. The same position is argued by Timothy Fitzgerald, 'Critique of Religion as a Cross-cultural Category', in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 9.2 (1997), 91–110.

the Reformation. Fundamental topics of this field of knowledge, such as the critique of religion, theories of the origin of religion and its social functions, and the comparison between polytheism and monotheism, find their origin in these ancient writings, so thematically there is a remarkable continuity in the reflection on religion.⁹³

The Latin term *historia religionis* first appeared in the sixteenth century and was used alongside terms like *historia ecclesiastica* as titles of chronicles of important events in church history. It was also applied to religions other than Christianity.⁹⁴ The birth of a critical study of religion understood as textual criticism of biblical texts, based on Jean Mabillon's treatise on the 'historico-philological method' in *De re diplomatica* of 1681 and starting with Richard Simon's *Histoire critique de l'Ancien Testament* in 1678, came only after Christianity was split by the Reformation and after the religious wars of the seventeenth century had destroyed the Christian 'culture of unity'. Textual criticism of biblical texts also produced the distinction between the theological and historical study of religion, which did not mean that all or most historians of religion displaced Christian apologetics. Within the critical study of religion one can see a distinction between historians who continued to postulate divine providence in human history, such as Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet in his *Discours sur l'histoire universelle* (1681), up to Leopold von Ranke in the nineteenth century, and historians who postulated that there was no place in human history for providence, as Montesquieu did in his *De l'esprit des lois* (1748) as well as Voltaire.

Montesquieu acknowledged religion as one of the factors alongside climate, laws, customs and traditions conditioning the intellectual character of a nation and its underlying 'spirit'. Voltaire, however, regarded religion as only a 'phase' in the history of civilisation that would be superseded by the phase of 'reason', an idea systematised into a full-blown stage theory by the marquis de Condorcet and Auguste Comte in the nineteenth century.⁹⁵ Voltaire formulated a religio-critical stance that originated in the 'radical' Enlightenment thinkers like Baruch Spinoza (1632–77) and would be characteristic of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century materialists from baron d'Holbach and Claude Helvetius to Ludwig

⁹³See H. G. Kippenberg, *Die Entdeckung der Religionsgeschichte. Religionswissenschaft und Moderne* (Munich, 1997).

⁹⁴F. W. Graf and A. Reuter, 'Religion, History of', in Smelser and Baltus (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* vol.10, pp. 13071–2.

⁹⁵See J. Israel, *The Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity*, (Oxford, 2001); A-N de Condorcet, 'The Progress of the Human Mind', in Patrick Gardiner (ed.), *Theories of History: Readings from Classical and Contemporary Sources* (New York, 1959), pp. 49–58; A. Comte, 'The Positive Philosophy and the Study of Society', in Gardiner (ed.), *Theories of History*, pp. 73–82.

Feuerbach and Karl Marx. According to this view, religion must be understood as a consequence of fear and ignorance and as a projection of the ideal characteristics of mankind on (a) transcendent creature(s). This perspective was subsequently extended by non-materialists like Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud. The (psychological) idea that reason would eventually overcome the need for religion, based on irrational emotions such as fear and hope, had also been expressed by David Hume in *The Natural History of Religion* (1757). In its nineteenth-century liberal versions this evolutionary vision would lead to the idea that religion would in time be superseded by nationalism as the dominant form of collective identity – a key idea discussed by James Kennedy in his contribution to this volume.⁹⁶ During the twentieth century, this evolutionary idea of ‘supersession’ was also known as the ‘secularisation thesis’ which equates modernisation with a general decline of the social significance of religion.⁹⁷

Next to the religio-critical stance, there were also historians who rejected the idea of the ‘supersession’ of religion and who developed a positive religio-historical position. They viewed religion as an integral part of the ‘progressive’ history of civilisation. This position was formulated, for example, by Christoph Meiner in *Grundriß der Geschichte aller Religionen* (1787). The critique of progressive stage-theory thinking concerning religion developed simultaneously with this theory itself. Most famously, Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that religion as part of culture had been in steady decline. Religion had degenerated from an honest ‘affair of the heart’ into an institutionally depraved ecclesiasticism no longer capable of integrating the community. In his *Du Contrat social ou principes du droit politique* (1762) he therefore pleaded for the establishment of a new ‘civil religion’.⁹⁸

Another type of influential critique of progressive stage-theory thinking is found in Johann Gottfried Herder, who supplanted stage-theories of history

⁹⁶See also A. D. Smith, ‘Religion: Nationalism and Identity’, in Smelser and Baltus (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* vol. 10, pp. 13085-13090, for a discussion on nationalism as a form of ‘political religion’.

⁹⁷For the meaning of the secularisation thesis, see esp. D. Yamane, ‘Secularization on Trial: In Defense of a Neosecularization Paradigm’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 36, 1 (1997), 109–22, esp. 115, where he argues that ‘secularisation ‘is best understood not as the decline of religion, but as the declining *scope* of religious authority’; R. N. Bellah, ‘Religion: Evolution and Development’, Smelser and Baltus (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* vol. 10, pp. 13062–6, and O’Toole, ‘Religion, Sociology of’, pp. 13106–12. O’Toole signals that the recent critiques of the secularization thesis are also based on ‘an increasingly broad conception of religion’, exemplified by the New Religious Movements (p. 13110).

⁹⁸Graf and Reuter, ‘Religion, History of’, p. 13073.

with the idea of organic growth of historical entities in his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1803). History is actually the unfolding of individual cultural units, which were usually taken to consist of 'peoples' or 'nations', each with a specific 'national character' or 'spirit'.⁹⁹ Herder viewed religion as the older, and therefore more 'basic', form of culture and solidarity in comparison to nationalism.¹⁰⁰ In the nineteenth century, Herder's ideas about 'national character' became a crystallisation point of nationalist thinking.

The debates on religion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were enriched by comparative research, especially concerning India and Persia and their relationship to European languages and mythologies, and anthropological research undertaken among 'primitive' tribes and societies outside Europe. Edward Burnett Tylor, in *Primitive Culture* (1871), argued that religions in tribal societies represented the beginnings of religious history and therefore needed careful examination. His thesis that animism – the attribution of a living soul to plants, inanimate objects and natural phenomena – was the primal form of religion was soon challenged by William Robertson Smith in *The Religion of the Semites* (1890) and by Emile Durkheim in *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (1912). They both argued that totemism (the worship of ancestors symbolised by totemic emblems of plants) represented the origin of religion. Evolutionary ideas about religion also informed James George Frazer's *opus magnum The Golden Bough. A Study in Magic and Religion* (1890–1915) in which he argued that everywhere in human mental evolution a belief in magic preceded religion, which in turn was followed in the West by science. (This was strongly reminiscent of Comte's 'law of the three stages'.) In the first stage, a false causality was seen to exist between rituals and natural events. Religion appeared in the second stage and the third stage was science. Customs deriving from earlier periods persisted into later ages where they were frequently reinterpreted according to the dominant mode of thought. The argument for nationalism as a 'political religion' would furnish an interesting example of this latter phenomenon (although it does not fit in the transition of stage 2 to 3).¹⁰¹

Whilst in most states the study of religion by historians was encapsulated in the specialisation of church history, limiting the history of religion to the

⁹⁹H. Mah, 'German Historical Thought in the Age of Herder, Kant, and Hegel', in Kramer and S. Mah (eds), *A Companion to Western Historical Thought*, pp. 143–66; J. G. Herder, 'Ideas Toward a Philosophy of the History of Man', in Gardiner (ed.), *Theories of History*, pp. 34–49.

¹⁰⁰See Herders section IX.5 'Religion ist die älteste und heiligste Tradition der Erde' of his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, vol. 2, book 9 (1803).

¹⁰¹See Smith, 'Religion: Nationalism and Identity'.

history of the church(es), the most important discussions in the first half of the twentieth century took place among sociologists and anthropologists. Starting with Weber's study of the relationship between Protestantism and the origins of capitalism in *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus* (1904–5) and Ernst Troeltsch's *Die Soziallehren der christlichen Kirchen und Gruppen* (1912), a discussion started about the role of religion in 'modern' societies, including those not located in Europe and North America. While religion was more or less eliminated as an interesting domain of culture for historians during the dominance of social history from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, it made a comeback through the history of mentalities propagated by the second generation of *Annales* historians after 1980. In this *Annales* framework, the study of religion, exemplified by Philippe Ariès, Michel Vovelle, Jacques LeGoff and Jean Delumeau, is cut loose from the traditional 'great thinkers' and 'great text' type of history. Religious history came to be seen as a history of religious consciousness whose carriers remain for the most part anonymous. Its themes and questions often were derived from anthropology: the attitudes towards birth and childhood, mortality and death, corporeality and sexuality, nature and environment, God and the Church, heaven and hell.¹⁰²

From the 1960s onwards methodical renewal also mainly came through anthropology, especially in the UK and the US. This was predicated on two new developments, one historical the other disciplinary, and although they are directly related, they must be analytically kept distinct. The first, historical, development was the massive decline in institutional religion in the late 1960s and into the 1970s; the adherents of the 'secularisation thesis' experienced their finest hour when institutionalised Christianity faced an unparalleled crisis. The former believers simply turned their backs *en masse* on the church pews and never returned. Any critique of the 'modernisation thesis' must face and explain this fundamental fact.

From the 1970s onwards, however, the critics of the 'secularisation thesis' claim a strong tail wind. First, after the 'fall' of institutionalised (church) religion, the rise of the 'New Religious Movements' (NMR) is presented as a 'falsification' of the aforementioned thesis (while its supporters continue to point to their very marginal and floating character and syncretic character). Scientologists, Unificationists, Rajneeshis, Transcendental Meditationists, Hare Krishnas and Astrologists are probably the best known examples of the NMRs. Second, the worldwide rise of religiously inspired political movements (the

¹⁰²See Graf and Reuter, 'Religion, History of', pp. 13075–6; P. Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School 1929–1989* (Stanford, CA, 1991).

Iranian Revolution, Solidarity in Poland, liberation theology in Latin America) and the rise of religious fundamentalism (Christian, Islam, Hindu) is often presented as a 'falsification' of the 'secularisation' thesis.¹⁰³

However the weights of the secularising and de-secularising forces are measured it is beyond reasonable doubt that the character of 'modern' religiosity in the West has changed fundamentally in comparison with the situation before the 1960s. 'Modern' religiosity has, 'instead of living in terms of authoritative orders', 'very much to do with the sphere of consciousness' and is 'very much in the hands of the experiencing subject. It largely operates beyond tradition: that is to say, autonomous subjects – not traditions – are authoritative, subjects developing their own religiosities by way of the test of their own life requirements'.¹⁰⁴ 'Modern' religiosity, therefore, is no longer essentialist because typical 'modern' religious individuals do not live according to 'essential' religious rules and texts, but construct their own 'personal' religions tailored to their personal needs. The broad religious trends are individualisation, privatisation, fragmentation and bricolage, thus testifying to their essentially postmodern character. Having a 'belief without belonging' is the mode of religious commitment typical of this condition. As a consequence, rational choice theory has been widely adopted as an explanatory model in religious studies.¹⁰⁵

Alongside this 'real historical' development from essentialist to constructivist conceptions of religion and religiosity from the 1970s onwards there has been a similar development in the disciplinary study of religion. Inspired by anthropology, the study of religion followed the 'constructive turn', also

¹⁰³For the secularisation debate, see Yamane, 'Secularization on Trial'; S. Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford, 2002); H. McLeod and W. Ustorf (eds), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe: 1750–2000* (Cambridge, 2002); Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge, 2004); O. Blaschke, 'Abschied von der Säkularisierungslegende. Daten zur Karrierekurve der Religion [1800–1970] im zweiten konfessionellen Zeitalter: eine Parabel', *Zeitenblicke* 5, 1 (2006), <http://www.zeitenblicke.de/2006/1/Blaschke/dippArticle.pdf> (accessed 3 July 2007); Silver, 'Religion without instrumentalisation'.

¹⁰⁴P. Heelas, 'Religiosity: Modern', p. 13112; Yamane, 'Secularization on Trial', p. 116, argues that the 'privatization' of religion supports the secularisation thesis.

¹⁰⁵O'Toole, 'Religion, Sociology of', pp. 13109, 13111; L. Young (ed.), *Rational Choice Theory and Religion: Summary and Assessment*, (New York, 1997); S. Bruce, *Choice and Religion: A Critique of Rational Choice Theory* (Oxford, 1999); J. M. Bryant, 'Cost-Benefit Accounting and the Piety Business: Is Homo Religiosus, at Bottom, a Homo Economicus?', *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 12, 4 (2000), 520–48.

emphasising the constructive character of notions of the Self and Other. The focus on the social constructedness of religious communities has, of course, been at the very heart of the study of collective religious rituals.¹⁰⁶ Since then themes such as gender, race and the religious forms of minority groups have played an important role in (especially American) historiography of religion.¹⁰⁷ So, all in all, the recent trends, as far as religion as a code of difference is concerned, are similar to those in the field of ethnicity, race, gender and class.

¹⁰⁶D. Eickelman, 'Transnational Religious Identities (Islam, Catholicism, and Judaism): Cultural Concerns', in Smelser and Baltus (eds), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* vol. 10, p. 15862: 'Transnational religious identities, like other personal and collective identities, are socially constructed'.

¹⁰⁷See M. Rosado Nunes, 'Religion and Gender', in Smelser and Baltus (eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* vol. 10, pp. 13034–7.