

## Chapter 1

### Identity in Complex Societies: Adaptation and Conflict

The concept of identity has had a fashionable career in recent years among anthropologists and sociologists.<sup>1</sup> It proved very useful, even if it was not clearly defined. It is also used by psychologists, in referring to relations between an individual and his social environment. Similarly, sociologists in the tradition of George Herbert Mead and symbolic interactionism speak of identity with regard to the individual psychological process of identification and formation of personality in relation to other individuals. For them, following Mead's thinking, a characteristic feature of human beings is that they have an ability to visualize their own behavior from the point of view of other people—partners in interaction. An individual establishes his identity through series of meaningful actions in relations with other people. These relations are of a symbolic character and identity is constructed as a self-image in the process of communication with others who also express and communicate their images of that particular individual.

The psychoanalytic tradition also formed a concept of identity, personal and psychosocial. Personal identity, wrote Erik Erikson, "includes a subjective sense of continuous existence and a coherent memory. Psychosocial identity has even more elusive characteristics, at once subjective and objective, individual and social" (Erikson 1968:61). Identity is a very complex whole, represents the multidimensional, integrated human personality and cannot be reduced to a series of separate roles which an individual plays in various social groups and situations. For Erikson "the gradual development of a

mature psychological identity presupposes a community whose traditional values become significant to the growing person even as his growth assumes relevance for them" (Erikson 1968:61).

Ideally, an individual's identity is a well integrated whole, but in practice it goes through numerous crises which involve memory of the past, fears for the future and elements of the present environment. "In its individual and collective aspects, psychosocial identity strives for ideological unity, but it is also always defined by that part which is to be lived down and by that potential future which is to be prevented. Identity formation thus involves a continuous conflict with powerful negative identity elements. In times of aggravated crises these come to the fore to arouse in man a murderous hate of 'otherness' which he judges as evil in strangers—and in himself" (Erikson 1985:61-62). Identity crises thus involve a negative attitude towards others and towards everything which an individual interprets as strange and not his own. Such a crisis consists in fear of intrusion of strange elements into one's own domain and in attempts at defending one's own distinct character defined in opposition to that of others. Psychology, and psychoanalysis particularly, specialize in diagnosing and solving such problems of individual personality.

Similar problems, however, also occur at the social level, in interaction between human groups, and are perhaps more and more acute in the contemporary world with its mobility and increasing contacts between groups of people from different cultures. At the individual level identity is an answer to the question "who am I in relation to other people?" At the social level it is a response to the question: who are we in relation to other human groups?" It would appear that problems concerning identity at both levels are similar in many respects, particularly since in both cases identity is formed in a force field of integration, adaptation and conflict and because in both cases identity is of a subjective and symbolic character.

The great Oxford English Dictionary defines the term "identity" as "the quality or condition of being the same in substance, composition, nature, properties, or in particular

qualities under consideration; absolute or essential sameness, oneness," and as "the sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality." Identity, then, in the most general terms involves a definition of an object of our perception, and thus forms an essential basis of our action in relation to this object. It is, however, itself a product of an action and not a "natural" intrinsic quality of an object prior to relations with other objects. Identity is formed in action, or rather in interaction, in the process of exchange of messages which we send, receive, and interpret until a general, relatively coherent image is achieved. In all such interactions both the identity of one's self and one's group, and of a partner are formed, defined, and expressed. Identity is thus a dynamic, processual, and contextual phenomenon.

From the most general point of view, identity is a result of classification of the world. Classification is the basic mental activity, universal although varied in form, and is the basis of cultural constructions through which people make order in the universe of their perception. Human thinking consists in distinguishing and defining objects and establishing relations between them. It may be the result of the existence of the basic deep structures in the human mind—common to all human beings and transmitted genetically—or it may be a functional requirement of survival; whatever its origin, it seems that ordering the world of things and phenomena, determining their relations, and combining particular elements of experience into a structure is the fundamental process through which the human world is created. This human, cultural, symbolic world, which people come to experience as the reality they live within, and which in turn shapes their actions, consists of categories, named and defined objects, beings and phenomena, among which various relations are established to form a systematic universe. Establishing identities of objects through acts of identification composes one dimension of this process of creating the world of culture. Dealing with the human world we may talk about an identity of a person (individual identity) or a group

(collective identity). We may also distinguish between an objective (external) and subjective (internal) identification, and the intermeshing of the two is central to the process of construction of identity. As Edwin Ardener pointed out, identity is not a stable, intrinsic, and independent property of a person or a group. We do not "have" an identity—what we see are simply ways that we are identified (passive) and ways we identify (active). When we talk about somebody's identity we abstract and objectify a process of exchange of acts in which partners in social contact classify, describe and define one another. Ardener suggested that the process of classification and identification of partners in the social world involves a crucial factor of power-relationship (Ardener 1987). Construction of identity therefore means establishing relations between a dominant individual or group and a subordinate one, and in this way identity serves as a justification and legitimization of relations between people and groups and of a social order in general. Similar ideas were also expressed as early as 1965 by Norbert Elias on the basis of fieldwork carried out in Winston Parva. Elias developed a theory of relations between what he called "the established" and "the outsiders" showing how the power ratio between the groups determines the images they construct of each other (Elias and Scotson 1965; see also Mennell 1989).

By ascribing certain qualities to people or groups or by including them in well defined categories, people organize their social world and classify it and in such a way a conceptual, symbolic model of the world is formed. Such a model describes relations between people, groups, objects, metaphysical beings, and natural phenomena and serves as the basis of thoughts and actions. People think and act in relation to the world according to this symbolic model and not in accordance with "objective" nature and characteristics of elements of the world. This does not mean that objective reality has no influence on people's thoughts or that it is irrelevant for cultural construction. It means only that people's behavior is determined directly by their view and interpretation of reality and not by the reality as it is objectively structured and as it may appear to an external observer at any particu-

lar moment. Social consciousness, the conceptual model of the social world, develops in time with the process of relations between people and their actions and the world (natural and social). Thus the model of the world is a dynamic entity created, changed and developed in the historical process. At any given moment people act according to their interpretation of the world. The effects of these actions subsequently shape their views, perception, and interpretation of reality and contribute to the mental model of the world. So, in the understanding of people's actions we must study both their models of the world and the process of interaction in which power ratios, according to Elias and Ardener, play a major role. What is characteristic of the way people build other people's identity as part of this conceptual model is that only certain traits and features of culture and behavior are chosen and used in this construction. It is an important and interesting question which traits are chosen and why. The main objective is to form a coherent picture built of unambiguous criteria of ascription (as has been shown by Fredrik Barth with regard to ethnic groups). Such a picture should describe in a clear way differences between one's own group and the others and make the distinction between them plain and obvious in a form of a contrastive model. Usually we choose a few particularly positive and attractive features of our culture as elements of our "self-image" while tending to build the image of the others on the basis of a few least attractive characteristics of their culture. The mental and symbolic organization of the world defines the reality of a given culture, determines the way in which its participants think and feel, their attitude towards all the beings and phenomena as well as their behavior regardless of how adequate it is to the reality seen by outside observants. Many social facts which from the external observer's point of view may seem irrational or not understandable in the light of objective conditions of social life, become clear and rational if they are analyzed in terms of the conceptual model of the world of the cultural group under consideration.

The classification of a social world consists, first of all, in defining one's own group in relation to others. At this point

two things should be remembered. First, the difference between an external and internal identification. As Ardener pointed out "an external classification, a 'naming' of an individual or of a group, is an act of imposition. It can result, however, in an internal acceptance of this external imposition, both at an individual level . . . or at a group level." (Ardener 1987:6-7). In the process of social contact a group often accepts its own identity as constructed by its partners, especially if these partners are stronger in economic, political, or cultural relations. Enforced identity is in this case accepted as a selfimage of a weaker group with all the social consequences of this fact in assuming the role and behavioral patterns congruent with the imposed identification (Elias and Scotson 1965). This is the case where, for example, immigrants aspire to belong to their new society, want to learn and internalize its norms and values and, above all, want to be regarded as equal, full members of it by all other "old" and already established members. Such immigrants who want to assimilate try to get rid of social and cultural stigma associated with characteristics of their original culture. In order to achieve this, they accept the inferior image of their group created by the local people and try to shake off everything that this image contains, and, simultaneously, to assume the new identity, compatible with what they see as the identity of the local people and eventually to become "one of them." Sometimes social contact may cause the formation of a group identity on a level which previously did not exist. Ardener mentioned in this context the identity of American Indians. Indeed, one could suppose that American Indians acquired one common general identity only after it had been constructed by Europeans for whom all Indians were basically the same, even though for these natives each tribe possessed unique features which in relations between the tribes served as the basis for mutual identification and social contacts, but which for the newcomers were not significant. Consequently, apart from the identity of an individual tribe, a new, general, common identity of Indians appeared as an image of the whole category which had not existed before in the model of the world of the local people.

This leads us to the second point, that all identification is par excellence contextual. We always define ourselves in relation to others, and the aspects of our identity which are stressed in a given situation depend on these others and their identity. The bigger the cultural distance between partners, the more general is the model of identity, and the less detailed is the image. Therefore it is also crucial to realize for whom, or in opposition to whom, the particular model of identity has been constructed. For a given Indian tribe, relations with another tribe were established on the basis of many cultural details among which the general concept of "American Indians" did not exist. But this concept probably came to the fore when a tribe dealt with white newcomers, since they were so obviously different from any native American, and these differences were crucial for understanding and organizing social relations in a new situation.

Identity is always defined in relation to a partner and to his or her identity, and therefore the same person or group may assume and express a different identity in different situations. The idea of contextuality of identity of a person was expressed by Kluckhohn and Murray in their well-known phrase that "every man is in a certain respect a) like all the other men, b) like some other men, c) like no other men" (Kluckhohn, Murray 1948:35). Similarly the concept of "basic identity" discussed by Harold Isaacs points at the multiplicity of levels of personal and social identity involving shared physical characteristics of the group (acquired through the genes), birthplace, name, language, history and origins, religion, nationality, as well as the social status of the individual and his group—political-social-economic circumstances which shape his relative position vis-a-vis the others. This basic identity is, according to Isaacs, a dynamic entity in a constant state of becoming in the process of social change (Isaacs 1975:39–42; 205–207). The more complex is a social system, the more identities a person or a group has. One may talk about a professional identity, a class identity, a regional identity, an ethnic identity or a national identity. Any person may have all of them encoded in his mental model of the world and in a given social situation, in contact with other

people, one of them comes to the fore and this shapes an action undertaken by a person towards his partner or partners. Dealing with representatives of other professions we express values and norms which we regard as characteristic of our professional group, we divide the world according to professional points of view and compare our situation in this respect with that of other people. On some other occasion we may feel that we are first of all inhabitants of a certain region, geographical and cultural space which is our own and which interests we have to defend against other people who are not "local," even if in many other respects they are quite like us. But when a new person joins a social situation and he happens to represent another nation, then regional divisions may be temporarily forgotten and a national difference becomes the most vital. Of course this whole principle of social classification and formation of identity is not simple; I am trying here only to suggest certain tendencies. As Maryon McDonald remarked in her book on Breton identity "individuals and groups are unproblematically involved in multiple identities, constructed through relativities (and most clearly in opposition), and changing according to context . . . Ethnicity is one kind of identity, and identity or identification is one aspect of classification." (McDonald 1989:310). Classification into "we" and "they," although common and universal, does not happen always with the same intensity and there are intervening factors which may change the picture. The division between "us" and "them" is stronger when there are important issues and interests involved in a social situation. Classification may then lead to antagonism and conflict, and action is likely to follow the mental process of identification. Also, especially in a complex society, not all criteria of classification are equally important. Regional identity for instance, may be so weak that there would be no visible results of perceiving somebody as a stranger to the region. Much also depends on cultural homogeneity of a group. Well integrated groups, consciously cultivating traditional values are for instance more likely to distinguish between themselves and the others, especially if they regard their interests as threatened.



This contextual character of identity is extremely important for understanding social relations, especially when, as so often happens, these relations involve conflict. Then perceived differences between people are sharpened, sides of the conflict tend to polarize the world into two opposite domains and ascribe to them opposite values. Internal differences within both groups involved in a conflict are forgotten and people perceive themselves and their partners—"enemies"—according to a single aspect of identity, that which constitutes the major difference and the basis of conflict. A good example of such a tendency was nationalism during World War I, when in spite of socialist and communist ideology which emphasized class divisions, workers gave up struggling for their rights against "the bourgeoisie" and joined national armies to fight against fellow workers from other nations. It did not mean that social problems disappeared, but simply that they were in a given context less important for those people (in spite of what Marxist described as "objective interests") than their national identity. The social world was divided according to national differences and national interests were defended. In many countries in the contemporary world a remarkable unity of millions of people—despite obvious, objective differences among them and contradictions in their objective interests—can be explained in a similar way.

Identity in ethnic groups has been widely discussed in a by now very rich literature, both sociological and anthropological. These discussions were so widespread that the very concept of identity became often used as a synonym for ethnic identity. Although I cannot see any reason why this should be so, and why we should not use the concept of identity while talking about groups other than ethnic, it is true that the identity of ethnic groups, its revival and development is one of the most vital, difficult and therefore interesting problems for social scientists.

Like any other form of social identity, ethnic identity is essentially subjective, a sense of belonging, a definition of self and one's own group in relation with others. It consists of two mental processes: the search for the self and the con-

struction of boundaries between one's own group and that of the others. Ethnic identity is defined in terms of cultural unity and is based on a self-definition on grounds of one's own group's cultural characteristics in contrast with those of others. A certain degree of cultural homogenization, or at least the existence of an important cultural text with which all members of a group identify themselves, is indispensable for the formation of an ethnic group. Consciousness and self-image are vital in this process. Since action is shaped by the way people perceive themselves and their partners, what they think of themselves and of the others is more important than the reality of their status. An ethnic group is thus mainly a category of ascription and identification by the people themselves. A well-known definition of ethnic group proposed by Fredrik Barth stresses this aspect as constitutive for ethnicity apart from common culture and interaction (Barth 1969:10-11). For understanding people's behavior in a social situation, the subjective component is of particular importance, since in different contexts people may emphasize different aspects of their cultural identity. Such a view was expressed by Sydelle Brooks Levy, who proposed that

ethnicity is a symbolic system which may be activated by members of a group or its leaders as one of many strategic alternatives in the pursuit of individual or group goals. By using selected cultural forms as charters and banners, group members may be extraordinarily flexible in their choice of behavioral alternatives. Particular cultural forms which express a group's boundaries are invoked as meaningful and appropriate by individual members only at certain times. At other times, in different situations, members use a range of symbols which are so different that they deny ethnicity. Such members, in these situations, deem the use of non-ethnic symbols as strategically relevant (Brooks Levy 1975:28).

In a contemporary, complex society, people participate in many groups and, as I mentioned above, express their iden-

tity on the basis of different principles in different situations. As George De Vos pointed out, an individual can lean towards one of three orientations: "(1) a present-oriented concept of membership as citizens in a particular state, or as a member of a specific occupational group, (2) a future-oriented membership in a transcendent, universal, religious or political sense, or (3) a past-oriented concept of the self as defined by one's ethnic identity, that is based on ancestry and origin" (De Vos 1975:9). Any of the three dimensions of identity can come to the fore in different moments of an individual's life or in a different social context.

In spite of many predictions, ethnic identity has not disappeared in modern society. One might suppose that in a post-industrial social system occupational stratification and a corresponding sense of identity would be dominant. Some thinkers, notably Marxists, predicted that the class structure and class identity (which in Marxism is called "class for itself") would become the single main identification for a modern man. Similar false predictions were formulated by sociologists in Europe and America. But as it has turned out, the reality is different. Ethnic identity persists and is even increasing in all types of societies in our world. It seems that people tend to oppose the unification of culture and life-style resulting from increasing contacts and exchange of all kinds. Our world is growing smaller and smaller; for people in developed countries it is now easy to maintain contacts with others living on the other side of the world. Exchange of goods results in similarities in ways of living, which become more and more similar, so as the increasing number of people all over the world participate in the same patterns of homogeneous mass culture distributed by electronic media and use the same technical inventions and facilities. But at the same time people want to maintain and continue their cultural characteristics. Technical civilization is more and more similar but symbolic culture does not necessarily follow. Mass culture, homogeneous and unified, is often opposed because it blurs the picture of cultural pluralism. It may happen that in the future we would live in a world of technological homogeneity but cultural pluralism in which

particular groups will continue their traditional differences. Cultural differences, being the basis of classification of the human world into groups and categories, serve here not only the need of preserving one's unique identity but also political interests. Ethnicity becomes a political phenomenon, especially nowadays, when it is usually taken for granted that ethnic identity is used in a struggle for power with the others who are identified as culturally strange and foreign. At a very general level, ethnic identity transforms itself into a national identity, when a belief in common ancestry and origin and of the homogeneity of a culture is combined with the desire to acquire a sovereign state to protect the integrity and free development of the group's culture. In this case the three types of identity distinguished by De Vos may overlap and appear in a single social situation. A political-religious identity of a future-oriented type may be combined with a past-oriented identity based on common tradition and either corresponds with or contradicts a political status quo and identity built upon loyalty to a given present political system. As we shall see in concrete examples in the following case studies such a situation is characteristic of the identity of people and groups involved in national political conflict. Perception of differences between groups, the creation of reciprocal identifications and establishing boundaries lead to development of norms and patterns of interactions. A reciprocal definition of each others' places in the social order establishes a certain model of relations. Identity and separateness are two sides of the same coin. By identifying "the others" we separate them from ourselves. This separateness does not necessarily mean hostility. Partners of social relations usually adapt to each other, establish relatively stable norms of contacts, and coexist on terms which depend on the balance of power between them.

Mutual accommodation is a feature of social stability. However, when one of the groups regards its position as unsatisfactory and its interests as threatened, then a relatively well-balanced accommodation may easily be transformed into conflict. Conflicts may arise as the result of social change, endogenous transformation of the social system, or

contacts with the outside social world. Social mobility and migration as a rule lead to problems of identity. The case study of migration which I shall present in chapter 4 shows the process of reconstruction of identity through subsequent generations, and various factors involved in this process, among which the balance of power, and the construction of social space became particularly relevant.

Identity thus appears as a dynamic characteristic of a group involved in the process of historical development. It implies changing relations to other groups, to the natural and social environment, and the symbolic construction of images of the group's own past and present. Case studies in the latter parts of this book will provide illustrations of this processes.

In the course of social conflict, the identities of both partners undergo changes and need to be rebuilt at a new level. As mentioned before, identity is not a static phenomenon. On the contrary, it is par excellence dynamic and it is formed and developed through a continuous process of identification. The existence of cultural differences between two or more groups, if perceived, is the initial condition of establishing the mental picture of one's group and of the others. But it is not enough for the model for identity to appear. In addition, it is necessary to codify the differences in the form of models and contradict them. The resulting picture involves all perceived inhabitants of the social world and accounts for similarities and differences, superiority and inferiority, cooperation and competition. The most obvious, stereotypical characteristics of the others are used in such a picture, which represents them as different from us. Empirical reality of behavior of particular representatives of the others group is irrelevant—what counts is a stereotype. Therefore the others eat the most disgusting things which for us is the negation of proper, human food, they have most appalling manners, outrageous sexual habits, are lazy, dirty and so on (See Elias and Scotson 1965).

One particular instance of this process of creation of opposite models of identity happens when contact occurs with a partner who is perceived as threatening one's own group

and its culture, its existence, or vital interests. Then the model of the world becomes polarized into opposite domains and images of the groups involved in the conflict are defined in terms of absolute, opposite values of good and evil, primitive and civilized, progressive and reactionary, aggressive and peaceful, and the like. This enables people to justify the necessity of struggle with the others and of destroying them. The ethnic studies literature describes many such cases and I shall dwell on this problem in later chapters. Now it is important to say that in the process of conflict, the identity of both partners becomes restructured, and a new model of the world, compatible with the new situation, is built. Since identity is created in action, if a group's freedom of action and organization is severely curtailed, this will hamper any reformulation of its group identity. As I shall try to show in chapter 4 if such a possibility is blocked, then a new identity cannot be created and a passive group lives on the shreds of its former identity, no longer adequate and not providing a sufficient basis for maintaining, preserving, and developing a group's culture. If, however, a group is allowed a relative freedom of self-determination, its cultural worldview is redefined and a new identity is built. The history of migrations, especially in such countries as the United States, gives us many examples of complicated processes of conflict, assimilation, and the emergence of cultural pluralism. Because in the contemporary world there are more and more groups expressing the desire for autonomy and independence, and since the development of world politics is making such movements possible and successful in more parts of the world, we may expect in the foreseeable future a world of cultural pluralism.

Another significant process arising from the same tendencies to maintain or regain traditional identity is the spread of fundamentalist movements all over the world. Fundamentalism, a term used initially with regard to conservative Protestantism, is now applied to all social-religious movements which demand return to traditional values and ways of life based on the sacred text of a given religion, and opposing modernity which has secularized and liberalized

the public life, the government, the Church, the religion, and destroyed the basic criteria of good and evil. Fundamentalism exists in Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and many other societies and seems to be gaining strength and influence. Often it is aggressive and militant, oriented against the others: people, groups, and philosophies who are regarded as threatening the "moral," "healthy," traditional virtues on which, in fundamentalists' interpretation, their identity is built (Caplan 1983).

The relation between social development and cultural pluralism is one of the most interesting problems of the contemporary civilization. It also involves moral and philosophical issues of great importance. On the one hand democratic and egalitarian values, being the basis of European and American ways of thinking about society and the human individual, favor the principle that political and economic benefits and well-being should be equally available to all people throughout the world. From this point of view all divisions, political, national, and others, appear artificial, old-fashioned, backward, and unjust. We should all live in an egalitarian world society irrespective of race, religion, cultural background, or whatever. On the other hand the same humanistic principles also assume that all people and human groups should enjoy freedom of choice and self-determination. People should be free to determine the way of life they want to develop even if for other people it seems strange, backward, or irrational. The long and rich history of dictatorship teaches us how dangerous it is when any person or group claims to know better what is the proper way of life or direction of development of other people and groups. Enforced homogeneity of culture means that at least some people are deprived of their own choice and their own rights and that they have to give up traditions they may want to continue. People in general seem to want to continue their traditional culture and want to be different from other people, to have their own, unique identity. There are many reasons why people may elect to give up this claim temporarily in order to achieve other goals, like economic well-being, security, or fulfillment of certain ideas. For these rea-

sons people may form various kinds of alliances and suspend tendencies towards separateness, or laying less stress on cultural uniqueness and the right to their own specific development. But when those overriding goals are satisfied, a revival of particularism seems to follow. In Europe now, when economic prosperity has brought well-being to practically all groups, where all basic needs are satisfied, aspirations for cultural autonomy and even political separation have increased. Perceived individual character, supported by historical tradition, dissimilarity of language or religion, often leads even to open conflicts. Elsewhere, in autocratic political systems, opposition movements frequently take the form of campaigns for separatism or national liberation. Alliances formed on the basis of a common ideology break up when this ideology proves to be disappointing or false. In all such cases identity is reconstructed at a lower, more particular level of apparent homogeneity of culture and common interest and leads to demands of pluralism. Such demands are very common nowadays and it seems likely that they will increase and that the future world will be culturally pluralistic even if economically and technologically more homogenous (see for example, Klapp 1969).

Apart from perception of differences and protection of one's interests, pluralism also results from a creative attitude towards one's own life and fate. People do not want to be anonymous consumers of mass culture, they are not satisfied with a passive existence in a welfare society. They want to express and develop their personalities and are conscious of individual characteristics which make them in a sense unique beings. At a group level people want to cultivate and develop tradition and heritage which make them different from other cultural units. Therefore, when basic needs are satisfied, when everybody is secure and has enough means not to concentrate only on mere survival, more and more people tend to look for an individualized way of life and unconventional ideas. They are also aware of the fact that people and human groups are not alike and that there is no reason why they should be identical and share the same patterns of life. Generally speaking, people want to be different



and want their differences to be recognized and safely maintained and developed. Our world became more homogeneous and integrated in many aspects of our way of life, access to knowledge, and technical inventions. At the same time the scope of our perception broadened. We perceive people and groups whom our ancestors could ignore even if they were aware of their existence. We must incorporate them into our model of the world because we interact with them in a shrinking world. Therefore, a reciprocal process of identification encompasses more and more groups and comparisons are made, but it does not follow that we are ready to lose our separate identity. On the contrary: we cooperate with others, exchange goods, services and messages, become more and more interdependent but wish to distinguish ourselves from others by cultivating our symbolic identity, by emphasizing differences between ourselves and the others. As Anthony P. Cohen has pointed out

communities become increasingly subject to influences from across their boundaries. The interrelated processes of industrialization and organization, the dominance of the cash economy and mass production, the centralization of markets, the spread of the mass media and centrally disseminated information, and the growth of transportation infrastructure, and increased mobility all undermine the basis of community boundaries. Each is a multipronged assault on social encapsulation, and one which results in an apparent homogenization of social forms. Within any country the language, family structures, political and educational institutions, economic processes, and religious and recreational practices of communities come to have a certain apparent resemblance to each other. . . . But this homogeneity may be merely superficial, a similarity only of surface, a veneer which masks real and significant differences at the deeper level. Indeed, the greater the pressure on communities to modify their structural forms to comply more with those elsewhere, the more are they inclined to reassert their

boundaries symbolically by imbuing these modified forms with meaning and significance which belies their appearance. In other words, as the structural bases of boundary become blurred, so the symbolic bases are strengthened (Cohen 1985:44).

However, this defense of one's identity is not the same as simple conservatism. People want to be different and original but also want to develop. Symbolic identity is not a resistance to change but an autonomous and independent development of a group's own unique culture within the "civilized," advanced, and egalitarian world. The differences do not necessarily have to be transformed into a conflict, although they are if at least one of the groups in a given social system perceives its situation as inferior and its interests as endangered.

Thus, identity, being a result of conceptual classification of the world, is also expressed symbolically. A mental model of the world which consists of images of one's group and the others, is formulated in terms of symbolic forms which range from simple categories of sameness and differences to complicated ideologies. Boundaries which people build to separate themselves from other people are also mainly of symbolic nature, although they may have and often do have material components. Symbolic actions constitute communication between groups and give meaning to their mutual relations, and through such actions identification is carried out and models of identity are created and adjusted. The collective sense of separateness which results from the process of boundary creation may lead to continual accommodation or conflict depending on balances of power and on whether the groups involved are prepared to respect their mutual interdependence on more or less equal terms. Therefore it is appropriate to look closer at the nature of symbolic behavior and at the way symbolic identity is created and expressed. The next chapter will discuss some aspects of these issues with a special reference to the role of symbols and symbolic actions in social conflict, legitimization of social order, and creation of ideology. It seems that since identity is a concep-

tual and symbolic phenomenon, understanding of the process of formation and transformation of identity can only be achieved through reconstruction of a symbolic model of the world which generates action and which is the conceptual basis of intergroup relations. Therefore, apart from descriptions of objective characteristics of social phenomena and processes, it is necessary to assume a cognitive approach which through reconstruction of symbolic systems allows us to look deeper into the way people think of themselves and of each other and to understand their behavior.