Identity Discourses and Communities in International Events, Festivals and Spectacles (Leisure Studies in a Global Era)

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Identity Discourses and Communities in International Events, Festivals and Spectacles

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IDENTITY DISCOURSES AND COMMUNITIES IN INTERNATIONAL EVENTS, FESTIVALS AND SPECTACLES

Leisure Studies in a Global Era

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Identity Discourses and Communities in International Events, Festivals and Spectacles

Edited by

Udo Merkel

University of Brighton, UK

For my late mother (1919–2012), who taught me to keep things simple and tidy; and Erika, my sister, who frequently reminds me of these virtues

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Acknowledgements

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Part I

Introduction

1

Making Sense of Identity Discourses in International Events, Festivals and Spectacles

Udo Merkel

This edited collection is concerned with international festivals, celebrations and spectacles, as well as the contributions these events make to our social identities. More precisely, it is about two distinctively different and yet interrelated processes: the construction and presentation of identities. It also explores the intersections of identity and community within various event contexts. The book's interdisciplinary approach, cross-cultural themes and methodological diversity reflect the complexity of its overriding issue that appears to be *en vogue* in the realms of everyday discourses, popular culture, journalism and academia. In a nutshell, identity refers to the understanding of individuals in terms of who they are, normally in comparison to others. This ability 'involves knowing who we are, knowing who others are, them knowing who we are, us knowing who they think we are, and so on' (Jenkins 2008, p.5). Jenkins also notes that planned events, in particular rites and rituals, play an important role in the formation and development of social identities as they tend to celebrate the essence of an identity and mark the transition from one identity to another. However, this volume is less concerned with small-scale or personal private celebrations that consolidate identity than high-profile, international events, festivals and spectacles.

In February 2014, two global sports spectacles, the Winter Olympics in Sochi and the Super Bowl in New York, attracted global media attention not only because of the sports but also due to their explicit engagement with identity discourses. Although Sochi's elegant and creative display of Russia's past, present and future in the opening ceremony was commended for its modest patriotism, there were also concerns about the extravaganza's historical accuracy, a number of serious omissions and a tendency to romanticize and glamourize the country's social and political

structures (Walker 2014b). Overall, however, the Russians' attempt to demonstrate to the rest of world who they were, who they are and who they want to be in the future was widely praised. In comparison, Coca Cola's one-minute commercial during the Super Bowl caused a serous stir, particularly among conservative political commentators. Over 110 million viewers saw an advertisement that can be described as neither innovative nor original. It commenced with a man on a horse wearing a cowboy hat, reflected, visually, on the rich social, cultural and ethnic diversity of the United States in the main part and finished with children running towards the Grand Canyon. All of this was accompanied by a rendition of 'America the Beautiful', a patriotic tune that many consider to be the unofficial national anthem of the United States. However, it was sung not only in English but in eight other languages, specifically Arabic, French, Hebrew, Hindi, Keres, Mandarin, Spanish and Tagalog, symbolizing American diversity (Younge 2014). The televized commercial sparked angry, controversial and ugly comments on social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter, suggesting that Coca Cola's understanding of America's identity is misguided, a threat to most Americans' sense of who they are and a misrepresentation of core American values. Others, particularly members of minority ethnic groups, were outraged that they had been appropriated as a marketing tool to increase corporate profits. There were also questions as to whether the company's attempts to legitimize the Americanness of minority groups should be praised or taken as an insult. After all, the global corporate giant has been frequently criticized for its disregard for fair working conditions, health and environmental concerns.

Debates about modern identities and membership in local, regional, national and international communities not only are part of popular culture but have also become more intense and systematic in the academic world. Donald Getz's comprehensive and thorough study, 'The Nature and Scope of Festival Studies' (2010), which examined 423 research papers, argues that the systematic analysis of festivals has grown into a significant field within events studies. He concludes that academic accounts of international festivals are dominated by three overarching themes: the socio-cultural roles , meaning and significance and the relationship between festivals and tourism and management issues. A closer look at this meta-literature review reveals that the issues of identity and community feature frequently as subheadings in various sections, for example in the context of papers concerned with authenticity, place and attachment, and social and cultural impacts. Therefore, it appears to be fair to suggest that a key characteristic of local, regional, national and international events and festivals alike is their contribution to the formation and expression of identity discourses and narratives. Many events and festivals confirm and reinforce identities, whilst others question and challenge traditional identities; some help to modify and reshape established identities, whereas others generate new identities or intend to reposition existing identities. Identity formation processes explicitly motivate some festivals and events; for others, it is an unintended by-product. With the help of symbolic systems and signifying processes, events and festivals create and offer distinctive meanings, which help individuals to form communities and make sense of who they are. These socio-cultural processes define and shape both individual and collective identities and have done so for some time, as the following three examples will show.

The 1969 Woodstock Festival of Music and Art was a memorable gathering of around half a million young, like-minded US citizens. Most of them questioned mainstream American norms and values, opposed the Vietnam War, supported the civil rights movement, wore unconventional clothes, explored alternative lifestyles, such as communal living, and experimented with sex and drugs. The festival caught the attention of the world as its essence was rooted in and combined music, social responsibility and independent, alternative forms of thinking. But, more importantly, Woodstock defined, shaped and expressed the identity of a new generation of young people, the *Woodstock Nation* (Hoffman 1993). Although the organizers of Woodstock were neither hippies nor civil rights or anti-war activists, the event brought together and united the energies of various counter-cultural streams, the anti-Vietnam War and pro-peace movement. Woodstock experienced the birth and 'christening' of a new identity that offered a different sense of social belonging

inspired by a reflective and dynamic relationship between music and citizenship. After the worldwide release of the soundtrack and the film about the event, in 1970, Woodstock became a key source and important reference point for all those who believed that solidarity with other young people around the world would lead to fundamental socio-political changes. As such, the *Woodstock Nation* slowly turned into *Woodstock Transnational* (Kramer 2013).

In sharp contrast, football fans in the various European leagues tend to be more conservative and traditional and do not necessarily challenge political but commercial forces. The event, that is the frequent matches of their respective teams, plays a crucial role in their desire to express their identity and experience a sense of community. These occasions provide unique and valuable opportunities for the celebration of distinctively local, sometimes regional, identities. For many traditional fans, attending a football match is about experiencing and expressing a sense of belonging through the emotional engagement with other like-minded fans. The uniform outward appearance of many fans provides a clear expression of their identity, displays their community membership and a sense of belonging (Finn and Giulianotti 2000; Giulianotti 2002; Merkel 1999; Ward and Williams 2010). Their vocal rejection of the increasing commercialization of football and their fight to preserve and maintain traditional, often very masculine, values and cultural practices are not driven by an anti-capitalism agenda. It is primarily about ownership, community and identity issues that are threatened by commercial forces that have repeatedly shown a total disregard for the social significance of football matches, clubs and teams.

Traditions play an equally significant role in the third example that demonstrates the close relationship and intersections between events, identity and community formation. In November 2013, Brazil's Amazon region hosted the 12th Indigenous Games with more than 1,500 participants from various South and North American tribes and countries (Dana 2013). Some competitions focused on physical strength, agility and endurance. Others drew on important hunting and survival skills of the participants, for example archery. A very small number of activities revealed modern influences, such as football – albeit players were not allowed to run but had to crawl along the ground and could only use their heads to push the ball forward. Of course, this indigenous festival appears to be an unconventional and low-profile alternative to the sporting spectacles in Brazil, the 2014 FIFA World Cup and the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Summer Olympics. However, this coming together of traditional tribal cultures offered these dispersed communities with limited contacts to the outside world a rare chance to interact with each other, unite, celebrate and reflect on their identities.

This trio of examples clearly confirms that identities are *social* constructs. Their formation occurs within specific socio-economic, political and cultural contexts. They are the outcomes of social interaction and can only be understood properly in relation to the social environment, in particular in relation to other identities and communities. Jenkins argues that 'identifying ourselves, or others, is a matter of meaning, and meaning always involves interaction: agreement and disagreement, convention and innovation, communication and negotiation' (2008, p.17). Consequently, he has repeatedly suggested abandoning the 'social' in 'social identity' as it is superfluous. Furthermore, events do not only offer the attendees a platform for developing, consolidating, modifying and expressing their identity but also give places such as towns, cities and regions a distinctive identity. Such a 'place identity is now frequently associated (in the minds of potential visitors, investors and residents, at least) with what it sells, what it creates and what it represents in terms of aesthetic attributes' (Foley et al. 2012, p.77). These events are frequently referred to as hallmark events (Hall 1992) as they cannot be separated from the city or region where they take place.

There is little doubt that most people associate the Notting Hill Carnival and the Wimbledon Championships with London, the Opera Ball with Vienna, the Oktoberfest with Munich, the Running of the Bulls with Pamplona, the Mardi Grass with New Orleans or the Woodstock Festival

with upstate New York. In some cases, the legacy of a famous festival can even lead to the emergence of other events and define their essence, characteristics and, ultimately, identity. Woodstock is one of these places. Since 2000, it has been hosting a highly respected, independent film festival. Considering the large number of international film festivals that have been founded over the last two decades, it is no surprise that many struggle to set themselves apart and differentiate themselves from the many others. However, the Woodstock film festival has what every film festival needs, many claim to have, but only very few can really offer – a genuine and distinctive identity. It is not based on choice, design or an expensive marketing campaign but the inevitable result of its famous history that is characterized by creativity and rebellion.

However, the above-mentioned short case studies also raise a significant number of questions about the relationship between events, identity discourses and communities, which this volume intends to explore in detail:

1. What kind of sources do events, festivals and celebrations provide and what kind of input do they offer for both the construction of communities and the expressing of their identities? How do events support the formation of identities? How do they build social capital and foster community spirit?

2. What kind of identity projects do events support? Do they help to preserve and reinforce established identities and communities, or do they challenge them and offer a platform to launch new and alternative identities?

3. What are the specific characteristics of identities and communities that emerge and exist in the context of international events? What do events say about the identity of their participants?

4. How do we best theorize those communities that share a distinctive identity? Are concepts that are derived from classical sociological thinking still able to capture the essence of these communities or are modern, often contested, conceptualizations more useful?

In order to facilitate a better understanding of this collection, I will address some of these issues and questions briefly in this introduction before they are considered in much greater detail in the individual chapters.

Theorizing identity and community: Influential thinkers and thoughts

Although, currently, there appears to be an urgency and preoccupation with questions of identity, academic debates about the significance and changing nature of identity and community have permeated the development of social-scientific thinking and analyses for more than a century. These discussions can be traced back to the origins and early days of both German and French sociology. Some of the most influential, innovative and groundbreaking thinkers, such as Karl Marx, Émile Durkheim and Ferdinand Tönnies, had a keen interest in the way people create communities and form social identities on the basis of a strong sense of shared interests, characteristics, values and beliefs, and reinforced through a variety of cultural practices and rituals. Despite their very different approaches to the study of identity, all agreed that a collective consciousness, which defines membership in, and the solidarity of, a group, is developed through action and interaction of individuals. It creates social integration and holds these communities and, ultimately, society together.

Karl Marx (1818–1883) was primarily interested in the impacts of fundamental socio-economic changes, the emergence of industrial society, the development of capitalism and the dynamics of the new class system. Due to his concern about growing social inequalities, he paid particular attention to the formation of a working-class consciousness, one of the many outcomes of the

industrialization process in European societies in the nineteenth century. Although Marx did not use the term 'identity', he introduced the sociological concept of class consciousness and differentiated between a 'class in itself' and 'class for itself'. In the context of the working class, or proletariat, a 'class in itself' is best understood as a substantial group of people sharing significant social characteristics in relation to the economic system, becoming aware of their likeness and the need to change their disadvantageous position through collective action. Organizing itself and actively pursuing shared interests in order to improve their socio-economic conditions and quality of life turns this group into a 'class for itself'. According to Marx, an understanding and appreciation of one's position in the economic system leads to class consciousness, which, in turn, motivates and encourages class action. This involves forming political parties, joining trade unions or even engaging with revolutionary movements. For Marx, the formation of a distinct working-class identity was the outcome of the new economic arrangements of capitalism and, at the same time, a crucial stepping stone in the revolutionary process of overthrowing that system and abolishing class society. Whilst many political commentators tend to explain 'class consciousness' simply as identification with other members of one's own class, Marx's analysis shows that the existence of a class consciousness requires a unification process that happens through social interaction. For Marx, class is the most significant source of identity and conflict.

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), a French sociologist, had a keen interest in what holds society together since the traditional and intense bonds of family and church had been replaced by modern economic arrangements with specialized roles and distinctive responsibilities. For Durkheim, any explanation of the existence of society required a detailed and subtle understanding of how collective identities bind people together and generate social integration. Durkheim was deeply concerned that the new socio-economic structures that the industrialization process had created could lead to a disintegration of society. Although he was aware that the increasing population size and growing division of labour had created robust networks of interdependencies, he considered the weakening of a collective conscience to be a serious challenge for modern societies. In his seminal work, *The Division of Labour in Society*, originally published in 1893, he concludes that social cohesion takes different shapes in particular historical eras (1997). He developed a simple dichotomy to mark the two ends of a continuum that illustrates the transition from tradition to modernity. Durkheim's differentiation between 'mechanical solidarity' and 'organic solidarity' describes two types of social organization and the ways individuals are connected.

Mechanical solidarity is characterized by a low division of labour, based on likeness, shared sentiments and responsibilities, a high degree of self-sufficiency and close personal ties. All these elements constitute a simple, pre-industrial version of social cohesion that is crucially supported by religious rituals and ceremonies. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, initially published in 1912, Durkheim (2001) has also shown how important rituals are for social cohesion, solidarity and a collective consciousness. He argued that rituals stimulate the experience of collective effervescence, which, in turn, promotes a group identity, strengthens the sense of belonging and stresses the symbolic boundaries between insiders and outsiders. In sharp contrast, organic solidarity is typical for more complex, socially differentiated and secular societies with a higher division of labour that requires more cooperation and collaboration. People are no longer connected to each other by close personal ties and traditions but by their reliance on each other. They have lost the ability to be self-sufficient and become mutually interdependent because of the increased division of labour and subsequent specialization. Rights and responsibilities are increasingly linked to individuals, rather than collectives. Durkheim further concluded that although the modernization process had destroyed the traditional bonds and ties that defined and created the mechanical solidarity of the people, it had been replaced by a different set of social relations and connections that created organic solidarity.

Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936) observed similar developments in German society and developed

two conceptual tools that tried to capture the changing principles of social life and group cohesion. He distinguished between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* (1887), which are frequently translated as 'community' and 'society' (or 'association'), respectively, in order to account for fundamental changes that affected the social organization of individuals in the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution. *Gemeinschaft* refers to a group of individuals who consider the interests and needs of the group at least as important as their own. Such a community tends to share fundamental values and beliefs, which guide and regulate the cultural practices and social responsibilities of all members with reference to each other and the group as a whole. A typical example of such a *Gemeinschaft* is the family, which often offers a distinctive sense of loyalty and identity. Other examples include tight-knit, exclusive, religious communities whose members have simple face-to-face relations and share a common belief system, language, traditions, rituals and routines. The status of individuals is ascribed and based on membership of this group.

Unlike the *Gemeinschaft*, the term *Gesellschaft* describes a social arrangement in which individuals' self-interest takes precedence over the large group or association. In *Gesellschaft*-like structures, secondary relationships are more important than familial or kinship ties and are largely instrumental. A modern business is well suited as an example as the different stakeholders (owners, managers, employees and so on) tend to have very little in common. However, all of these stakeholders have a keen (self-)interest in making a living, earning money and ensuring that the company continues to provide such opportunities. Such a socio-economic system rarely generates a genuine and intense sense of identity and loyalty. It is therefore more prone to conflicts and tensions. In order to combat such problems and to increase an individual's commitment in *Gesellschaft*-like structures, currently, corporate identity strategies seek to forge artificial group bonds and a sense of belonging that are typical for a *Gemeinschaft*. Furthermore, the status of individuals in *Gesellschaft*-like social structures is usually based on their personal achievements, for example through work and education, and not ascribed as in *Gemeinschaft*-like social systems. Very similar to Durkheim, Tönnies also argues that social consciousness and cohesion in more advanced societies are the outcomes of an awareness of one's dependence on others rather than likeness and similarities.

Despite the lasting impact of Marx, Durkheim and Tönnies's ideas, modern and contemporary theoretical debates about identity and community have become more complex, increasingly differentiated and more contested. They also reflect fundamental shifts in the way research and theories try to capture these issues, particularly in the context of international events, which constitute very specific, often unique, usually highly condensed and always liminal experiences. More recently, substantial contributions to the analysis of community and identity issues have been made by Benedict Anderson (1983), Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Rangers (1983), Anthony Cohen (1985), Michel Maffesoli (1996) and Kevin Hetherington (1998) – to name just a few of those whose ideas and theories underpin the case studies in this collection.

Benedict Anderson's work on *Imagined Communities* (1983) and the origins and spread of nationalism is widely regarded as seminal. His conceptualization of modern nation-states as imagined communities acknowledges that a sense of belonging to a national community does not depend on face-to-face interaction or relationships between members of that collective. He suggests that this sense of belonging to a nation is socially constructed and imagined. In other words, members of a national community are brought together by the image of their communion.

The nation is imagined as *limited* because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations. No nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind ... It is imagined as *sovereign* because the concept was born in an age in which the Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinelyordained, hierarchical dynastic realm ... Finally, it is imagined as a *community* because,

regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may occur in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship.

(Anderson 1983, p.7)

Anderson's exclusive focus on the role of literacy and the reproduction and representation of the nation through the print media reveals a somehow narrow understanding of culture. There is no doubt about the historical significance of printed media products. However, national, and other, identities can be imagined and experienced in a variety of ways and contexts, such as architecture, particular clothes, food, music and festivities.

Anderson's understanding of imagined communities implies that nations can be reimagined and transformed. Therefore, national identities are flexible constructs and prone to change over time and able to adjust to new circumstances. 'Nations are what their citizens imagine them to be, and nation-building occurs not only through political and economic processes, but also in cultural and symbolic contexts' (Farquharson and Marjoribanks 2003, p.45). In this regard, international sports events are frequently referred to as important forums for these kinds of processes. However, other international events, festivals and spectacles are, at least, equally useful and influential as they provide important sites for the modification of identities. Even though Anderson's concept is the outcome of a thorough analysis of the development of modern nationalism, it is now used more broadly and in a variety of contexts as it can be applied fruitfully to other groups, communities and identity projects.

Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's seminal book *The Invention of Tradition* (1983) complements Anderson's account. This classic text argues convincingly that many of the traditions and customs that we perceive to have a long history are, in fact, relatively recent inventions. Hobsbawm defines the title and focus of this edited book as 'a set of practices […] of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past' (1983, p.1). Like the customs of premodern societies, modern invented traditions have symbolic functions and convey important social meanings that have been reduced to rituals, symbols and festive occasions. Furthermore, several chapters clearly illustrate how rituals and symbolisms have been created to be part of various national cultures meeting important emotional needs. At the same time, many of these invented traditions support the spread of fundamental ideological messages. Although the collection of essays focuses on Britain and the British Empire, Hobsbawm suggests in the introduction and in the conclusion that the findings of the individual case studies can be applied to other Western nations. In the last chapter, Hobsbawm stresses the close links between the invention of traditions and the development of nation-states and spread of nationalism during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, invented traditions were not only used to justify the existence of states but also employed to create social cohesion and a sense of community by other institutions and organizations, such as political parties and the trade union movement in various countries.

Hobsbawm and Ranger's focus is upon how the powerful invent traditions and rituals that create the illusion of continuity, instil a sense of belonging, legitimize existing power structures and reinforce common norms and values. Although the concept of 'invented traditions' is very useful and applicable to the critical study of contemporary international events and festivals, as this collection will show, it is not only the political and economic elites but also ordinary people that invent, develop, consolidate and modify cultural traditions and practices as part of communal gatherings and identity discourses.

According to Anthony Cohen (1985), a community is a meaningful system of cultural practices, patterns and values that provides its members with a sense of belonging and, ultimately, an identity. He stresses that the concept of community entails that members of a collective share a set

of common characteristics that clearly distinguishes them from other groups. For Cohen, the concept of community can only be fully understood with reference to belonging and similarity, on the one hand, and differences and boundaries on the other. Both sameness and differences become very visible, and are reinforced, through the setting of boundaries as they protect the unifying elements that define a group's identity and demarcate it from other collectives. The 'boundary encapsulates the identity of the community and, like the identity of an individual, is called into being by the exigencies of social interaction' (Cohen 1985, p.12). Importantly, it is not the boundary as such, but what the boundary means to people, or, 'more precisely, about the meanings they give to it' (Cohen 1985, p.12) and how it is experienced that matters in this context.

The persistent interest of sociology, politics and cultural studies in examining and theorising the formation and construction of communities that share a distinctive collective identity has also led to the modification of existing theories and the emergence of new concepts. The French sociologist Michel Maffesoli (1996) introduced the notion of neo-tribes in the late 1980s in the wider context of discussions about postmodernism. The term refers to social communities that people create on the basis of emotional solidarity and in response to the increasing fragmentation and individualization of social life. Whereas, traditionally, geography and kinship defined membership in tribes, nowadays tribes are more fluid and transient and come together for the duration of rituals, performances and special occasions. Their shared emotional solidarity only exists in specific contexts, in a particular period of time and for a specific reason, such as the pursuit of a common interest or the duration of a festival.

Kevin Hetherington evaluated critically the concept of neo-tribes, questioned a number of Maffesoli's ideas and expanded it in his book *Expressions of Identity: Space, Performance, Politics* (1998). He suggests that neo-tribes are intentional 'communities of feeling' (Hetherington 1998, p.49) and, as such, they offer expressive rather than rational identities. They reveal a 'troubled politics of identity in which people try to renegotiate their identities' (p.53). Hetherington also acknowledges that older sources of identity, such as class, gender and ethnicity, continue to influence identity discourses of neo-tribes. According to Maffesoli, however, identities are shaped and constructed through the practices that derive from the chosen focus of the neo-tribes and their emotional ties, but do not arise from the members' positions in the social structures (p.56). Hetherington also suggests that neo-tribes exhibit their collective identities through distinctive symbolisms and conspicuous styles.

Similar academic discussions about the formation and display of collective styles initially gained prominence in the mid-1970s due to the innovative work of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at the University of Brimingham (Hall and Jefferson 1976). Their analysis of the emergence of youth subcultures and the significance of their styles is framed by Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony (Gramsci 1971) and, therefore, considers youth subcultures as a response to the overarching power structures in post-Second World War Britain. Youth subcultures emerge usually around common leisure activities, social rituals and cultural spaces. They are most visible through their distinctive, often provocative, subcultural styles (Hebdige 1979) that combine a special dress code, jargon, symbols, rituals and other elements. The subcultural style not only reinforces commitment to the group but also displays core norms and values, and forms and reflects the group's identity. Despite a degree of similarity, there are some substantial differences between subcultures and neo-tribes. Most importantly, whilst the identities of the former are relatively stable, fixed and perpetual, membership of neo-tribes is less static and more dynamic. Opting in and out is as possible as multiple affiliations.

Whilst all the above-mentioned writers have made important contributions to the understanding of the concept and phenomenon of identity, there is hardly any acknowledgement of the contested nature of many identity projects. This is reflected frequently in the controversies surrounding the

use of specific symbols that mark and display publicly a group's sense of who they are. The popularity of the St George's Cross, England's emblematic flag, has declined considerably over the last decade after far-right political groups appropriated this symbol. Various polls have shown repeatedly that the St George's Cross is, nowadays, often associated with exclusionist racist and xenophobic views.

Furthermore, all the theorists discussed above pay very little attention to the mundane and routine displays of identity, for example in everyday life, leisure and popular culture. As several of the case studies in this collection will show, any contemporary and critical analysis of identity discourses needs to take these realms into consideration. Tim Edensor has done this successfully in his book on *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (2002) that explores 'the dense spatial, material, performative, embodied and representative expressions and experiences of national identity which are inextricably interlinked with each other, which constitute a shared compendia of resources, akin to a vast matrix into which individuals can tap to actualize a sense of national belonging' (p.vii).

Many of the theories that frame the case studies in this volume derive from, draw on and/or extend the observations and insights of the above-mentioned theorists. This persistent theoretical diversity confirms the complexity of the issue under investigation and an epistemological truism, namely, that no single theoretical framework can encapsulate the totality of a social phenomenon.

Constructing identities and communities: Traditional and modern sources

In addition to the substantial increase of academic interest in identity issues over the last few decades, journalistic publications and television programmes frequently aim to offer a better understanding of this complex, multi-layered phenomenon. Many of these are keen to solve the contemporary identity crisis that has been caused by the ongoing globalization process, the growing fragmentation and individualization of modern societies and the absence of firm and stable points of reference. Although the existence of an identity crisis is contested, there is little doubt that the widespread interest in identity issues is linked to some dramatic technological, socio-economic, political and cultural changes. These far-reaching developments have resulted in a number of discontinuities and uncertainties that affect our sense of who we are. This book will touch on some of these developments as their impacts can be observed in the complex relationship between international events, festivals and celebrations, and identities, identity discourses and debates as well as the construction and celebrations of contemporary communities.

Although the meanings attached to international events and festivals vary considerably and range from personal to global significance and impacts (Merkel 2014), there is little doubt that they make considerable contributions to the creation of collective and place identities, enhance the participants' social and cultural capital, and offer a wide variety of opportunities to engage in identity discourses. Such an engagement takes various forms. Some events and festivals reinforce traditional identities; others promote identity changes. Some celebrate majority identities; others challenge the normative nature of dominant identity discourses and favour alternative and minority identities. Some are a reminder of traditional identities; others provide a forum for the launch of new identities.

At the heart of all these identity projects lies a fundamental question: Who am I? As already established, answering this question requires active engagement with our social environment. It involves exploring how we see ourselves and imagining how others view us. The creation of identities is a social practice that constitutes the basis for identification with and a sense of belonging to a community of like-minded people. Such groups tend to manifest opposition to the

identity of other groups through stressing differences that create boundaries and act as important markers (Woodward 2010). The outcome is quite often a simple differentiation between 'us' and 'them' that tends to be socially experienced through inclusion or exclusion of individuals and groups.

Whilst a group identity is based on its members' shared sense of who they are, individuals draw on their biography, their experiences, their social and spatial environments and their interactions with other people. However, identity formation processes are never complete. They are dynamic and fluid, require adjustments to new individual and social realities and have become more complex and multifaceted through one's life span. We all grow up within specific ethnic, socio-economic, cultural and political environments, as citizens of states and members of national communities, and are, at least initially, shaped by these collectives. In later stages of our lives, we acquire additional identities that may reflect our occupational background, strong religious beliefs, support for specific environmental causes or admiration of sports teams and rock bands with whom we identify. The formation of identities is a continuous process that happens in, and is therefore influenced by, the surrounding social context. The outcome reconciles and integrates the dynamic relationship between the personal and the social. Past and present social structures, however, tend to limit our choices and the control we have over this process of identity construction.

Although the vast majority of modern festivals and events appear to be democratic and inclusive celebrations, below the surface, the space offered for the expression and display of identities can be limited and, very often, prioritize dominant identity discourses. Many events have been clearly gendered throughout their history, often excluding or marginalizing women. Although women tend to be much more visible in, and, occasionally, even the focus of, event settings, their presence often perpetuates outdated and stereotypical ideas of femininity and womanhood. Gender identities are primarily a social and cultural construct. There are, however, a number of tensions between outdated, stereotypical assumptions and modern, emancipatory expectations. This is clearly reflected in the political controversies that frequently surround the hosting of beauty pageants. These competitions tend to perform very traditional gender identities that are frequently contested as they reinforce stereotypical, Western conceptions of womanhood, celebrating beauty and sexual attractiveness.

Since their inception over 150 years ago, these competitions have attracted opposition and protest. Feminists argue that these events are shallow and superficial, show a close resemblance to livestock competitions at country fairs, reduce women to the sum of their parts, are symbols of the hyper-commercialization of beauty and, most importantly, signify the oppression of women. In 2002, when the Miss World competition was to be held in Nigeria, over 100 people were killed in violent clashes after a newspaper article, written by a Christian journalist, suggested that Prophet Mohammad would have selected a wife from among the contestants. Many Muslims felt insulted by this publication, which caused a further deterioration in the already tense relationship between the Christian and Muslim communities and resulted in three days of rioting. A year later, Indonesian Muslims voiced their discontent about the Miss World event due to take place in Bali. They argued that this pageant celebrated a gender identity that promoted sexual indecency. Even more contested are child beauty pageants that have grown considerably in popularity over recent years in a large number of countries. In France, in 2013, a clear majority in the Senate decided to ban beauty pageants for children under the age of 16 as these events, it was argued, promoted a hyper-sexualized identity among young girls.

Equally important for the formation of identities are economic structures, in particular patterns of employment and the distribution of wealth and power. Social class has traditionally offered people a firm sense of who they are and an important means of class distinction. More recently, and largely due to substantial socio-economic and cultural changes such as the continuously high

levels of unemployment, the decline of traditional large-scale manufacturing industries and the erosion of work-based community cultures, class as a source of one's identity has diminished. Some commentators even argue that in modern, Western societies, class, as a social category and identity source, has become obsolete and been replaced by a variety of consumptionoriented lifestyles that, nowadays, make more significant contributions to the formation of people's identities. Although this claim of the fragmentation, disintegration and disappearance of traditional working-class identities is not new, it implies two noteworthy fundamental changes. First, there has been a shift from collective to individual identities, and, second, consumption practices and non-work activities, such as leisure priorities, have become more important and influential than occupational background. Despite these claims, there are still a large number of events that celebrate class membership and conspicuously display the group's class identity and social background.   *

This collection focuses on the multi-layered links between international events and identity discourses. With a unique line-up of international scholars, this book offers a diverse range of exciting case studies, including sports competitions, music festivals, exhibitions, fashion shows and royal celebrations.

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