

WORK IN PROGRESS—PLEASE CONTACT AUTHOR FOR A NEW VERSION BEFORE QUOTING.

GENERALIZING FROM UNCERTAINTY IN SOCIAL ENCOUNTERS TO INSECURITY ABOUT THE OTHERS

Introduction

This paper relies heavily on my submitted PhD-thesis, particularly the presentation of cultural theory, while the argument concerning insecurity and otherness, I believe, is novel. My main argument is following:

- 1) There is a strong general human need to classify to make sense of the world around us. Institutions are the main source of classifications. Creating social interaction requires a choice of institutional form or type, in order to create a pattern of behavior.
- 2) The social competence of a person can be described as the combination of knowledge about and preferences regarding the different ways of organizing.
- 3) A problem of communication during the first encounter with an immigrant creates uncertainty, as the participants do not know how to classify and understand each other.
 - a. The difficulty of classification or problem of creating is generalized to everybody “similar” to the Other.¹ Based on cultural theory I suggest that there are two different alternative logics that can be used in the generalization. Either, the lack of classification is made to a ‘taboo’ (or reinforcing an existing one). Alternatively, the ambiguity present can be interpreted as support for competing ways of organizing and a threat to the dominant institutions (way of organizing).
 - b. If one fails to agree upon a way of organizing future transaction costs will be very high, this leads to little social contact in future.

How can cultural theory help to explain the insecurity that permeates our modern societies—and why migrants seem to be understood, defined and feared as the other? How can cultural theory

¹ There are many representations and ways to conceptualize the Other (Bauman 1996; Barth 1980) (Said 2003) (Helne 2002)

help us to understand the insecurity during attempts to create social interaction and the generalization from this to a more general insecurity concerning the others?

Where many other approaches understand otherness as exclusion from a somehow unitary majority society, cultural theory does not assume this. Cultural theory sees society as consisting of many institutions in conflict with each other. What happens to the position of the Other if we reject the assumption of unity among the majority?

Cultural theory is a neo-structuralistic theory built on the ideas and writings of Mary Douglas, who has used it to understand institutions and how they influence our lives, even our thinking and perception in manners that are much more persuasive than one would expect. According to the theory even our deepest values and thoughts are rooted into institutional structures (Douglas 1966, 1970, 1986). Other authors have taken ideas these and developed them further into a dynamic theory. In 1990 Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky gave out their book *Cultural Theory*—the name by which the theory is often known .

I have in my PhD thesis shown how this theory can be used to analyze the inner life of immigrant households, their external social relations and views of politics and society. I have studied 17 households from Chile, Sri Lanka and Vietnam who have been living in Norway for more than 10 years. I show how the organization of common household tasks like making important decisions and how they divide the household work can be described with the help of cultural theory. The same applies to their helping relations outside the household—who is helping whom and in which ways. I identified four different ways to organize a household, as predicted by the theory. These four ways to organize a household are the hierarchical, the egalitarian, the individualistic and the fatalistic ways of organizing. Some authors call these for cultures or ways of life, others call them solidarities (Thompson 1996). I will get back to the content of these ways of organizing.

One of my main findings is that the patterns I found within the household and in their helping relations were also present in their most central views of politics and society. In addition, what is perhaps more interesting, for the present discussion, is that the ways of organizing were not determined by the households' country of origin. The households that differ from each other in the way they organize had very different social relations, values, behavior and experiences, even if they come from the same country—and conversely—households that share the way of organizing resemble each other, despite from where they came from.

Presentation of the theory

I show in my thesis that cultural theory can be successfully used to understand how social interaction in some migrant households is constructed. Cultural theory is a theory about forms of institutionalized social interaction.² It claims that there is a connection between social relations, behavioral patterns, and cultural biases (mental constructs), and that only certain combinations of these work well together, while the rest do not. These well-working combinations, which can be used to create long-lasting institutions, are called *solidarities* or *ways of organizing*. Many institutionalists have worked with two cases (market and hierarchy), and some have added a third one (club, clan, collegium, enclave, or clique) that is based on a small group with a flat structure.

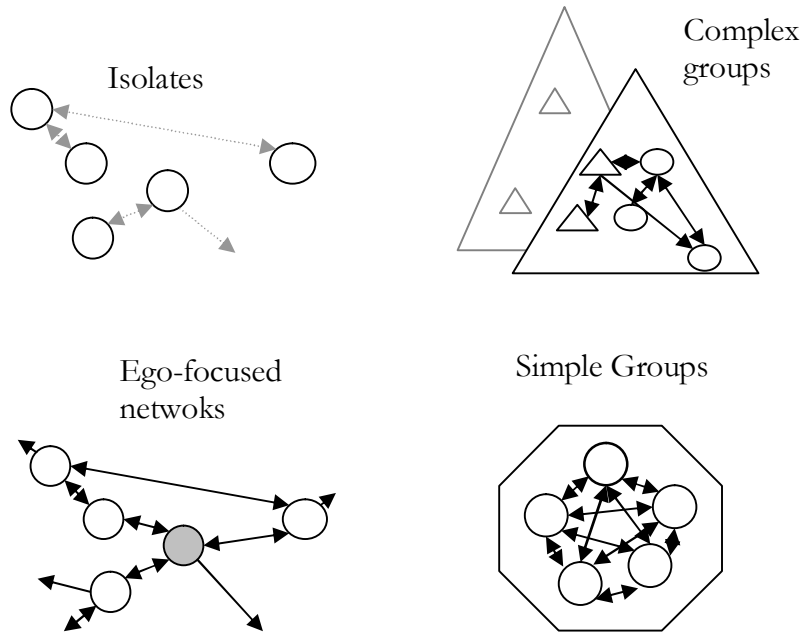
From Social Structures to Ways of Organizing

There are four ideal types of social structure: Two of them are collectives—the simple group and the complex group. The third is a personal network—the ego-focused network. The fourth are the isolates—individuals without a solid network.

These social structures do differ in regard to the degree of collectiveness (group) and the degree of structuration (grid). The ego-focused networks are not groups, they are networks. Every person has their own network, and there are very few and loose rules that are more like mutual bilateral agreements. The simple groups have a flat structure and very little differentiation of labor. There are few rules that are made by the group. The more time the members spend in the collective the stronger the ‘group’. When the group grows, differentiation of labour becomes often necessary and more rules are required to ensure the working of the group. These rules are often embedded in positions and roles. The last ideal type, Isolates, is comprised of people who are governed by external constraints (many ‘rules’), but do not have the support of the group. Many people would regard this as an anomaly or lack of a social institution, but it is useful to regard this as one of the four ideal types.

² The references are omitted from the presentation of the theory for the sake of clarity. This relatively new version of cultural theory is best presented by Michael Thompson (Thompson 1996; Thompson, Grendstad, and Selle 1999). In my thesis due respect is paid to the original authors (Douglas 1982, 1986; Gross and Rayner 1985; Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky 1990; Thompson 1996; Dake, Thompson, and Neff 1994).

Figure 1: Four Ideal Types of Social Structure



Each of these social structures will survive over time only if there is a behavioral pattern and a cultural bias (values and world view that supports it). These *four different ways of organizing* are called for the hierarchical, egalitarian, individualistic, and fatalistic ways of organizing.

Figure 2 Four Ways of Organizing



Four Ways to Organize a Household

I will here exemplify these ways of organizing by presenting how they apply to the organization of a household and how there is a corresponding view of politics and society. A thorough presentation of the theory behind this typology and of my operationalization can be found in my thesis. Here the aim is merely to give the reader some images to relate to.

A household that organizes it based mainly upon the *hierarchical* way of organizing is likely to divide the world into different spheres, with different rules: hence, you get a division of labor based on gender, generation, and so forth. In these households, the members know who does what and when it should be done. Traditions are important and are often used to justify and define roles and rules. A good person is one who lives up to these roles and rules. In this household, one might hear the mother say to her children, “You should do it because your father says so!”

A household that organizes itself based mainly upon the *egalitarian* way of organizing is likely to have a division of labor that emphasizes equality: everyone is supposed to perform every task, at least sometimes. The ideal household is a collective, with a flat structure, and a low level of role differentiation. The egalitarian way of organizing rejects the division of the world into different spheres; instead, it emphasizes the unity of the world. The household makes its own rules: in some sense, it is sovereign; rules and roles are not just adopted from the outside, they are carefully created within the household. A good person maintains a consistent role across different contexts. Justification is often rooted in a collective decision. In these families, one might hear one of the parents inviting the children to a discussion: “Let us all talk about this...”

A household that relies on the *individualistic* way of organizing is more flexible and dynamic. The social structure is more like a network of individuals, than a collective is. Division of labor is based on skill. Rather than being governed by fixed rules, it is controlled by bilateral agreements. They do not care much about what makes a “good person”, as moral pondering is left to others. What matters is that things get done. Authority has only a minimal role, and parents bargain with their children. In these kinds of households, one might hear the mother saying to her children: “If you do it, I will give you...”

In a household where the *fatalistic* way of organizing is dominant, the division of labor is random. Their conception of time is guided by the short-term: the focus is on coping from day to day. Long-term plans are commonly unrealistic dreams, because outside forces have considerable influence on the household, even on daily routine tasks. Thus, the safety net provided by the fatalistic solidarity is not reliable. In this kind of household, one might overhear the mother saying to her children: “Not again! Haven’t I told you thousand times...?”

The individualistic, egalitarian, and hierarchical ways of organizing each form a social structure through which resources are distributed, hence forming safety nets based on different rules: individualistic solidarity prefers reciprocal relations; hierarchical solidarity thrives on resource transfers that emphasize social roles and status differences (helping the deserving poor); while the egalitarian solidarity emphasizes in-group solidarity and equality (helping fellow humans). In contrast, the combination of unaccountability and asymmetry of transactions that defines the fatalistic solidarity usually means that one cannot demand help from others.

The smallest units in society that can be considered to be institutions are households. No single household is likely to rely on just one solidarity, however, and often, one is more prevalent than the others are.

Cultural theory is not just a typology of ways of organizing, but a systems theory, which shows how these different ways of organizing relate to each other in a social system and how they are simultaneously in conflict and dependent on each other. Common to other systems theories, there is no simple causation, but rather a system in perpetual change, which moves from one state of balance to another state of balance. In this paper the systems theoretical aspects are downplayed, as more emphasis is put on the typology of four ways of organizing as a useful simplification.

Four Different Views of Society and Politics

These four ways of organizing emphasize different aspects of social interaction: they each have their strengths and weaknesses, forms of rationality, forms of solidarity, and ideas of justice. The value of cultural theory for a political scientist lies in its ability to predict people's norms and values, their understanding of society, and their behavioral patterns. I document in my thesis how knowledge of a household's preferred way of organizing, allows us to tell quite a lot about its political views and behavior.³ The households are not able to articulate the following aspects clearly themselves, but a discourse analysis shows how these aspects are present in their reasoning.

A *hierarchical* household is likely to think of the society as a body. We all have our own important role to play, and it is important that everyone plays his or her role properly. Politics is about ruling and it is best left to those few with special skills. Democracy is mainly about choosing leaders. The hierarchical household is likely to divide the world into distinct public and private spheres. In the public sphere, the wise politicians should have all the power, whereas the private sphere belongs to the family (and perhaps to moral authorities like the Church). The hierarchical household believes

³ A very similar claim has been made by Aaron Wildavsky:

these two "inches of facts" enable individuals to "generate miles of preferences" (Wildavsky quoted from Grendstad 1999:464).

that human nature is weak, so strong institutions are needed to teach people their proper place and to ensure that they stay there. The ideal state is like a strict father bringing up his children. Blame is often placed on victims and deviant individuals. Justice is viewed as procedural justice, and therefore doing things by the book is important. Social support should be properly regulated by experts, so that the deserving poor get the help they need, while deviant individuals (criminals, drug addicts, or whomever they choose to blame) are sorted out.

The *egalitarian* household is likely to think positively of other people, while the blame is placed on the institutions and markets that corrupt people. They blame the harsh markets and the inhumane bureaucratic institutions when people end up unemployed or in the welfare queue. The ideal state is like a nurturing mother caring for her children. Everyone is equal and it makes no sense that one person is more qualified to make decisions than any other person. Where hierarchy trusts institutions, egalitarians trust collective decision-making. They value participatory democracy highly, and enjoy a roundtable discussion. The good thing about elections is that each person has only one vote, but unfortunately, money also rules here and public opinion can be manipulated. The egalitarian household wants to be part of as many decisions as possible and does not think that teachers are better qualified than parents are to teach children. They believe that sharing the limited resources amongst everyone is only fair, since resources are scarce and justice is about end-equality.

The *individualistic* household is likely to look at resources as unlimited, were there not all of these public rules and regulations limiting their availability. Therefore, the state should not be that concerned with taxation and income redistribution, but should let human ingenuity roam free, so that we can increase the size of the cake, rather than argue about how to divide it. Individualistic households look at people as strong and resourceful, while the state is simultaneously keeping the best people down, and pampering the others. Social welfare recipients are viewed as lazy: they just have not tried hard enough; human nature is primarily selfish, and lucrative welfare systems remove the incentive to work. Individualistic households prefer a night watchman state, which only provides people with fundamental security. The society is not viewed as a collective, but rather as a market place where individuals compete with each other—the best ones should win.

Fatalistic households are left alone to cope with their lives. Where the three previously described ways of organizing are active—their adherents believe that their way of organizing is best and would like to convince everyone else of it, too—fatalism is a passive way of organizing. The world is a random and dangerous place, in which the best thing one can do is keep one's head down, in order to avoid the hardest blows. Their plans fail and, consequently, their experience tells them that planning is futile. Where the three active ways of organizing have a form of solidarity that can be trusted, the fatalist lacks trust in his or her peers.

“It doesn’t matter who you vote for,” they tell themselves, to the never-ending dismay of those who belong to the three other solidarities, “the government always gets in” (Molenaers and Thompson 1999:192).

Fatalists are likely to be a part of the growing population of non-voters, and their lack of trust makes cooperation and collective action difficult. Even reciprocal agreements, which the individualists prefer, are difficult to form because the level of trust is low.

A Person and his or hers Relation to Ways of Organizing

Cultural theory is a theory originally about institutions and culture, not individuals. For many applications it is necessary to define what is the relation between individual and culture (Olli 1995). I suggest that at least two aspects must be described: First, the persons’ knowledge about ways of organizing as some people know many, others only one. There are also differences in degree of refinement within each way of organizing. Second, preferences concerning ways of organizing as somebody might be familiar with of a way organizing, but rejects it or even hates it. Thus, people with knowledge of many ways of organizing, and without many negative preferences, are likely to be able to find their way in many very different social settings. Those who have knowledge of only one have limited social skills. Those who prefer only one way of organizing and strongly reject the others have been called for fanatics (Olli 2007).

Problems with reading social signals

One source of uncertainty is located in problems with reading each others social signals in an unfamiliar social setting. Where two locals or native speakers are able to interpret each others signals and figure out if the other is focusing on positions, trying to make an agreement or trying to build a bond of equality. Even with native speakers, this is sometimes difficult, not everybody has the social flare and skill to handle new situations.⁴ If the participants do not agree upon which way to organize, they will be talking past each other and if the situation persists long enough conflicts will rise.

We have all encountered strangers, with whom we feel comfortable, perhaps because we are able in seconds to define the situation and move on. I am proposing that when you put an immigrant and a local person in such a situation their ability to interpret the others signals is not so good, and this creates a very fundamental type of insecurity. There is something scary about these situations when

⁴ In this paper I address those situations where a local and an immigrant meet and they need to create social interaction, but the much of the same applies in relation to people with a severe handicap and perhaps even with a different class background.

we do not “understand” our fellow human beings—what is it that they want and what is that they will do next?

One of the starting observations and built in assumptions in cultural theory is that we need to make sense of the world around us. Mary Douglas wrote in the new foreword thirty-six years after the first publication of *Purity and Danger* following:

"The book proceeds developing two themes. One presents taboo as a spontaneous device for protecting the distinctive categories of the universe. Taboo protects the local consensus on how the world is organised. It shores up wavering certainty. It reduces intellectual and social disorder. We may well ask why is it necessary to protect the primary distinctions of the universe, and why are taboos so bizarre? The second theme answers this with reflections on the cognitive discomfort caused by ambiguity. Ambiguous things can seem very threatening. Taboo confronts the ambiguous and shunts it into the category of the sacred." (Douglas 2002: xi)⁵

I am suggesting that the insecurity in the first meeting with strangers does easily become one of these events that that create uncertainty that needs to be solved. We are attempting to create a consistent understanding of the world—the empirical proof available that otherwise would falsify our categorizations is made invalid by the taboo. If something does not fit in— take it out!

Without being agreeing upon classification (ways of organizing), it is very difficult to create cooperation.

"A central part of my argument was that rational behaviour involves classification, and that the activity of classifying is a human universal. This follows from the essay on classification by Durkheim and Mauss, a classic for anthropologists of my generation. They demonstrated explicitly that classification is inherent in organisation; it is not a cognitive exercise which exists for its own sake. I thought I had made the same assumption explicit: organisation requires classifying, and that classification is at the basis of human coordination. " (Douglas 2002: xvii)

This classification that is so necessary is embedded in the cultural biases that are part of the ways of organizing. Thus we need institutions and their guidance to be able to think straight {Douglas, 1986 #3668}. For discourse to be possible at all, the basic categories have to be agreed on. Nothing else but institutions can define sameness.

"...institutions perform the same task as theory. They also confer sameness. [...] Sameness is not a quality that can be recognized in things themselves; it is conferred upon elements within a coherent scheme" (Douglas 1986:59)

Without sameness we would not have Otherness, either. we thus commonly also reproducing some of the dominant institutions in the society when we generalize.

⁵ However, Douglas does not suggest that any anomaly will create discomfort -- only those who challenge the present (dominant) way of organising.

Creating interaction with strangers

Strangers are people we do not know. When we meet a stranger, we need to establish the social rules we both will adhere to. Without a common understanding or agreement, the situation can be scary, as you have no understanding of the stranger's future behavior.

I am proposing that when we establish new interaction we have a few different ways to do this. Each of these new interactions can be described in terms used to describe households. We can have interaction that is structured around one of the four ways to organize—hierarchical, egalitarian, individualistic or fatalistic.

Each of the four ways of organizing has its own social code, its own way to construct social cooperation. In meeting with strangers, we are often well advised to search for these ideal typical forms of cooperation, rather than trying to create something more complicated. When the participants in a first encounter do not share a native language and belong to different national cultures the subtle communication needed to find out, and decide, which social code is to be used (or what kind of institution are we creating now) breaks down. This creates insecurity. There are several potential sources of poor communication—differences in language skills, differences in class, differences in ethnicity, country of origin, racism and so forth...

Four Ways to Organize Interaction

Each of the four ways of organizing has a different internal logic, which should be taken into account when the participants define a new interaction situation. In the following general traits of interaction based on the four ways of organizing are presented.

Hierarchical interaction is well defined; the participants have roles that come with clear defined descriptions of what to say and how to behave. In the beginning, there might be a small period of uncertainty, while the participants are figuring out what kind of situation this is or how to frame this encounter. The participants are probing each other for status and position, because positions are also the source of power. There will be emphasis on roles, participants will rely on presenting themselves as carriers of roles that are pre-defined, and they are defining themselves by their roles. As the interaction will reflect upon the roles people carry, participants might consider long time consequences to roles and social status. Because people can have different roles in different situations, people's behavior is evaluated separately for each context-role pair.

Egalitarian interaction is based on flat structure and the unity of cooperation. A 'temporary' collective with a purpose can be created—we are in this together. The participants are in the beginning wary of trying to control the situation too much, and thus grabbing the leadership to themselves. The

participants are probing each other for signs of moral or ideological unity and equal status as these create trust. It is important to give enough space for the other participants to formulate their own goals and wishes. Nevertheless, as the group is searching for a consensus, which can be time consuming. One interaction context (a temporary organization) is not likely to influence others as each one is 'sovereign' in its context, but people are morally evaluated based on all their interaction situations.

Individualistic interaction is goal oriented and based on contractual agreements. There is no need for true agreement concerning goals and ideology; agreement upon the action and acceptance of mutual benefit is sufficient. Trust is high until there is reason to expect otherwise. There will not be much talk about the goals or ideology, as the results of the action are in the focus. However, there might be discussions about what are suitable milestones, deadlines and how to reach them. Because the contracts and agreements are limited in time and scope, they are conducted on a pragmatic basis. Morals are simply about keeping one's contracts.

Fatalistic interaction is not easy to control, and therefore professionals should avoid it. However, a few typical characteristics can be laid out. Participation is heavily structured by external constraints; it is likely to be not completely voluntary cooperation. Some of the participants will just be going through the moves. There is likely to be much talk, but not enough commitment and trust to produce joint action. Participants expect everyone else to be a free rider or acting out of other non-expressed motives. There is some avoidance of contractual agreements, because they are not expected to be fulfilled.

Generalizing Insecurity

Based on cultural theory I suggest that there are two different alternative logics that can be used in the generalization. Either, the lack of classification is made to a 'taboo' (or reinforcing an existing one). Alternatively, the ambiguity present can be interpreted as support for competing ways of organizing and a threat to the dominant institutions (way of organizing).

There is uncertainty from the single encounter is generalized to apply to a whole category of people—the Others. The uncertainty about one encounter becomes represented through a taboo, something dangerous and threatening. In political discussions this is sometimes even spoken out—they are threatening our way of life—they multiply and will take over our country. There is something contagious about a taboo.

"Some of the dangers which follow on taboo-breaking spread harm indiscriminately on contact. Feared contagion extends the danger of a broken taboo to the whole community." (Douglas 2002: xiii)

Just think how in today's society some elements in the society fear Muslims: how they envision that the Others will populate the land and take it over, and how they are looking for a social, spatial and cultural distance to ensure the purity of their own kind.

One could expect that there are counterforces to this process of generalizing the uncertainty to insecurity in large scale. Quite often, when we learn to know an immigrant, we find him or her to be a decent and kind person. Why is it that this knowledge and friendliness is not generalized to the Others? Cultural theory does provide one possible answer. Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky have showed how the ways of organizing are in conflict with each other by definition (Thompson, Ellis, and Wildavsky 1990). As systems of ideas, they oppose each other, and define themselves through the opposition to each other. They compete of resources, of supporters and power in a society. This conflict perspective, built into the theory, is the reason why political scientists have been using the theory.⁶

On individual level, we are marking our own position and support for one way of organizing, by not only expressing support directly, but also attacking and rejecting one or more of the competing ways of organizing. Thus, the conflict and competition between the four ways of life, can also be observed on the individual level (Olli 1997, 2007). This cultural level opposition, thus, transfers to the individual level as opposition to particular values and attitudes. The individual not being able to figure out what this other person wants or is trying to do, is more likely to label the immigrants as belonging to one of these other (and opposing) ways of organizing. These ways of organizing (or ways of life) are not just harmless collections of ideas supporting people's behavior, but the most fundamental political ideas. They differ in regard to their views of human nature, what they trust, what they blame for their problems, what is justice, what is solidarity, and what is democracy.

The generalization from the single encounter, does not just involve generalizing the uncertainty, to a whole category of people, but the conflict between the ways of life becomes a part of this

⁶ Taboos and other rules are of course connected to power and power relations.

"The taboo-maintained rules will be as repressive as the leading members of the society want them to be. [...] If the makers of opinion want to prevent freemen from marrying slaves, [...] - the taboo system that supports their wishes will endure. Criticism will be suppressed, whole areas of life become unspeakable and, in consequence, unthinkable. But when the controllers of opinion want a different way of life, the taboos will lose credibility and their selected view of the universe will be revised." (Douglas 2002: xiii)

generalization. We are not sure what the Others want, but we are sure that it is against what we want.

I am not suggesting that peoples' reactions are based on analysis of these matters, the same way as empirical research is. They do not need to understand why they generalize and are insecure. Cultural theory is a theory about institutions and how they relate to each other, rather than a theory about individuals. The individual experiences becomes a cultural trait when they are expressed publicly and will thus provide a frame for interpretation of these individual level experiences, which again can reinforce the common understanding of the Other.

In my PhD thesis, I show how migrant household's political views to a large degree are intimately connected to the organization of their household. However, what is important for this paper, the immigrant households can be found in all four quadrants of the ideological space, and households from one country did not locate themselves in just one quadrant. Thus, one could say that there is a logical error in the generalization that makes the Others position in the opposition a general trait. We can find supporters of each way of life among the locals and among immigrants. Consequently, some of the immigrants will have the same fundamental values as I do.

Quiet Dismissal

A complimentary argument to the taboo/ambiguity argument can be found in linguistics. Within cognitive linguistics, there is a similar process of exclusion, connected to our use of stereotypes with members that are more central. Everyone would agree upon that "Birds can fly"—flying is partly what makes a bird to a bird. Sparrow is perhaps the most prototypical bird—the bird that is more bird than others (Lakoff 1987). However, there are other birds like penguins or the ostrich, which cannot fly. Nevertheless, when we argue, and perhaps more importantly, when we are thinking, we are unable to include this into our reasoning, because it would make the whole category of birds meaningless or at least too difficult to use. We just eliminate ostriches and penguins—we do not think of them.

If we apply this reasoning and accept that the "Other" is a category with similar ambiguity and lack of fit to real world situations it is likely that in most of our reasoning concerning the society, policy, social rights, politics, and so forth, we just ignore the Other, similarly as we ignore penguins when we think about birds. Cultural theory and cognitive linguistics both agree upon that we tend to ignore what ever does not fit into our thinking.

Fighting Insecurity

Is there hope? Are we trapped into this situation? When we learn to know a migrant well, for example through work, he or she moves from the position of the Other to something known. We seldom fear those we know. Is it possible to create a collective jump to including and understanding the Other? No, because otherness is defined through its impermeability for our social understanding, which again is partly caused by our inability to figure out their preferred way of organizing. My advice would be to try to improve people's ability to create social interaction. The easier this is the less Otherness is there room for in the collective consciousness. Households that share a way of life have much in common, despite their different countries of origin.

What other consequences does an approach based on cultural theory have for dealing with Otherness? First, it will not be possible to remove the source of uncertainty in with city-renewal strategies. Changing the city does not change the origin of the problem. Second, integration of a minority to the majority will take generations. (that is it will take a long time to move a category of people out of the position of otherness) However, individuals can have a rich social life with lots of contact with the majority population. Third, the insecurity is a two-way street; it is not just the majority that fears the minority. Fourth, there will always be new groups that will be incorporated to the Other. We can only hope to reduce the number of people who belong to the Other, and the negative consequences for them.

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Generalizing from Uncertainty in Social Encounters to Insecurity about the Others

Abstract

Cultural theory explains to us what is that people need to feel secure, and why they feel insecure. Cultural theory, by Mary Douglas and others, claims that there is a limited number of structurally different ways of life, that is, fundamentally different ways of organizing social life. Each one of these has its own rules for social life, its own values and norms, its own preferred form of solidarity, its own preferred form of social relations and behavioral patterns that help to sustain these. Being part of a way of life gives us a fundamental form of security: predictability concerning future events and the behavior of our fellow human beings. Evidence supporting this line of reasoning is presented from my qualitative study of migrant households in Norway demonstrating the strong relationship between a household's way of organizing and its view of society and politics.

First source of insecurity is the need to find a shared way to organize social interaction, when we meet a stranger. During the first seconds or minutes, we are probing for signs that allow us to establish common ground for interaction. One source to the fundamental, and so common, insecurity about migrants rises from our *inability to quickly 'read'* them and place them into the scheme of things. We do not know what they want or what they will do next, because we are not getting any help from what is commonly called 'the national culture' like Norwegian culture or Pakistani culture, which are not ways of life (or ways of organizing)—they consist of shared language, history, art and meaning that that allow us to read and understand people unknown to us.

The second element creating the fundamental insecurity rises from *generalizing* our insecurity from the single encounter to insecurity concerning a whole category of people. What does not fit in becomes easily a taboo and represents danger. Moreover, the ways of organizing are in conflict with each other by definition. As systems of ideas, they oppose each other, and define themselves through the opposition to each other. Thus, as long as we are not able to understand our fellow humans, we are bound to create, when we generalize, either otherness as a taboo, or otherness based on the assumption that their way of life is in opposition to our own.

Is there hope? Are we trapped into this situation? When we learn to know a migrant well, for example through shared work, he or she moves from the position of the Other to something known. We seldom fear those we know. Is it possible to create a collective jump to including and understanding the Other? No, because otherness is defined through its impermeability for our social understanding (lack of being able to figure out their way of life). My advice would be to try to improve people's ability to create social interaction. The easier this is the less Otherness is there room for in the collective consciousness. Knowing that households relying on the same way of life have much in common, despite their different countries of origin, makes it easier to feel comfortable during these first encounters.