CHAPTER 7

# Politics, Society and Identity

'*Society is inside man and man is inside society.*'

ARTHUR MILLER, *The Shadow of the Gods* (1958)

**PREVIEW**

To suggest, as textbooks tend to do, that politics takes place in a social context fails to convey just how intimately politics and social life are related. Politics, by its very nature, is a social activity, and it is viewed by some as nothing more than the process through which the conflicts of society are articulated and, perhaps, resolved. In this sense, society is no mere 'context', but the very stuff and substance of politics itself. Although later chapters examine the interaction between society and politics in relation to particular channels of communication, such as the media, elections, political parties, interest groups and so on, this chapter focuses on the broader political implications of how society is structured and how it has changed and continues to change. For example, the transition from agrarian societies to industrial societies and then to so-called post-industrial society has profoundly altered levels of social connectedness and given rise to new political battle lines. Not only has post-industrialism been associated with the declining significance of social class, but technological change, particularly in the fields of information and communication, has altered the breadth and depth of connections between people, as well as the nature of these connections. These and related factors have been linked to the strengthening of individualism, with major political consequences. Modern thinking about the relationship between politics and society is, nevertheless, increasingly focused on the question of identity, many claim, giving rise to a new politics of group self-assertion, or identity politics. This trend has helped, amongst other things, to highlight the political significance of race and ethnicity, gender, religion and culture.

**KEY ISSUES**

- What have been the political implications of the emergence of post-industrial societies?
- Is the 'information society' a myth or a reality?
- How has the growth of individualism affected community and social cohesion?
- Why has the politics of identity become so prominent in recent years?
- How have race and ethnicity, gender, religion and culture provided the basis for identity politics?
- Is identity politics a liberating force or a political dead-end?

CONCEPT

**Status**

Status is a person's position within a hierarchical order. It is characterized by the person's role, rights and duties in relation to the other members of that order. As status is a compound of factors such as honour, prestige, standing and power, it is more difficult to determine than an essentially economic category such as class. Also, because it is a measure of whether someone is 'higher' or 'lower' on a social scale, it is more subjective. Although status hierarchies have faded in significance in modern societies, they continue to operate in relation to factors such as family background, gender, and race and ethnicity.

# POLITICS AND SOCIETY

What do we mean by 'society'? In its most general sense, a society is a collection of people who occupy the same territorial area. However, not every group of people constitutes a society. Societies are characterized by regular patterns of social interaction. This suggests the existence of some kind of social *structure*; that is, a usually stable set of interrelationships amongst a number of elements. Moreover, 'social' relationships involve a sense of connectedness, in the form of mutual awareness and, at least, a measure of cooperation. For instance, strictly speaking, warring tribes do not constitute a 'society', even though they may live in close proximity to one another and interact regularly. Societies are also usually characterized by social *divisions*, in which groups and individuals occupy very different positions, reflecting an unequal distribution of status, wealth and/or power within the society. The nature of these divisions or cleavages, and the political significance of particular divisions (class, race, gender, age, religion and so on), of course, differ from society to society.

In all cases, though, society can be seen to shape politics in a number of important ways:

- The distribution of wealth and other resources in society conditions the nature of state power (as discussed in Chapter 3).
- Social divisions and conflicts help to bring about political change in the form of legitimation crises (as discussed in Chapter 4).
- Society influences public opinion and the political culture (as discussed in Chapter 8).
- The social structure shapes political behaviour; that is, who votes, how they vote, who joins parties and so on (as discussed in Chapters 9–11).

The nature of society, however, is one of the most contentious areas of political and ideological debate, being no less controversial, in fact, than the attempt to define the content of human nature. For example, whereas Marxists and others hold that society is characterized by irreconcilable conflict, liberals tend to emphasize that harmony exists amongst competing interests and groups. Similarly, while liberals are inclined to view society as an artefact fashioned by individuals to satisfy their various needs, conservatives have traditionally portrayed it as organic, ultimately shaped by the forces of natural necessity. Nevertheless, the nature of society, and therefore of social connectedness, have changed significantly over time. Modern society appears to be characterized by a 'hollowing out' of social connectedness, a transition from the 'thick' connectedness of close social bonds and fixed allegiances to the 'thin' connectedness of more fluid, individualized social arrangements. These changes have been linked to developments such as the advent of 'post-industrialism' and the fading significance of social class (see p. 153), the emergence of so-called 'information societies', and the growth of individualism (see p. 158).

## From industrialism to post-industrialism

Industrialization has been the most powerful factor shaping the structure and character of modern societies. It has, for instance, contributed to a dramatic

CONCEPT

**Social class**

A class is, broadly, a group of people who share a similar social and economic position. For Marxists, class is linked to economic power, which is defined by the individual's relationship to the means of production. From this perspective, the key class division is between the owners of productive wealth (the bourgeoisie) and those who live off the sale of their labour power (the proletariat). Non-Marxist definitions of class are usually based on income and status differences between occupational groups. Distinctions are thus made between 'middle' class (or non-manual) workers and 'working' class (or manual) workers.

increase in geographical mobility through the process of urbanization (by the early 2000s, most of the world's then 6.3 billion people had come to live in towns and cities, rather than in rural areas). In the process, the nature of social connectedness underwent significant changes. One of the most influential attempts to convey this transition was undertaken by the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (1855–1936). Tönnies distinguished between ***Gemeinschaft*** and ***Gesellschaft***. The advance of industrialization also changed the structure of society, with economically-based class divisions displacing the fixed social hierarchies of more traditional societies, which were usually based on status and linked to land ownership. Social class thus emerged as the central organizing principle of society.

However, any analysis of the relationship between class and politics is bedevilled by problems, not least about how social class should be defined and the role that social classes play. The leading protagonists of class politics have come from the Marxist tradition. Marxists regard class as the most fundamental, and politically the most significant, social division. As Marx (see p. 41) put it at the beginning of the *Communist Manifesto* ([1848] 1967), 'the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle'. From the Marxist perspective, capitalist societies are dominated by a 'ruling class' of property owners (the bourgeoisie) who oppress and exploit a class of wage slaves (the proletariat). This gives rise to a two-class model of industrial capitalism that emphasizes irreconcilable conflict and progressive polarization, with social classes being the key actors on the political stage. Marx predicted that, as capitalist development would be characterized by deepening crises, the proletariat would eventually achieve **class consciousness** and fulfil its destiny as the 'gravedigger' of capitalism. The proletariat would thus be transformed from a 'class in-itself' (an economically defined category) and become a 'class for-itself' (a revolutionary force).

## Decline of class politics

The Marxist two-class model has, however, been discredited by the failure of Marx's predictions to materialize, and by declining evidence of class struggle, at least in advanced capitalist societies. Even by the end of the nineteenth century, it was clear that the class structure of industrial societies was becoming increasingly complex, and that it varies from system to system, as well as over time. Max Weber (see p. 82) was one of the first to take stock of this shift, developing a theory of stratification that acknowledged economic or class differences, but also took account of the importance of political parties and social status. In drawing attention to status as a 'social estimation of honour' expressed in the lifestyle of a group, Weber helped to prepare the ground for the modern notion of occupational class, widely used by social and political scientists. For some, however, the late twentieth century was characterized by the final eclipse of class politics. By the 1960s, neo-Marxists such as Herbert Marcuse (see p. 42) were lamenting the deradicalization of the urban proletariat, and looked instead to the revolutionary potential of students, women, ethnic minorities and the developing world. The traditional link between socialism and the working class was formally abandoned in works such as André Gorz's *Farewell to the Working Class* (1982).

Most commentators agree that, behind the declining political significance of class, lies the emergence of so-called '**post-industrial societies**'. One of the

● ***Gemeinschaft***: (German) Community; social ties typically found in traditional societies and characterized by natural affection and mutual respect.

● ***Gesellschaft***: (German) Association; the loose, artificial and contractual bonds typically found in urban and industrial societies.

● **Class consciousness**: A Marxist term denoting a subjective awareness of a class's objective situation and interests; the opposite of 'false consciousness'.

● **Post-industrial society**: A society based on service industries, rather than on manufacturing industries, and accompanied by a significant growth in the white-collar workforce.

CONCEPT

**Fordism, post-Fordism**

Fordism refers to the large-scale mass-production methods pioneered by Henry Ford in Detroit in the USA. These used mechanization and highly-regimented production-line labour processes to produce standardized, relatively cheap products. Fordist societies were structured largely by solidaristic class loyalties. Post-Fordism emerged as the result of the introduction of more flexible microelectronics-based machinery that gave individual workers greater autonomy and made possible innovations such as subcontracting and batch production. Post-Fordism has been linked to decentralization in the workplace and a greater emphasis on choice and individuality.

key features of such societies has been the process of de-industrialization, reflected in the decline of labour-intensive 'heavy' industries such as coal, steel and shipbuilding. These tended to be characterized by a solidaristic culture rooted in clear political loyalties and, usually, strong union organization. In contrast, the expanding service sectors of economies foster more individualistic and instrumentalist attitudes. Post-industrial societies are therefore distinguished by growing **atomism** and the weakening of social connectedness. The term 'post-industrialism' was popularized by Daniel Bell in *The Coming of Post-industrial Society* (1973). For Bell, post-industrial societies were characterized, amongst other things, by the transition from a labour theory of value to a knowledge theory of value, as implied by the idea of an 'information society' (see p. 156), discussed below. Piore and Sabel (1984) interpreted the transition as part of a shift from a Fordist to a post-Fordist era. In this light, the eclipse of the system of mass production and mass consumption, the chief features of Fordism, has produced more pluralized and fluid class formations.

The shrinkage of the traditional working class has led to the development of so-called 'two-thirds, one-third' societies, in which the two-thirds are relatively prosperous, a product of a marked tendency towards social levelling associated with mass education, rising affluence and consumerism (Hutton, 1995). One of the most influential attempts to discuss the political implications of this development is found in J. K. Galbraith's *The Culture of Contentment* (1992). Galbraith (see p. 155) pointed to the emergence in modern societies, at least amongst the politically active, of a 'contented majority' whose material affluence and economic security encourages them to be politically conservative. This contented majority, for instance, has provided an electoral base for the anti-welfarist and tax-cutting policies that have become fashionable since the 1970s. Debate about the plight of the one-third and about the nature of social inequality in modern societies has increasingly focused not so much on social class, but more on what has been called the '**underclass**'. The underclass suffers less from poverty as it has been traditionally understood (deprivation of material necessities) and more from social exclusion, reflected in cultural, educational and social impediments to meaningful participation in the economy and society. However, attitudes towards social differentiation and debates about the appropriate response to the growth of an underclass are rooted in deeper disagreements about the causes and political implications of social inequality (see p. 156).

## New technology and the 'information society'

One of the features most commonly associated with post-industrialism is the increased importance that is placed on knowledge and information generally, on intellectual capital (ideas), rather than material capital (things). This is often seen as a consequence of what has been called the 'third' modern information revolution, which has witnessed the advent of so-called 'new' media; notably, mobile phones, cable and satellite television, cheaper and more powerful computers, and, most importantly, the **internet**. (The first revolution involved the development of the telegraph, telephone and radio, while the second centred on television, early-generation computers and satellites). The third information

● **Atomism**: The tendency for society to be made up of a collection of self-interested and largely self-sufficient individuals, operating as separate atoms.

● **Underclass**: A poorly defined and politically controversial term that refers, broadly, to people who suffer from multiple deprivation (unemployment or low pay, poor housing, inadequate education and so on)

● **Internet**: A global 'network of networks' that connects computers around the world; 'virtual' space in which users can access and disseminate online information.

## John Kenneth Galbraith (1908–2006)

Canadian economist and social theorist. Following wartime service as the Director of the US Strategic Bombing Survey, Galbraith became a professor of economics at Harvard University and served as the US Ambassador to India, 1961–63. Galbraith was closely identified with the Democratic Party, and was perhaps the leading modern exponent of Keynesian economics (and certainly its most innovative advocate). He became one of the USA's most eminent social commentators. In *The Affluent Society* (1958), Galbraith highlighted the contrast between private affluence and public squalor, arguing that economic resources are often used in the wasteful gratification of trivial wants. *The New Industrial State* (1967) advanced a critique of corporate power in the USA. His other major works include *The Culture of Contentment* (1992).

revolution has concerned the technologies of **connectivity**, and have been particularly significant. The extraordinary explosion that has occurred in the quantity of information and communication exchanges, made possible by digital technologies, has marked, some argue, the birth of the 'information age' (in place of the industrial age). Society has been transformed into an 'information society' and the economy has become a '**knowledge economy**', even a 'weightless' economy.

The emergence of new media has helped to alter both the scope and the nature of social connectedness. As far as the scope of social connectedness is concerned, new media have given huge impetus to the process of globalization. Indeed, so-called 'hyperglobalist' theorists subscribe to a kind of technological determinism in arguing that accelerated globalization became inevitable once new information and communication technologies (ICT) became widely available (Ohmae, 1989). While the industrial age (and the first two communications revolutions) created new mechanisms for communicating at a national, rather than a local level (via national newspapers, telephone systems, radio and television services, and so on), the technologies of the information age are, by their nature, transnational: mobile phones, satellite television and the internet (usually) operate regardless of borders. This, in turn, has facilitated the growth of transborder groups, bodies and institutions, ranging from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (see p. 248), protest movements and transnational corporations (TNCs) (see p. 149) to international criminal organizations and global terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda. Not only do states struggle to control and constrain groups and organizations that have transborder structures, but they also have a greatly reduced capacity to control what their citizens see, hear and know. For instance, although states such as China, Burma and Iran have, at various times, tried to restrict transborder communications via mobile phones and the internet, the pace of technological change is very likely to weaken such controls in the longer term. The former US Presisent Bill Clinton likened China's attempts to control the internet to trying to nail Jell-O to the wall.

Not only do information societies connect more people to more other people – and, increasingly, to people who live in other societies – but the nature

● **Connectivity**: A computer buzzword that refers to the links between one device (usually a computer) and others, affecting the speed, ease and extent of information exchanges.

● **Knowledge economy**: An economy in which knowledge is the key source of competitiveness and productivity, especially through the application of information and communications technology.

# Debating . . .
# Does social equality matter?

The issue of social equality lies at the heart of ideological debate and argument. While left-wingers tend to support equality, seeing it as the key to social justice, right-wingers typically accepted inequality as inevitable if not desirable. How does material inequality, particularly income inequality, affect politics and society? Do governments have a moral obligation to promote social equality, and, if so, on what grounds?

## YES

***Inequality and social dysfunction***. Socialists have long argued that social inequality breeds resentment, hostility and strife, even, in the case of Marxists, associating class inequality with inevitable social revolution. Such concerns have also been borne out by empirical studies that link inequality to a range of negative personal and social outcomes. Comparative studies of 'high' inequality countries, such as the USA, the UK and Portugal, and 'low' inequality countries, such as Japan and the Scandinavian states, suggests that inequality leads to shorter, unhealthier and unhappier lives, reflected in increased rates of, for instance, teenage pregnancies, violence, obesity, imprisonment and addiction (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2010).

***Justice as equality***. The moral case in favour of equality includes that poverty and social disadvantage impair people's opportunities and life chances. As social differentiation more often results from unequal treatment by society than from unequal natural endowment, justice dictates that social rewards should generally be distributed more equally, and that this should be done through policies of welfare and redistribution. According to John Rawls (see p. 45), if people were unaware of their personal attributes and qualities, most would favour equality over inequality, as their fear of being destitute would outweigh their desire for great wealth.

***Social citizenship***. Social equality (or, more accurately, reduced social inequality) is a necessary condition for healthy democracy and meaningful citizenship. Citizens have to enjoy freedom from poverty, ignorance and despair if they are to participate fully in the affairs of their community, an idea embodied in the concept of social citizenship. Groups such as women, ethnic minorities, the poor and the unemployed, commonly regard themselves as 'second class citizens' if social disadvantage prevents their full civic and political participation (see p. 444). Social inequality thus correlates with low voter turnout and fuels dissent and civil unrest.

## NO

***Inequality and economic growth***. Liberal political economists link social equality to economic stagnation. This occurs because social 'levelling' serves to cap aspirations and remove the incentive for enterprise and hard work. The sterility and inertia of communist states was thus in large part a consequence of high levels of job security and low income differentials. In contrast, the USA, the world's leading economy, demonstrates how inequality promotes economic vigour, as the rich can always get richer and the poor can always become more poor. Indeed, by strengthening incentives, inequality may actually benefit the poor, whose living standards may be higher in relatively unequal societies than they are in relatively equal societies.

***Justice as inequality***. Inequality is justifiable quite simply because people are different: they have different aspirations, talents, dispositions and so forth. To treat them as equals must therefore result in injustice. As Aristotle (see p. 6) put it, injustice arises not only when equals are treated unequally, but also when unequals are treated equally. Justice may require equality of opportunity, giving each person the same starting point in life, but certainly not equality of outcome. In line with the principle of meritocracy, the talented and hardworking should rise, while the lazy and feckless should fall. Pursuing equality thus involves penalizing talent.

***Politics of envy***. The socialist principle of equality is based on social envy, the desire to have what others possess. Instead of encouraging the less well-off to focus on improving their own living standards, it encourages them to resent the wealthy, seeing them, somehow, as the architects of their misfortune. As the politics of envy grows, individual freedom is diminished, both through the emergence of an extensive system of manipulation and 'social engineering', and by the fact that redistribution, in effect, legalizes theft (as government transfers wealth from one group of people to another without their consent).

CONCEPT

**Information society**

An information society is a society in which the creation, distribution and manipulation of information are core economic and cultural activities, underpinned, in particular, by the wider use of computerized processes and the internet. Information and knowledge are thus seen to have replaced physical capital as the principal source of wealth. In an 'information age', or 'cyber age', the principal responsibility of government is to improve education and training, both to strengthen international competitiveness and to widen opportunities for the individual.

of those connections has also changed. One of the most influential attempts to explain this was advanced in Manuel Castells' (1996) notion of the 'network society'. Whereas the dominant mode of social organization in industrial societies had been hierarchies, more complex and pluralized information societies operate either on the basis of markets (reflecting the wider role of market economics, as well as the impact of economic globalization, as discussed in Chapter 6), or on the basis of looser and more diffuse **networks**. According to Castells, businesses increasingly function as 'network corporations'. Many TNCs, for instance, are organized as networks of franchises and subsidiaries. Similar trends can be witnessed in social and political life. For example, hierarchical bodies such as trade unions and pressure groups have increasingly lost influence through the emergence of network-based social movements (see p. 260), such as the anti-globalization movement and the environmental movement.

Nevertheless, opinions are divided over the implications of the wider use of new communications technologies for politics and society. Dating back to Ivan Illich's pioneering *Tools for Conviviality* (1973), the potential for computer-based technologies to give individual citizens independent access to specialized knowledge, allowing them to escape from dependency on technocratic elites, has been lauded. In this light, new media are a source of citizen empowerment and (potentially) a significant constraint on government power. Critics, in contrast, point out that the internet does not discriminate between good ideas and bad ones. It provides a platform for the dissemination not only of socially-worthwhile and politically-neutral views, but also of political extremism, racial and religious bigotry, and pornography of various kinds. A further danger has been the growth of a 'cult of information', whereby the accumulation of data and information becomes an end in itself, impairing the ability of people to distinguish between information, on the one hand, and knowledge, experience and wisdom, on the other (Roszak, 1994). Such a criticism is linked to allegations that 'surfing' the internet actually impairs people's ability to think and learn by encouraging them to skim and jump from one piece of information to the next, ruining their ability to concentrate. New media may therefore be making people stupid, rather than better-informed (Carr, 2008, 2010). The impact of new media on democracy and governance is examined in greater detail in Chapter 8.

## No such thing as society?

Although the advent of post-industrialism and the spread of IT-based, network relationships have encouraged the 'thinning' of social connectedness, at the heart of this trend lies a deeper process: the rise of individualism. In many parts of the world, the notion of 'the individual' is now so familiar that its political and social significance, as well as its relatively recent origins, are often overlooked. In traditional societies, there was typically little idea of individuals having their own interests, or possessing personal and unique identities. Rather, people were seen as members of the social groups to which they belonged: their family, village, tribe, local community and so on. Their lives and identities were largely determined by the character of these groups in a process that had changed little from one generation to the next. The rise of individualism is widely seen as a conse-

● **Network**: A means of co-ordinating social life through loose and informal relationships between people or organizations, usually for the purpose of knowledge dissemination or exchange.

CONCEPT

## Individualism

Individualism is the belief in the supreme importance of the individual over any social group or collective body. As such, individualism has two key implications. First, each individual has a separate, indeed unique, identity, reflecting his or her 'inner' or personal qualities. This is evident in the idea of individuality, and is linked to the notion of people as self-interested, and largely self-reliant, creatures. Second, all individuals share the same moral status as 'persons', irrespective of factors such as race, religion, nationality, sex and social position. This is reflected in the idea of rights, and especially in the doctrine of human rights (see p. 342).

quence of the establishment of industrial capitalism as the dominant mode of social organization, first in western societies and, thanks to globalization, beyond. Industrial capitalism meant that people were confronted by a broader range of choices and social possibilities. They were encouraged, perhaps for the first time, to think for themselves, and to think of themselves in personal terms. A peasant, for example, whose family may always have lived and worked on the same piece of land, became a 'free man' and acquired some ability to choose who to work for, or maybe the opportunity to leave the land altogether and look for work in the growing towns or cities. As individuals, people were more likely to be self-seeking, acting in accordance with their own (usually material) interests, and they were encouraged to be self-sufficient, in the sense of taking responsibility for their economic and social circumstances. This gave rise to the doctrine of **economic individualism**.

A child of industrial capitalism, individualism has been further strengthened by the growth, especially since the 1960s, of the consumer society and, later, by the general shift in favour of neoliberal economics, as examined in Chapter 6, Whereas earlier versions of industrial capitalism had linked people's status in society to their productive roles (most clearly demonstrated by the importance traditionally placed on social class, a consumer society, or consumer capitalism), encouraged people to define themselves increasingly in terms of what they own and how much they own. While an emphasis on production tends to foster social solidarity, in that it highlights what people have in common with other people, consumerism encourages people to think and act more in individual terms, focusing on personal gratification, even seeing consumption as a form of self-expression. Daniel Bell (1976) interpreted this as evidence of a cultural contradiction that lies at the heart of the capitalist system, arguing that the ethic of acquisitiveness and immediate gratification (which encourages consumers to consume) was winning out over the ethic of asceticism and delayed gratification (which encourages workers to work). The growing prominence of neoliberalism (see p. 144) from the 1980s onwards, especially in countries that had embraced free-market thinking with the greatest enthusiasm, such as the USA and the UK, further strengthened individualism. This occurred both through the tendency to extol the virtues of entrepreneurialism and individual self-striving, creating, critics argued, a philosophy of 'greed is good', and through the rolling back of welfare, based on the desire for people to 'stand on their own two feet'. Margaret Thatcher's famous assertion, that 'There is no such thing as society . . . only individual men and women and their families', is often seen to encapsulate the thrust of neoliberal individualism.

However, there is deep disagreement over the implications of the spread of individualism. For many, the spread of individualism has profoundly weakened **community** and our sense of social belonging. For instance, academic sociology largely arose in the nineteenth century as an attempt to explore the (usually negative) social implications of the spread of industrialization and urbanization, both of which had encouraged increasing individualism and competition. The French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) thus emphasized the degree to which the weakening of social codes and norms had resulted in the spread of '**anomie**'. For Durkheim (1897), this had led to an increase in the number of suicides in industrial societies. Similar misgivings about the rise of individualism have been expressed by modern communitarian thinkers, who have linked the

● **Economic individualism**: The belief that individuals are entitled to autonomy in matters of economic decision-making; economic individualism is loOsely linked to property rights.

● **Community**: A principle or sentiment based on the collective identity of a social group; bonds of comradeship, loyalty and duty.

● **Anomie**: A weakening of values and normative rules, associated with feelings of isolation, loneliness and meaninglessness.

CONCEPT

## Consumerism

Consumerism is a psychic and social phenomenon whereby personal happiness is equated with the acquisition and consumption of material possessions. Its growth has been shaped by the development of new advertising and marketing techniques that took advantage of the emergence of the mass media and the spread of mass affluence. Rising consumerism has important socio-economic and cultural implications. Whereas 'productionist' societies emphasize the values of discipline, duty and hard work (the Protestant work ethic, for example), consumer societies emphasize materialism, hedonism and immediate, rather than delayed, gratification.

growth of egoism and atomism to a weakening of social duty and moral responsibility. Communitarian theorists, such as Michael Sandel (1982) and Alisdair MacIntyre (1981), have thus argued that, in conceiving the individual as logically prior to and 'outside' the community, liberal individualism has legitimized selfishness and greed, and downgraded the importance of the public good. Robert Putnam (2000) and others have associated such trends with a decline of social capital (see p. 175) across many modern societies, as discussed at greater length in Chapter 8.

On the other hand, liberal theorists, in particular, have viewed rising individualism as a mark of social progress. In this view, the forward march of individualism has been associated with the spread of progressive, even 'enlightened', social values; notably, toleration and equality of opportunity. If human beings are thought of, first and foremost, as individuals, they must be entitled to the same rights and the same respect, meaning that all forms of disadvantage or discrimination, based on factors such as gender (see p. 163), race (see p. 112), colour, creed, religion or social background, are viewed as morally questionable, if not indefensible. All modern societies have, to a greater or lesser extent, been affected by the spread of such ideas, not least through the changing gender roles and family structures that have resulted from the spread of feminism. The link between individualism and the expansion of choice and opportunity has also been highlighted by the spread in modern societies of **social reflexivity** (Giddens, 1994). This has occurred for a variety of reasons, including the development of mass education; much wider access to information through radio, television, the internet and so on; and intensified cultural flows within and between societies. However, social reflexivity brings both benefits and dangers. On the one hand, it has greatly widened the sphere of personal freedom, the ability of people to define who they are and how they wish to live, a tendency reflected in the increasing domination of politics by so-called 'lifestyle' issues. On the other hand, its growth has coincided with a strengthening of consumerism and materialist ethics.

Nevertheless, it is important not to overstate the advance of individualism or, for that matter, the erosion of community. Individualism has been embraced most eagerly in the English-speaking world, where it has been most culturally palatable, given the impact of Protestant religious ideas about personal salvation and the moral benefits of individual self-striving. In contrast, Catholic societies in Europe and elsewhere have been more successful in resisting individualism and in maintaining the ethics of social responsibility, reflected in a stronger desire to uphold welfare provision as both an expression of social responsibility and a means of upholding social cohesion. However, the best examples of successful anti-individualist societies can be found in Asia, especially in Japan, China and Asian 'tiger' states such as Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore. This has led to a debate about the viability of a set of so-called 'Asian values', and especially those associated with Confucianism (see p. 278), as an alternative to the individualism of western, liberal societies. In addition, the image of modern societies being increasingly dominated by 'thin' forms of social connectedness is undermined by evidence of the resurgence of 'thick' social connectedness in many societies; notably, through the rise of identity politics and the growing importance of ethnicity, gender (see p. 160), culture and religion in many parts of the world.

● **Social reflexivity**: The tendency of individuals and other social actors to reflect, more or less continuously, on the conditions of their own actions, implying higher levels of self-awareness, self-knowledge and contemplation.

CONCEPT

**Ethnicity**

Ethnicity is the sentiment of loyalty towards a distinctive population, cultural group or territorial area. The term is complex because it has both racial and cultural overtones. The members of ethnic groups are often seen, correctly or incorrectly, to have descended from common ancestors, and the groups are thus thought of as extended kinship groups, united by blood. More commonly, ethnicity is understood as a form of cultural identity, albeit one that operates at a deep and emotional level. An 'ethnic' culture encompasses values, traditions and practices but, crucially, it also gives a people a common identity and sense of distinctiveness, usually by focusing on their origins.

# IDENTITY POLITICS

## Rise of identity politics

One of the prominent features of modern politics has been a growing recognition of the significance of cultural differences within society, often portrayed as '**identity politics**', or the 'politics of difference'. Identity politics is an orientation towards social or political theorizing, rather than a coherent body of ideas with a settled political character. It seeks to challenge and overthrow oppression by reshaping a group's identity through what amounts to a process of politico-cultural self-assertion. This reflects two core beliefs. The first is that group marginalization operates through stereotypes and values developed by dominant groups that structure how marginalized groups see themselves and are seen by others. These typically inculcate a sense of inferiority, even shame. The second belief is that subordination can be challenged by reshaping identity to give the group concerned a sense of pride and self-respect (for instance, 'black is beautiful' or 'gay pride'). In seeking to reclaim a 'pure' or 'authentic' sense of identity, identity politics expresses defiance against marginalization and disadvantage, and serves as a source of liberation. This is what gives identity politics its typically combative character and imbues it with psycho-emotional force.

The foundations for identity politics were laid by the postcolonial theories that emerged from the collapse of the European empires in the early post-1945 period. The significance of postcolonialism (see p. 52) was that it sought to challenge and overturn the cultural dimension of imperial rule by establishing the legitimacy of non-western – and sometimes anti-western – political ideas and traditions. For example, Franz Fanon (1926–61) developed a theory of imperialism (see p. 427) that gave particular emphasis to the psychological dimension of colonial subjugation. For Fanon (1968), decolonization was not merely a political process, but one through which a new 'species' of man is created. He argued that only the cathartic experience of violence is powerful enough to bring about this psycho-political regeneration. Edward Said (see p. 161) developed a critique of **Eurocentrism** through his notion of 'orientalism' (Said, 1978). Orientalism highlights the extent to which western cultural and political hegemony over the rest of the world, but over the Orient in particular, had been maintained through elaborate stereotypical fictions that belittled and demeaned non-western people and culture. Examples of this would include notions such as the 'mysterious East', 'inscrutable Chinese' and 'lustful Turks'. However, manifestations of identity politics are varied and diverse. This is because identity can be shaped around many principles. The most important of these are:

- race and ethnicity
- gender
- religion
- culture.

## Race and ethnicity

Racial and ethnic divisions are a significant feature of many modern societies. There is nothing new, however, in the link between **race** and politics. The first

● **Identity politics**: A style of politics that seeks to counter group marginalization by embracing a positive and assertive sense of collective identity.

● **Eurocentrism**: A culturally biased approach to understanding that treats European, and generally western, ideas, values and assumptions as 'natural'.

● **Race**: A group of people who share a common ancestry and 'one blood': 'racial' differences linked to skin and hair colour and facial features have no scientific basis (see p. 112).

## Edward Said (1935–2003)

A Jerusalem-born US academic and literary critic, Said was a leading literary critic, a prominent advocate of the Palestinian cause and a founding figure of postcolonial theory. From the 1970s onwards, he developed a humanist critique of the western Enlightenment that uncovered its links to colonialism and highlighted 'narratives of oppression', cultural and ideological biases that disempowered colonized peoples by representing them as the non-western 'other'. He is best known for the notion of 'orientalism', which operated through a 'subtle and persistent Eurocentric prejudice against Arabo-Islamic peoples and culture'. His key texts include *Orientalism* (1978) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).

explicitly racialist (see p. 120) political theories were developed in the nineteenth century against the background of European imperialism. Works such as Gobineau's *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* (Gobineau, [1855] 1970) and H. S. Chamberlain's *The Foundations of the Nineteenth Century* ([1899] 1913) attempted to provide a pseudoscientific justification for the dominance of the 'white' races of Europe and North America over the 'black', 'brown' and 'yellow' peoples of Africa and Asia. Anti-Semitic (see p. 121) political parties and movements emerged in countries such as Germany, Austria and Russia in the late nineteenth century. The most grotesque twentieth-century manifestation of such racialism was found in German Nazism, which, through the so-called 'Final Solution', attempted to carry out the extermination of European Jewry. Apartheid (Afrikaans for 'apartness') in South Africa consisted of the strict segregation of whites and non-whites between the election of the Nationalist Party in 1948 and the establishment of a non-racial democracy under the leadership of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1994. Elsewhere, racialism has been kept alive through campaigns against immigration, organized, for example, by the British National Party (BNP) and Le Pen's *Front National* (FN) in France.

Very different forms of racial or ethnic politics have, nevertheless, developed out of the struggle against colonialism (see p. 122) in particular, and as a result of racial discrimination and disadvantage in general. Indeed, in seeking to challenge economic and social marginalization, black nationalism in the USA and elsewhere constituted the prototype for identity politics, especially through its emphasis on '**consciousness raising**'. The origins of the black consciousness movement date back to the early twentieth century and the emergence of a 'back to Africa' movement, inspired by activists such as Marcus Garvey (see p. 162). Black politics, however, gained greater prominence in the 1960s with an upsurge in both the reformist and revolutionary wings of the movement. In its reformist guise, the movement took the form of a struggle for civil rights that reached national prominence in the USA under the leadership of Martin Luther King (1929–68) and the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). The strategy of protest and non-violent civil disobedience was, nevertheless, rejected by the emerging Black Power movement, which supported black separatism and, under the leadership of the Black Panther Party, founded

● **Consciousness raising**: Strategies to remodel social identity and challenge cultural inferiority by an emphasis on pride, self-worth and self-assertion.

## Marcus Garvey (1887–1940)

Jamaican political thinker and activist, and an early advocate of black nationalism. Garvey was the founder in 1914 of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). He left Jamaica for New York in 1916, where his message of black pride and economic self-sufficiency gained him a growing following, particularly in ghettos such as Harlem. Although his black business enterprises failed, and his call for a return to Africa was largely ignored, Garvey's emphasis on establishing black pride and his vision of Africa as a 'homeland' provided the basis for the later Black Power movement. Rastafarianism is also based largely on his ideas. Garvey was imprisoned for mail fraud in 1923, and was later deported, eventually dying in obscurity in London.

in 1966, promoted the use of physical force and armed confrontation. Of more enduring significance in US politics, however, have been the Black Muslims, who advocate a separate creed based on the idea that black Americans are descended from an ancient Muslim tribe. Founded in 1930, the Black Muslims were led for over 40 years by Elijah Muhammad (1897–1975), and they counted amongst their most prominent activists in the 1960s the militant black leader Malcolm X (1925–65). Renamed the Nation of Islam, the movement continues to exert influence in the USA under the leadership of Louis Farrakhan. Other manifestations of ethnic consciousness include the secessionist nationalist movements that sprang up in many parts of western Europe and North America in the 1960s and early 1970s. This was most evident in Quebec in Canada, Scotland and Wales in the UK, Catalonia and the Basque area in Spain, Corsica in France, and Flanders in Belgium.

The rise of ethnic consciousness has by no means occurred only in the West. Although ethnic rivalry (often portrayed as 'tribalism') is sometimes seen as an endemic feature of African and Asian politics, it is better understood as a phenomenon linked to colonialism (see p. 122). However, the divide-and-rule policies of the colonial period often bequeathed to many newly-independent 'nations' a legacy of bitterness and resentment. In many cases, this was subsequently exacerbated by the attempt of majority ethnic groups to consolidate their dominance under the guise of 'nation-building'. Such tensions, for instance, resulted in the Biafran war in Nigeria in the 1960s, a long-running civil war in Southern Sudan, and a resort to terrorism by the predominantly Christian Tamils in Sri Lanka. The worst recent example of ethnic bloodshed, however, occurred in Rwanda in 1994, where an estimated 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were slaughtered in an uprising by militant Hutus. The spectre of ethnic rivalry and regional conflict has also been created by the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. In the former USSR, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, for example, this led to state collapse and the creation of a series of new states. Nevertheless, these newly-created states have themselves been subject to deep ethnic rivalries and tensions. This has been demonstrated by the rebellion of the Chechens in Russia, and the fragmentation of the former Yugoslav republic of Bosnia into 'ethnically pure' Muslim, Serb and Croat areas.

CONCEPT

**Gender**

Gender refers to social and cultural distinctions between males and females, (as opposed to 'sex' which highlights biological, and therefore ineradicable, differences between men and women). Gender is therefore a social construct, usually based on stereotypes of 'feminine' and 'masculine' behaviour. Feminists typically emphasize the distinction in order to demonstrate that physical or biological differences (sexual differences) need not mean that women and men must have different social roles and positions (gender differences). In short, gender equality is based on the belief that sexual differences have no social or political significance.

## Gender politics

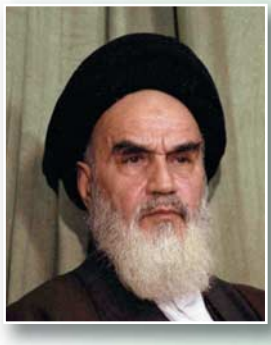
An awareness of the political significance of gender dates back to the emergence of so-called '**first-wave feminism**', which emerged in the nineteenth century and was shaped, above all, by the campaign for female suffrage: the right to vote. Its core belief was that women should enjoy the same legal and political rights as men, with a particular emphasis being placed on female suffrage on the grounds that if women could vote, all other forms of other sexual discrimination or prejudice would quickly disappear. This essentially liberal form of feminism was nevertheless 'difference-blind', in that its goal was the achievement of genderless 'personhood', allowing women and men to transcend 'difference'. However, the emergence of **second-wave feminism** in the 1960s and 1970s served to recast feminism as a form of identity politics. Radical feminists, such as Kate Millett (1970) and Mary Daly (1978), argued that gender divisions are the deepest and most politically significant of all social cleavages. All contemporary and historical societies are therefore seen to be characterized by patriarchy (see p. 65); that is, the dominance of men and the subordination of women, usually rooted in the rule of the husband-father within the family. From this perspective, nothing short of a 'sexual revolution' that would fundamentally transform cultural and personal relationships, as well as economic and political structures, could bring an end to gender inequality.

The emphasis within feminism on identity and difference increased with the emergence of strains within radical feminism that emphasized the fundamental and unalterable differences between women and men. An example of this was the 'pro-woman' position, which has been particularly strong in France and the USA. This position extols the positive virtues of fertility and motherhood, and rejects the idea that women should try to be 'more like men'. Instead, they should recognize and embrace their sisterhood, the bonds that link them to all other women. The pro-woman position therefore accepts that women's attitudes and values are different from men's, but implies that, in certain respects, women are superior, possessing qualities of creativity, sensitivity and caring which men can never fully appreciate or develop. The acknowledgement of deep, and possibly ineradicable, differences between women and men also led some feminists to argue that the roots of patriarchy lie within the male sex itself. In this view, 'all men' are physically and psychologically disposed to oppress 'all women'; in other words, 'men are the enemy'. In *Against Our Will* (1975), Susan Brownmiller therefore argued that men dominate women through a process of physical and sexual abuse. Men have created an 'ideology of rape', which amounts to a 'conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear'. Such a line of argument leads in the direction of feminist separatism, whereby women retreat from corrupt and corrupting male society. For some radical feminists, this had important implications for women's personal and sexual conduct. Only women who remain celibate or choose lesbianism can regard themselves as 'woman-identified women'. In the slogan attributed to Ti-Grace Atkinson: 'feminism is the theory; lesbianism is the practice' (Charvet, 1982).

Since the 1990s, a younger generation of feminist theorists have sought to articulate a feminist 'third wave', distinct from the campaigns and demands of the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s. This has usually involved a more radical engagement with the politics of difference, especially going beyond those

● **First-wave feminism**: The early form of feminism, dating from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1960s, which sought to achieve gender equality in the areas of legal and political rights, particularly suffrage rights.

● **Second-wave feminism**: The form of feminism that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, and was characterized by a more radical concern with 'women's liberation', including, and perhaps especially, in the private sphere.



## Ayatollah Khomeini (1900–89)

Iranian cleric and political leader. Khomeini was one of the foremost scholars in the major theological centre of Qom until he was expelled from Iran in 1964. His return from exile in 1979 sparked the 'Islamic Revolution', leaving the Ayatollah (literally, 'gift of Allah') as the supreme leader of the world's first Islamic state until his death. Breaking decisively with the Shi'a tradition that the clergy remain outside politics, Khomeini's world-view was rooted in a clear division between the oppressed (understood largely as the poor and excluded of the developing world) and the oppressors (seen as the twin Satans: the USA and the USSR, capitalism and communism). Islam thus became a theo-political project aimed at regenerating the Islamic world by ridding it of occupation and corruption from outside.

strands within radical feminism that had emphasized that women are different from men, to a concern with differences between women. In so doing, third-wave feminists have tried to rectify an over-emphasis within earlier forms of feminism on the aspirations and experiences of middle-class, white women in developed societies, meaning that the contemporary women's movement is characterized by diversity, **hybridity**, and even contradiction. This has allowed the voices of, amongst others, low-income women, women in the developing world and 'women of colour' to be heard more effectively. Black feminism has been particularly effective in this respect, challenging the tendency within conventional forms of feminism to ignore racial differences and suggesting that women endure a common oppression by virtue of their sex. Especially strong in the USA, black feminism portrays sexism and racism as linked systems of oppression, and highlights the particular and complex range of gender, racial and economic disadvantages that confront women of colour.

## Religion and politics

The impact of religion on political life had been progressively restricted by the spread of liberal culture and ideas, a process that has been particularly prominent in the industrialized West. Nevertheless, liberal **secularism** is by no means an anti-religious tendency. Rather, it is concerned to establish a 'proper' sphere and role for religion. Emphasizing the importance of the public/private divide, it has sought to confine religion to a private arena, leaving public life to be organized on a strictly secular basis. However, the emergence of new, and often more assertive, forms of religiosity, the increasing impact of religious movements and, most importantly, a closer relationship between religion and politics, especially since the 1970s, has confounded the so-called '**secularization thesis**'. This was dramatically demonstrated by the 1979 'Islamic Revolution' in Iran, which brought the Ayatollah Khomeini to power as the leader of the world's first Islamic state. Nevertheless, it soon became clear that this was not an exclusively Islamic development, as 'fundamentalist' movements emerged within Christianity, particularly in the form of the so-called 'new Christian Right' in the USA, and within Hinduism and Sikhism in India. Other manifestations of this

● **Hybridity**: A condition of social and cultural mixing; the term derives from cross-breeding between genetically dissimilar plants or animals.

● **Secularism**: The belief that religion should not intrude into secular (worldly) affairs, usually reflected in the desire to separate church from state.

● **Secularization thesis**: The theory that modernization is invariably accompanied by the victory of reason over religion and the displacement of spiritual values by secular ones.

include the spread of US-style Pentecostalism in Latin America, Africa and East Asia; the growth in China of Falun Gong, a spiritual movement that has been taken by the authorities to express anti-communism and is reportedly supported by 70 million people; the regeneration of Orthodox Christianity in post-communist Russia; the emergence of the Aum Shinrikyo Doomsday cult in Japan; and growing interest across western societies in myriad forms of Eastern mysticism, and spiritual and therapeutic systems (yoga, meditation, Pilates, Shiatsu and so forth).

Although religious revivalism can be seen as a consequence of the larger upsurge in identity politics, religion has proved to be a particularly potent means of regenerating personal and social identity in modern circumstances. As modern societies are increasingly atomistic, diffuse and pluralized, there is, arguably, a greater thirst for the sense of meaning, purpose and certainty that religious consciousness appears to offer. This applies because religion provides believers with a world-view and moral vision that has higher, or indeed supreme, authority, as it stems from a supposedly divine source. Religion thus defines the very grounds of people's being; it gives them an ultimate frame of reference, as well as a moral orientation in a world increasingly marked by **moral relativism**. In addition, religion generates a powerful sense of social solidarity, connecting people to one another at a 'thick' or deep level, as opposed to the 'thin' connectedness that is conventional in modern societies.

The link between religion and politics has been clearest in relation to Islam, where it has been reflected in an upsurge in Islamic fundamentalism, often termed 'Islamism'. Fundamentalism in Islam does not imply a belief in the literal truth of the Koran, for this is accepted by all Muslims and, in that sense, all Muslims are fundamentalists. Instead, it means an intense and militant faith in Islamic beliefs as the overriding principles of social life and politics, as well as of personal morality. Islamic fundamentalists wish to establish the primacy of religion over politics. In practice, this means the founding of an 'Islamic state', a **theocracy**, ruled by spiritual rather than temporal authority, and applying the **Shari'a**. The Shari'a lays down a code for legal and religious behaviour, including a system of punishment for most crimes, as well as rules of personal conduct for both men and women. However, Islam should be distinguished from Islamism. Islamism refers either to a political creed based on Islamic ideas and principles, or to the political movement that has been inspired by that creed. It has had three core aims. First, it promotes pan-Islamic unity, distinguishing Islamism from traditional political nationalism. Second, it seeks the purification of the Islamic world through the overthrow of 'apostate' leaders of Muslim states (secularized or pro-western leaders). Third, it calls for the removal of western, and especially US, influence from the Muslim world, and possibly a wider politico-cultural struggle against the West itself. The rise of Islamism has sometimes been interpreted as evidence of an emerging '**clash of civilizations**' between Islam and the West, a notion that has profound implications for both global politics and for western societies which have significant Muslim communities (see p. 168).

## Cultural diversity

One of the most powerful factors underpinning the global significance of identity politics has been the growth of international migration, particularly since

CONCEPT

### Islamism

Islamism (also called 'political Islam' or 'radical Islam') is a politico-religious ideology, as opposed to a simple belief in Islam. Although Islamist ideology has no single creed or political manifestation, certain common beliefs can be identified, as follows.
(1) Society should be reconstructed in line with the ideals of Islam.
(2) The modern secular state should be replaced by an 'Islamic state'.
(3) The West and western values are viewed as corrupt and corrupting, justifying, for some, the notion of a *jihad* against them. However, distinct Sunni and Shi'a versions of Islamism have been developed, the former linked to Wahhabism, the latter to Iran's 'Islamic Revolution'.

● **Moral relativism**: A condition in which there is deep and widespread disagreement over moral issues (see p. 453).

● **Theocracy**: Literally, rule by God; the principle that religious authority should prevail over political authority, usually through the domination of church over state.

● **Shari'a** (Arabic): Literally, the 'way' or 'path'; divine Islamic law, based on principles expressed in the Koran.

● **Clash of civilizations thesis**: The idea that twenty-first century conflict will be primarily cultural in character, rather than ideological, political or economic (Huntington, 1996).

CONCEPT

**Transnational community**

A transnational community is a community whose cultural identity, political allegiances and psychological orientations cut across or transcend national borders. Transnational communities can therefore be thought of as 'deterritorialized nations' or 'global tribes'. The strength of transnational allegiances depends on factors such as the circumstances of migration and the length of stay in the new country. Nevertheless, transnational communities typically have multiple attachments, as allegiances to a country of origin do not preclude the formation of attachments to a country of settlement.

the 1950s. This has given an increasing number of societies a distinctively multicultural character, with examples of still highly homogenous countries, such as Japan, becoming rarer. Ethnic minority communities developed in many European countries as a result of the end of empire and of deliberate attempts by governments to recruit workers from abroad to help in the process of postwar reconstruction. Since the 1980s, however, there has been a significant intensification of cross-border migration across the globe, creating what some have seen as a 'hyper-mobile planet'. This has happened for two main reasons. First, there have been a growing number of refugees (reaching a peak of about 18 million in 1993), which resulted from war, ethnic conflict and political upheaval in areas ranging from Algeria, Rwanda and Uganda to Iraq and Afghanistan. Second, economic globalization (see p. 142) has intensified pressures for international migration, both because people have been 'pushed' to migrate through the disruption that has been caused to many developing economies by the pressures generated by global markets and because they have been 'pulled' to migrate by the growth of a stratum of low-paid, low-skilled and low-state jobs in developed societies that indigenous populations are increasingly unwilling to fill. This has led to a position in which, for instance, roughly one-third of the total population of the Gulf states, and two-thirds of their working populations, are (predominantly female) non-nationals, largely from South and Southeast Asia. Such trends have significantly strained national identity in many countries and contributed to the development of so-called 'transnational communities', sometimes call **diasporic** communities.

As a growing number of countries have come to accept as an irreversible fact that their populations have a multi-ethnic, multireligious or multicultural character, various attempts have been made to reconcile cultural diversity and identity-related difference with civic and political cohesion. However, how is political stability to be maintained in societies in which the monocultural bonds of political nationalism have been fatally undermined? Some, indeed, view this as the central political challenge of the twenty-first century. Attempts to balance diversity against cohesion are usually dubbed 'multiculturalism' (see p. 167). Multiculturalism is a broad and often ill-defined term, which may simply stress cultural differentiation that is based on race, ethnicity or language. However, multiculturalism not only recognizes the fact of cultural diversity; it also holds that such differences should be respected and publicly affirmed.

Although the USA, as an immigrant society, has long been a multicultural society, the cause of multiculturalism in this sense was not taken up until the rise of the black consciousness movement and the advent of '**affirmative action**'. Australia has been officially committed to multiculturalism since the early 1970s, in recognition of its increasing 'Asianization' through an acceptance of the rights of its aboriginal peoples. In New Zealand, multiculturalism is linked to a recognition of the role of Maori culture in forging a distinctive national identity. In Canada, the country that has demonstrated the greatest official commitment to multiculturalism, it is associated with attempts to achieve reconciliation between French-speaking Quebec and the English-speaking majority population (see p. 114), and an acknowledgement of the rights of the indigenous Inuit peoples. In the UK, multiculturalism recognizes the existence of significant black and Asian communities, and abandons the demand that they **assimilate** into white society. In Germany, this applies to Turkish groups.

● **Diaspora**: Literally, dispersion (from the Hebrew); implies displacement or dispersal by force, but is also used to refer to the communities that have arisen as a result of such dispersal.

● **Affirmative action**: Reverse or 'positive' discrimination which accords preferential treatment to groups on the basis of their past disadvantage.

● **Assimilation**: The process through which immigrant communities lose their cultural distinctiveness by adjusting to the values, allegiances and lifestyles of the 'host' society.

CONCEPT

**Multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism is used as both a descriptive and a normative term. As a descriptive term, it refers to cultural diversity arising from the existence within a society of two or more groups whose beliefs and practices generate a distinctive sense of collective identity. As a normative term, multiculturalism implies a positive endorsement of communal diversity, based on either the right of cultural groups to respect and recognition, or the alleged benefits to the larger society of moral and cultural diversity. Multiculturalism, in this sense, acknowledges the importance of beliefs, values and ways of life in establishing a sense of self-worth for individuals and groups alike.

The central theme within all forms of multiculturalism is that individual identity is culturally embedded, in the sense that people largely derive their understanding of the world and their framework of moral beliefs from the culture in which they live and develop. Distinctive cultures therefore deserve to be protected or strengthened, particularly when they belong to minority or vulnerable groups. This leads to the idea of minority or multicultural rights, sometimes seen as 'special' rights. Will Kymlicka (1995) identified three kinds of minority rights: self-government rights, polyethnic rights and representation rights. Self-government rights belong, Kymlicka argued, to what he called 'national minorities', peoples who are territorially concentrated, possess a shared language and are characterized by a 'meaningful way of life across the full range of human activities'. Examples would include the Native Americans, the Inuits in Canada, the Maoris in New Zealand and the Aborigines in Australia. In these cases, he argued, the right to self-government should involve the devolution of political power, usually through federalism (see p. 382), although it may extend to the right of secession and, therefore, to sovereign independence. Polyethnic rights are rights that help ethnic groups and religious minorities, that have developed through immigration to express and maintain their cultural distinctiveness. They would, for instance, provide the basis for legal exemptions, such as the exemption of Jews and Muslims from animal slaughtering laws, the exemption of Sikh men from wearing motorcycle helmets, and the exemption of Muslim girls from school dress codes. Special representation rights attempt to redress the under-representation of minority or disadvantaged groups in education, and in senior positions in political and public life. Such rights, which in the USA take the form of affirmative action, imply the practice of reverse or 'positive' discrimination, which attempts to compensate for past discrimination or continuing cultural subordination. Their justification is not only that they ensure full and equal participation, but also that they are the only means of guaranteeing that public policy reflects the interests of all groups and peoples, and not merely those of traditionally dominant groups.

However, there is neither a settled view of how multicultural societies should operate, nor of how far multiculturalism should go in positively endorsing communal diversity. There are three main models of multiculturalism:

- Liberal multiculturalism
- Pluralist multiculturalism
- Cosmopolitan multiculturalism.

*Liberal* multiculturalism is rooted in a commitment to freedom and toleration: the ability to choose one's own moral beliefs, cultural practices and way of life, regardless of whether these are disapproved of by others. However, the liberal model of multiculturalism only provides a qualified endorsement of communal diversity, highlighting the dangers that may also be implicit in identity politics. In particular, liberals are only prepared to tolerate views, values and social practices that are themselves tolerant; that is, to those that are compatible with personal freedom and autonomy. Liberal multiculturalists may therefore be unwilling to endorse practices such as female circumcision, forced (and possibly arranged) marriages and female dress codes, however much the groups concerned may believe that these are crucial to the maintenance of their cultural identity.

POLITICS IN ACTION . . .

# Muslims in the West: an internal clash of civilizations?

**Events**: In 2011, estimates of the number of Muslims living in the European Union ranged from 15 to 20 million. In the early post-1945 period, immigration mainly came from former colonies. The majority of France's Muslim population (about 6 million – the largest in Europe) thus have a heritage in Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, while most of the UK's Muslims (almost 2 million) came originally from Pakistan. Later Muslim immigration has often been linked to war and civil strife in countries such as Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia. Nevertheless, in recent years several incidents have raised issues about the relationship between western European states in particular and, at least, elements in their Muslim populations, including the following:

- the 1989 'Rushdie affair', in which Muslim protesters in several countries denounced Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* as blasphemous and Ayatollah Khomeini issued a *fatwa* condemning the author to death
- the 2004 murder of Theo van Gogh, a Dutch film director who had collaborated on a film criticizing the treatment of women in Muslim countries
- the 2004 Madrid train bombings, carried out by an 'al-Qaeda-inspired' group
- the 2005 'Danish cartoons affair', in which the publication of 12 cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad by the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* provoked protests across the Muslim world
- the 2005 London bombings, carried out by so-called 'home-grown' Islamist terrorists.

**Significance**: The existence of significant Muslim populations in the West has been seen by some as a threat to social cohesion and possibly national security (Caldwell, 2009). Such a view is in line with Huntington's (1996) 'clash of civilizations' thesis, which suggests that Islamic values and beliefs are fundamentally incompatible with those of the liberal-democratic West. Clashes over issues such as whether protecting 'sacred' beliefs justifies the curtailment of free speech and press freedom thus highlight a more profound divide over whether the public realm should be strictly secular, or shaped by Islamic ideas and values. As, in this view, Islam is anti-liberal and anti-pluralist, the politics of cultural recognition threatens to entrench Muslim separatism and sow the seeds of civic conflict. The most appropriate response to Muslim communities in the West is therefore to reject multiculturalism and insist on a strategy of integration. Such a stance has been adopted most clearly in France, where, in 2004, a law was passed forbidding the wearing of any 'ostentatious' religious articles, including Islamic headscarves, in state-funded schools, with a ban on the wearing of face-covering headgear, including *niqads* and other veils, in public places coming into force in 2011.

Others, however, view multiculturalism as the most appropriate response to what has been called the 'Muslim question' (Modood, 2007; Parekh, 2008). From this perspective, the image of Muslims in the West as an 'enemy within' is based on a serious misrepresentation of Islam and of the views of Muslim populations. Surveys, for instance, consistently show that Muslims in the Europe are predominantly satisfied with the secular nature of western society and hold political views little different from other cultural groups. Moreover, when Muslim identity politics has become entangled with extremism, even violence, this is better explained by social or political factors than by cultural incompatibility. Muslim communities in Europe, for example, tend to be socially marginalized, facing higher unemployment and poverty rates, and having lower educational achievement than the general population. Moreover, international developments since 9/11 have seen a range of western states participating in wars against and occupations of Muslim countries. In this light, the politics of cultural recognition is likely to weaken the trend towards extremism and violence, by giving Muslim populations a clearer stake in society, while a strategy of 'enforced' integration threatens to be counter-productive, being perceived as evidence of 'Islamophobia' and helping to deepen alienation and resentment.

## Isaiah Berlin (1909–97)

UK historian of ideas and philosopher. Berlin was born in Riga, Latvia, and came to Britain in 1921. He developed a form of liberal pluralism that was grounded in a lifelong commitment to empiricism and influenced by the ideas of counter-Enlightenment thinkers, including Vico (1668–1744), Herder (see p. 110) and Alexander Herzen (1812–70). Basic to Berlin's philosophical stance was a belief in moral pluralism, the idea that conflicts of values are intrinsic to human life. His best-known political writing is *Four Essays on Liberty* (1958), in which he extolled the virtues of 'negative' freedom over 'positive' freedom. Berlin's writings constitute a defence of western liberalism against totalitarianism.

*Pluralist* multiculturalism provides firmer foundations for a theory of cultural diversity because it is based on the idea of **value pluralism**. Developed in particular in the writings of Isaiah Berlin, this holds that people are bound to disagree about the ultimate ends of life. As values conflict, the human predicament is inevitably characterized by moral conflict. In this view, liberal or western beliefs, such as support for personal freedom, democracy and secularization, have no greater moral authority than rival beliefs. This form of multiculturalism also focuses more explicitly on unequal power relations in society, particularly the extent to which the dominant culture in western societies reflects the values and interests of the majority group and so subordinates minority communities. Cultural recognition therefore counters oppression and serves to expose the corrupt and corrupting nature of western culture, values and lifestyles, believed to be tainted by the inheritance of colonialism and racialism, or by materialism and 'godless' permissiveness. Such thinking has been especially controversial in relation to Muslim minorities in western societies (see p. 168).

*Cosmopolitan* multiculturalism endorses cultural diversity and identity politics, but, in contrast to both liberal and pluralist views, sees them more as transitional states in a larger reconstruction of political sensibilities and priorities. This form of multiculturalism celebrates diversity on the grounds of what each culture can learn from other cultures, and because of the prospects for personal self-development offered by a world of wider cultural opportunities and lifestyle choices. Its acceptance of multiple identities and hybridity lead to a kind of pick-and-mix multiculturalism, which portrays society as a 'melting pot', as opposed to a 'cultural mosaic' of separate ethnic or religious groups.

● **Value pluralism**: The theory that there is no single, overriding conception of the 'good life' but, rather, a number of competing and equally legitimate conceptions.

## SUMMARY


- Societies are characterized by regular patterns of social interaction. However, the 'thick' social connectedness of close bonds and fixed allegiances is giving way to the 'thin' connectedness of more fluid, individualized social arrangements. This reflects, in large part, the transition from industrial to so-called post-industrial society, and, particularly, the declining importance of social class.
- Post-industrialism is characterized, amongst other things, by an increasing emphasis on knowledge and information generally, with the advent of the internet and the wider use of computer-based technologies having given rise to the 'information society'. Not only do information societies connect more people to more other people, but the nature of those connections has also changed, especially through the development of looser and more diffuse networks.
- At the heart of the trend towards the 'thinning' of social connectedness is the rise of individualism. Individualism was a child of industrial capitalism, but it has been boosted by a growing ethic of materialism and consumerism, given greater prominence, from the 1980s onwards, by the wider influence of neoliberal or free-market thinking. However, the spread of individualism may weaken community and people's sense of social belonging, a trend that may be particularly evident in the English-speaking world.
- The rise of identity politics has been evident in the growing recognition of cultural and other forms of difference, especially providing a vehicle through which groups can challenge marginalization by adopting a more positive and assertive sense of identity. Nevertheless, identity politics does not have a settled political character and it has been shaped around many principles, the most important of which are race and ethnicity, gender, religion and culture.
- Attempts to regenerate personal and social identity have given rise to new, and sometimes more radical, forms of politics. These include forms of ethnic assertiveness, often associated with black nationalism; second-wave feminism and a stronger emphasis on issues of gender equality and gender difference; religious revivalism, commonly expressed through fundamentalist movements, especially in Islam; and multiculturalism and the 'celebration' of cultural diversity.


## Questions for discussion

- Why has social connectedness become 'thinner'?
- Has class conflict in modern society been resolved or merely suppressed?
- Has the network society substituted 'virtual' communities for real communities, and with what consequences?
- Is individualism the enemy of social solidarity and cohesion?
- Does consumerism liberate people or enslave them?
- What are the main factors explaining the growth of identity politics?
- Is identity politics a liberating or oppressive force?
- To what extent has the recognition of ethnic and gender divisions produced meaningful political change?
- Do modern societies need to be protected from cultural diversity?

## Further reading


Bauman, Z. *Liquid Modernity* (2000). An examination of the changing nature of human connectedness in the light of the emergence of 'liquid' or 'light' modernity.

Beck, U. and E. Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences* (2001). A critical examination of the process of individualization that examines both its causes and its wide-ranging consequences.

Kumar, K. *From Post-Industrial to Post-Modern Society: New Theories of the Contemporary World* (2004). A lucid and insightful study of the idea of the information society and theories of post-Fordism and post-modernity.

Parekh, B. *A New Politics of Identity: Political Principles of an Interdependent World* (2008). A wide-ranging analysis of the impact of global interconnectedness on ethnic, religious, national and other identities.