Quiz

Consciousness of Kind: Monaghan and Just, Chapter 5

This chapter is not the easiest to sort out; these are just some notes for discussion that might help.

People tend to divide themselves into groups

- and to feel that they have something in common with other members of their group

- this is "consciousness of kind"

- as in "we are all the same kind of people; members of that other group are a different kind"

We have looked at groups by descent

- families, patrilineages, matrilineages, etc.

- but there are many other ways that people divide themselves into groups

- these are the focus of this chapter

Emile Durkheim looked at what holds society together, that is, what makes people feel connected to others in their society

- we discussed this before, but:

  - mechanical solidarity: due to everyone being roughly the same

    - like a bunch of farmers in a valley who all speak the same language, raise the same crops, use the same methods, etc.

  - organic solidarity: due to everyone having different roles and depending on the others to do their necessary part

    - like people in a city, where the grocer provides food, the mailman delivers mail, the plumber fixes pipes, etc.

Monaghan and Just note that many societies divide themselves into smaller groups

- for example, with clans, which are theoretically like kin groups but the descent cannot actually be traced -- often to a non-human founding "ancestor"

- or age sets - based on being born in the same several-year period, creating permanent groups of people of similar ages

- or allegiance to a college sports team

- they note that ironically, these arbitrary, invented groups tend to be most pronounced in simple societies that have mechanical solidarity

  - that is, where there are few real differences to divide people

  - it seems that people need to divide into groups, and invent ways to do so if there are not natural divisions already

Meanwhile, societies that are complex like modern nation-states, with many unavoidable divisions, tend to try to increase solidarity

- nations have flags, anthems, voting, state religions, etc. to hold all the different groups together

- to create a "consciousness of kind", even if it is not there on its own

- the objects that signify this collective identity are collective representations
− flags, national monuments, anthems, etc.
− another term coined by Durkheim
− some examples of groups based on, or intended to create, consciousness kind
  − Hindu caste system
    − by birth
    − endogamous (theoretically)
    − associated with a particular profession (theoretically)
    − also associated with a degree of spiritual purity and status
  − ethnicity
    − supposedly by descent
    − usually associated with shared national origin, language, dress, religion, sometimes occupation, etc.
    − note that these are mainly cultural characteristics, even though one is supposedly born into a given ethnicity
      − and even though there may be some physical characteristics involved
    − Latinos speak Spanish, come from certain countries, tend to be Catholic, etc., but also are thought to have black hair and darker skin than northern Europeans
    − Monaghan and Just assert that ethnicities are always defined in contrast to other ethnicities
      − example: while the lowland Biminese see the Dou Donggo as a separate and inferior ethnicity, people from other islands don't know the difference between them
      − also that ethnicities generally have to do with access to resources like land, political power, manipulation by elites, mobilizing people for action in war or politics, etc.
      − that is, ethnicities come and go, change their criteria for membership, change in relative status, etc.
    − people may change their ethnicity, and may have multiple ethnicities that they can claim, depending on the circumstances
      − example of the rapidly rising number of people who claim Native American ethnicity in US censuses
      − presumably it is becoming more appealing, and less potentially harmful, to adopt this ethnicity
    − ethnicities are constantly negotiated for various ends, not permanent, inborn, unchanging traits
      − example of the Dou Donggo, an ethnicity that was once sharply divided from the lowland Biminese by religion, political status, lifestyle, etc.
      − now that Dou Donggo have mostly converted to Islam and Christianity, the political situation has changed, etc., the ethnic difference is fading away
      − Ama Bose announces that his son (and therefore he, too) will henceforth have a Muslim name, so that he will fit in better in school in the lowlands
        − changing his ethnicity for practical reasons
  − race
    − we will cover this more carefully in the next set of notes
    − supposedly by descent
– generally based mainly on visible, physical characteristics, although there may be some cultural characteristics
– these traits are thought to be biological, inborn, permanent
– usually thought to divide all humans up into a limited number of fairly distinct races (except for recent mixtures due to interbreeding)
– anthropologists now argue that humans cannot really be divided into races in any meaningful biological sense
– race is socially constructed, not a biological reality

– nation (and nationalism)
  – a group of people with common heritage, usually common language, customs, origin, etc. such that they feel a legitimate claim to be politically autonomous
  – if such a group actually is politically autonomous, it is a nation-state
  – states are political units that often include people with different heritage, origin, etc.
    – so states tend to try to create a sense of shared national identity and nationalism among the people in the state, in order to create support for the state
    – usually based on the identity of the leaders, and ideally of the majority of the population
    – if there is much variation in the population, it may be necessary to allow separate, minority identities within the state for those who clearly do not fit the national identity that is being created
  – note that Monaghan and Just get sloppy, referring to the Mixtec, who now live in Mexico and the US, as trans-national, when actually that should be trans-state

– kinds of groups that do NOT involve the idea of shared descent, but still based on, or intended to create, consciousness of kind

– community
  – Monaghan and Just define this people who live in a single settlement
    – co-residence and daily interaction
    – people may feel strong ties to the community they are from

– religious congregations and institutions
  – may be within a community, or cross-cut communities, nations, or states
  – clubs, secret societies, credit associations…
  – labor unions
    – based on consciousness of kind, but with specific political aims
  – class

– Monaghan and Just suggest that modern communications and travel are allowing people increasingly to cross these many group boundaries
  – making study of any given group more difficult, as people move all over the globe
  – will this really change anything?
  – one emerging new kind of group is the multinational (really multi-state) corporation
    – with little accountability
  – yet, M&J suggest that world cultures are not homogenizing as much as we might fear
    – example: Japan's adoption of corporate organization
    – it has been altered to fit specifically Japanese concepts
- solidarity within corporations, up and down the hierarchy, vs. US solidarity with similar workers in other corporations
- proven by a Japanese CEO committing suicide after laying off many workers
  - they suggest this is a very Japanese sense of solidarity, and a Japanese sort of response to it
  - while no US CEO would feel that way, nor commit suicide because of it
- that is, despite adopting some aspects of corporate behavior, Japanese culture remains distinct from other nations' cultures