Foreword

Grammars, identity, structural: each key word in the title of this book in some ways represents a provocation, but perhaps a justifiable one.

The word 'grammars' has become a nigh-impossible term to use in anthropology, sociolinguistics, cognitive psychology, philosophy and, latterly, artificial intelligence. No one knows one when they see one, no one dares use the word for fear of evoking anything between yesteryear's ideas of grammar from the Humanists to Jakobson and more recent ideas from Chomsky's 'generative grammar' to Derrida's 'grammatology'. Grammar, one of the most imaginative discoveries we know and perhaps the most potent hypothesis about anything from a baby's mind to that of a philosopher, has become a truly taboo word, placed on the *Index Verborum Prohibitorum* by a fear of being so polysemic that it might easily be misunderstood. One may borrow the Freudian term *überbesetzt*, or 'overcharged', to diagnose this fear of a word not simply overused, but successively endowed with so many different meanings or 'levels' of signification. These successive uses have never been cumulative and have never added up to one defineable core idea. We simply do not know what a grammar 'is', be it ontologically, epistemologically, phenomenologically or otherwise.

Why, then, this strange awe of using the word and at the same time the seemingly absurd inflation of an astonishing variety of usages ? The word seems to echo so well with the most varied forms of our desire to see 'sense' or 'order' in people's capacities and failures to deal with their worlds. It is the almost metasocial lure of the word, coupled with its polysemy acquired by dozens of incommensurable usages, that may have something to do with it. (The word wears at the same time the robe of a prescriptive language teacher and the outfit of a cunning spy in sociolinguistics and studies of cognition.) What, then, is the word supposed to signify in our title ? We use the word as a simple shorthand for certain simple classificatory structures or classificatory schemata that we argue can be recognized in a vast variety of processes concerned with defining identity and alterity. Such social processes of classifying identity/alterity are intrinsically related to social conceptions which, of course, are always shaped and influenced by their respective historical and sociopolitical contexts. We call these social conceptions classificatory schemata or classificatory structures because they are not defined by their content, but by the way in which they arrange whatever content of self and other they are used to structure.

If there were a convenient plural for the term syntax, that might have been an alternative to 'grammars', but syntagmata evokes the wrong association, contrasted as it is to paradigmata. Other terms we considered, such as 'cognitive maps' or 'classificatory pathways' or 'logics' or 'operations' or 'models' with their various adjectives were again excluded one by one, sometimes to avoid terminological border skirmishes with other fields ranging from social and cognitive psychology via 'culture and personality' to artificial intelligence.

The choice for the term 'grammars' is informed by pragmatic considerations in three ways. First, it is based on a process of negative exclusion of various alternative terms, in order not to fall prey to those unproductive terminological border skirmishes. Secondly, it is pragmatic in that it makes only a heuristic claim. We do 'as if' there were grammars that structure the ethnographic contents we describe, and we see where it gets us. Thirdly, this choice is concerned with pragmatics in that we use the term not to postulate prescriptive rules, but to paraphrase empirical ethnographic data concerned with people's constructions of identity and alterity. We shall, however, return to this question after reviewing our working definition of identity and the three grammars in the first two chapters.

Our working definition of identity designates social subjectivities as persons and groups of persons. These subjectivities are multidimensional and fluid; they include power-related ascriptions by selves as well as by others; and they simultaneously combine sameness, or belonging, with alterity, or otherness. This anthropological working definition therefore rejects any essentialist or moralist connotations by embracing a 'soft', or in the philosophical sense 'weak', concept of identity, and by relating them to social context and social processes. We need hardly repeat that they can only be studied in their contexts and with due attention to agency. We do wish to restate, however, that these are relatively simple classificatory structures or schemata that may be recognized in seemingly incomparable processes of selfing and othering. We distinguish three of these, although we readily admit, of course, that others may think of more in due time. The three grammars upon which we have based our work are freely adapted from classic works in the anthropological canon, namely Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer*, and Louis Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus*.

The first grammar, orientalization, constitutes self and other by negative mirror imaging: 'what is good in us is lacking in them,' but it also adds a subordinate reversal: 'what is lacking in us is (still) present in them.' It thus entails a possibility of desire for the other and even, sometimes, a potential for self-critical relativism. The second grammar, segmentation, works by context-dependent and hence sliding scales of selfings and otherings among parties conceived as formally equal. It thus allows fusions and fissions of identity/alterity in a highly context-sensitive manner, but is also always subject to disputes about the right placing of the apex. The third, the grammar of encompassment, works by a hierarchized sub-inclusion of others who are

thought, from a higher level of abstraction, to be really 'part of us'. It thus includes some others, but never all others, and it tends to minimize the otherness of those it includes.

By crossexamining these grammars ethnographically and theoretically, we aim at three things: first, to go beyond the unproductive, and essentially moralist, truism that every selfing involves an othering, secondly, to distinguish different modalities of identity formation and dialogical inclusion or exclusion, and finally, to move beyond the false opposition between an assumed primacy of structures or cognition on the one hand, and on the other, the helpless reduction of all social processes to agency and contextual contingency. As we hope to show, such a structural and comparative approach to the articulations of identity and alterity has immediate implications also for an understanding of extreme forms of collective and genocidal violence.

As a counterpoint to genocidal violence we must raise the question of how our grammars relate to hybridization or, as we prefer to call it, creolization. Very often, ambiguous categories are, of course, denied, denigrated, or evacuated into 'special' classificatory slots. This was the case, for instance, with the 'coloureds' of Apartheid South Africa or the 'half-breeds' of the nineteenth-century U.S. West. These cases are easily accommodated within the ternary versions of the three grammars as unfolded by Baumann in this volume. There are, however, social, cultural and political projects by which elites encourage and privilege 'mixed' forms such as *métissage* or *mestisaje*. Two grammatical operations appear to be at work here. The first is a special version of orientalization in which the positive values associated with both self and other are normatively amalgamated, creating ideal representations of 'the best of both [of indeed more] worlds'. Remaining a hegemonic operation, the second process then involves a self encompassing its former other. In the contemporary world, the role of encompassment by elites may be less visible, but where it is absent, 'hyphenated identities' continue to be kept in such 'special' categories as are called 'halfies' by some and 'mixed race' by others.

To return now to the question asked above, namely why one might call these classificatory schemata or structures 'grammars', the intuitive counterargument to the pragmatic choice we have made is that a grammar is expected to be to some degree prescriptive, rule-orientated, or at least vaguely normative. Does this intuitive expectation hold in any way for the three classificatory structures we have called 'grammars' ? The argument is that it does. Just as linguistic grammars offer a set of rules which allow sentences to be formulated, so these social grammars offer a set of rules which allow otherings to be articulated. Furthermore, grammars are assigned a normative status by the social and cultural contexts that privilege, or indeed demand, one or another grammar to be used. Those who use an orientalizing grammar to define others normatively expect these others to recognize themselves as the non-contemporaneous negative mirror images of the orientalizers, and orientalists normatively expect other orientalists to use the orientalist grammar,

rather than the grammar of segmentation or the grammar of encompassment in given contexts. An 'oriental' *is not to be* treated as a segmentary partner or an encompassed part of the self. By the same token, segmentary grammars are ascribed normative force in other contexts by other users and for those they are used about. A Freemason is normatively expected to view all the world's religions as a shifting scale of contextual fission and fusion, a federalist is not to voice ideas of encompassing a partner who *is to be* seen as a federal equal. In the same way, the cultural hegemony of a grammar of encompassment is endowed with normative force. Hindus who state that 'Sikhs are Hindus' not only expect of Sikhs that they accept this encompassment, but they also measure 'good' Hindus by whether they subscribe to this project of encompassment or are 'exclusivists' using the grammar of orientalism.

The final indication that all three grammars are endowed, in different sociocultural contexts, with some normative authority is alluded to with the term 'anti-grammar' or 'non-grammar'. Whether we deal with propagators of the orientalizing, the segmentary, or the encompassment grammar, they all have normative expectations that their grammar is the correct one and that it is incomparably better than the non- or anti-grammar of systematic violence annihilating the other. The classificatory schemata or structures, in other words, are grammars also in that they are endowed, within given sociocultural constellations, with a certain normative force. Needless to add, norms can neither determine nor render predictable any particular social action in its manifold contexts; nonetheless, norms are a force that *may* inform and standardize language, behaviour, and even conceptions of agency. In that sense, our collective exploration of grammars in action follows a general direction that will lead readers right through the creative tension zone between structure and agency.

This exploration is the result of a somewhat unusual experiment in that we addressed an open invitation to any participants of EASA's Sixth Biennial Conference in Copenhagen to subject the grammars proposed to their own ethnographic tests. The proposition was circulated early on and then discussed in detail; the ethnographic tests, however, were to be open-ended. Each contributor was to act, so to speak, as an independent test pilot: fly the model and let us see which aspects of your ethnography are thrown into starker relief or are rendered comparable in time or space, and what of your ethnography indicates the limitations of a grammars approach which must inhere in this analytic technique as it does in any other. The questions and debates that arose have been worked into the structure of the book itself which traces four steps.

Step one starts with Andre Gingrich presenting a critical anthropological review of some major transdisciplinary debates on identity/alterity. Assessing some major forms of essentializing 'othering' in these debates leads to the

rationale of this volume. Several interdisciplinary 'strong' versions of conceptualising identity as opposed to difference are critiqued as essentialist and moralist. Instead, it is suggested here to employ 'weak' notions of social identity by further differentiating them in the form of grammars. These are then presented and discussed by Gerd Baumann as a theoretical and methodological proposition and illustrated by way of examples.

Step two then departs from this proposition of a repertoire of grammars, in order to explore it in those specific fields of action that are primarily informed by hierarchies and power relations. Michael Mühlich's analysis of ritualized forms of 'othering' scapegoats in Nepal provides a first case in point, while Anne Friederike Müller's analysis of political discourses in Germany throws into relief the historical transformations in the use of the grammars. This use of the grammars for diachronic comparison is followed by Inger Sjørslev's exploration of the grammars' uses for comparison across *prima facie* incomparable social fields, namely by examining Brazilian and Danish conceptions of identity/alterity in their contexts of power, hierarchy, and contested forms of creolization.

Step three takes us from power in its heterogeneous variants to the more troubling forms of exerting power through violence. This helps to reflect on the limits imposed on the use of the grammars. In the theoretical and methodological exposition of Step one, it was suggested that one of these limits could be seen in constellations where the grammars are made to 'implode' and give way to an 'anti-grammar' that accompanies, legitimizes, and prepares violence. This point is now tested out, first by Christian Postert's analysis of interethnic relations in Laos, then by Karel Arnaut's study of implicitly genocidal discourse in mass media discourses in Côte d'Ivoire. Finally, Jojada Verrips shows how the dehumanizing language as instrumentalised in certain Western armies effects not only violent exclusions, but also violent inclusions into groups prepared to act as 'killing machines'.

Step four combines other ethnographic examinations with an attempt to widen the debate in two ways. Guido Sprenger's case study from Laos leads to scrutinizing the distinction between grammars and anti-grammars, whereas Christian Karner's reflections upon Hindu nationalism result in the productive suggestion to further differentiate between grammars and situational utterance. The editors' final chapter will then pull together three strands of argumentation: questions answered by the project, questions raised about the project itself, and reformulations that the project can offer to such abiding problems as extreme violence and the relation between structure and agency.

Having outlined the premises, the dialogical methods, and the goals of this endeavour may now also help us to clarify the third provocation contained in the subtitle: 'A Structural Approach'.

'Nothing could be more unfashionable in anthropology right now than a structural approach,' so most contributors agreed at one stage or another. Yet when discussing the age-old division between a purported primacy of structures and the fashionable but helpless reduction of all social facts to contextual contingency, we saw room for a pragmatic solution to bridge the two extremes. This project works with the concept of 'structure' not in the sense of any 'elementary' mechanism of thought, but rather in the sense of flexible classificatory models employed in, and for, social interaction. By proposing a 'weak' conception of identity and by then differentiating three classificatory models or grammars, we thus operate with a profoundly anti-essentialist concept of structure. Needless to add that our usage of the term is not beholden to any sectarian subvarieties of structuralism, but it is certainly indebted to several variants of structuralism whose worth has been proven by ethnography over time, and it has been further inspired by some of the more recent anglophone and francophone work in this field. One conclusion from our exploration through the creative tension zones between structures and forms of agency highlights the heuristic pursuit of grammars traced and observed in contextual action. We see this as a possibility to bridge that divide between structure and agency not only theoretically, but also with attention to the subtleties of ethnographic context.

In following this structural approach to grammars of identity, this volume has, to some extent, privileged a focus on ethnic and national identities. Nonetheless, some contributors have opened up other fields, at least three of which seem to be worth pursuing further. They include gender and sexuality, aesthetics and arts, and finally, macrolevel and globalized interactions such as international and postcolonial relations. In all these fields, a contextually sensitive examination of grammars and anti-grammar will invite the merging of fieldwork with comparative endeavours. We shall return to these possibilities and projects, too, when surveying the prospects of the argument in the final chapter.