



# Ambivalent Multiculturalism

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## Abstract

Multiculturalism is a fiercely debated subject. This article argues that *ambivalence* is a central feature of people's perspectives on societal diversity. Data are interviews with leaders from three Norwegian social movement organisations. Qualitative analysis reveals that despite leaders' very different organisational and political vantage points, they share a common ambivalence towards multiculturalism. This perspective on political and organisational leaders' views on diversity provides an important supplement to analyses aimed at classifying specific political preferences on multiculturalism. Considering ambivalent multiculturalism is therefore key to understanding those elements of public debate that are not 'either/or'. In addition to showing the wider relevance of ambivalence, the concluding discussion speculates on the link between ambivalent and extreme expressions in the Norwegian case.

## Keywords

Bauman, diversity, Norway, public debate, Simmel, social movement organisations

## Introduction

Multiculturalism is often a contested issue. However, following the atrocities committed by an extreme right-wing terrorist against youths of the Labour party that had anti-racist work high on its agenda, the debate on diversity and multiculturalism has become particularly topical in Norway. For this article, interviews conducted with Norwegian social movement organisation (SMO) leaders prior to 22 July 2011 were analysed. They included representatives from a prominent anti-racist organisation and MPs for the Labour party and the right-wing populist Progress party. The focus is on how the leaders address Norway as a diverse society in the interviews. It is relevant to gain knowledge of leaders' approaches to diversity issues because they are active in shaping a highly politicised public debate. Their statements can, however, also be looked upon as well-articulated versions of something general or common. The interview analyses show one

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element cutting across political and organisational differences in the leaders' reflections on societal diversity. Though their points of departure are far from similar, multicultural society is described as both hopeful and problematic, making *ambivalence* a particularly apt concept for exploring this commonality. Ambivalence is a central focus of much sociological literature (Bauman, 1991; Hillcoat-Nallétamby and Phillips, 2011; Merton, 1976; Smelser, 1998). This article attempts to bring the ambivalence inherent in Simmel's (1950[1908]) original conceptualisation of 'the stranger' to bear on our understanding of contemporary accounts of social and cultural diversity. A basic idea in classic sociological theory is to look for system and regularity, but rather than focusing specifically on the relationship between states and individuals as in political theory, the objects of study are social relations. For Simmel, ambivalence is at the core of an individual's social existence, a condition captured clearly in his social form 'the stranger'. This form aptly reflects the ambivalence in contemporary social relations around diversity and its interference with neatly constructed categories of state-regulated approaches to citizens and foreigners.

The term ambivalence is traceable in Bauman's authorship from the 1973 *Culture as Praxis* to the 2004 *Wasted Lives* (Junge, 2008). However, ambivalence and strangers is mainly discussed in *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Bauman, 1991). Although the concluding discussion incorporates additional elements from Bauman's contribution, Bauman and Simmel's approaches to modernity and ambivalence will first be contrasted to emphasise the findings. Bauman (1991) argues that seeking order through categorisation is central to the modern condition. Although the ambivalent character of the stranger can represent a means of exploring the unfamiliar, Bauman devotes considerable space to descriptions of the discomfort and urge to assimilate provoked by ambivalent strangeness. Unlike Bauman, Simmel does not explicitly use the term ambivalence. In 'How is society possible?' (Simmel, 1910), he treats two-sidedness as central to human existence, and in his seminal essay 'The stranger' (1950[1908]), he deals specifically with the two-sided position of strangers. Insiders who are not quite 'inside' are described by Simmel as adding a certain positive quality to a society, but strangeness can also result in alienation and social exclusion. Such two-sidedness, simultaneously containing positive and negative elements, is also found in the perspectives on diversity of the social movement leaders interviewed here. Simmel's characterisations are particularly relevant to interpreting empirical analysis of leaders' accounts of diversity. The concluding discussion suggests how this finding can be combined with Bauman's approach to speculate on the wider relevance of ambivalence to understanding current perspectives on diversity. The particularities of the Norwegian case will also be discussed and the link between ambivalent and extremist expressions considered.

## Empirical Material and Context

This article has its origin in a larger study focused on how majority voices draw boundaries in relation to issues of ethnic, racial and religious diversity. Interview data were gathered from 2008 to 2009 by the author as part of the Eurosphere project<sup>1</sup> in Norway. They comprise 16 in-depth interviews with leaders of three SMOs: the Norwegian Centre against Racism (NCR), No to EU and the European Movement. Eurosphere focuses on

diversity in the European public sphere. Norwegian SMOs were therefore selected for their significance as actors in issues related to Europe, diversity and the public sphere. Of importance to this article is the interest shared by the three Norwegian SMOs in defining the boundaries of Norway, either in the sense of how the national community is imagined (Anderson, 1996) or more concrete boundaries related to Norway's non-membership in the EU. In some of the 16 countries dealt with by Eurosphere, SMOs with explicit antipathy to diversity, such as the Danish Association in Denmark, were included in the selection of SMOs (Kutay and Arribas, 2011). However, in spite of recent extremist racist violence in Norway, it was not possible to recruit an SMO advocating antipathy towards diversity at the time of the selection of organisations in Norway.<sup>2</sup> The tension between toning down differences on the one hand and active boundary work vis-a-vis those perceived as different on the other is highly relevant when analysing majority approaches to diversity in the Norwegian context. A central question is therefore: is the similarity of leaders' expressions related to a specific way of addressing diversity issues in the Norwegian public sphere?

Drawing on Anderson's (1996) notion of imagined community, Gullestad (2001: 38) suggested that social contexts in Norway are pervaded by an 'imagined sameness', wherein 'getting on well and holding common opinions' is important to social dynamics. Her thesis is that people who socially and morally frame situations according to such an imagined sameness tend to emphasise equality and tone down differences between people. However, equality perceived as sameness also 'underpins a growing ethnification of national identity' (Gullestad, 2002: 45). Several authors have, for example, noted how the issue of gender equality is an important part of imagining the Norwegian community (see e.g. Bygnes, 2012a; Hagelund, 2002). Race and racism on the other hand are certainly present in Norwegian debates and contexts but are almost never acknowledged as such (Hagelund, 2003; Muller Myrdal, 2010). What *is* made explicit is the issue of culture, mostly denoting 'Muslim culture' (Hagelund, 2002, 2003; Razack, 2008).

The Norwegian context and debate on diversity before 22 July 2011 certainly shared many similarities with other European countries. Norway and the Netherlands, for example, are both north-western European countries with a strong egalitarian tradition where emphasis on gender equality is central to the national identity (Prins and Slijper, 2002; Roggeband and Verloo, 2007). Compared to the Netherlands, however, Norway has a substantially smaller population, a less explicit colonial past and no tradition for multicultural policies (Muller Myrdal, 2010). Politically, both countries have experienced rightwards shifts in politics with decreasing support for ethnic diversity particularly since the 9/11 attacks in 2001 (Buruma, 2006; Prins, 2002; Strømme, 2011). As a result, political parties with a clear anti-diversity agenda have gained popular support in both the Netherlands and Norway (Strømme, 2011: 121). In the Netherlands, Geert Wilder's anti-Islamic Partij Voor de Vrijheid (PVV) is currently the third largest political party. Also in Norway, the right-wing populist Progress party (Fremskrittspartiet) is currently the parliament's second largest party. Some Norwegian particularities are, however, relevant. Compared to other radical right-wing parties in Europe, the Progress party is a relatively moderate conservative protest party, without the fascist roots or ties to radical nationalism found in strongly Islamophobic parties such as the Danish

People's Party or the Dutch PVV (Strømmen, 2011: 144). Hagelund (2003) singles out the 'importance of being decent' as a trait that is central in shaping the Norwegian political debate on immigration:

[...] a decent stance is one where immigration is talked about in certain (proper) ways and where politicians do not behave 'indecently' by 'flirting' with the 'muddy currents' of racism and xenophobia. (Hagelund, 2003: 252)

Hagelund argues that the Progress party has, on the one hand, become the 'embodiment of what "we" do not want' [...] 'providing a constitutive outside for the project of decent immigration politics' (2003: 252). On the other hand, the Progress party leadership has joined this tendency in mainstream discourse and drawn their distinctions against indecency. By expelling 'indecent members', the leadership has attempted to 'define the Progress party in opposition to indecency, thus joining the other parties in their formulation of immigration politics as a moral sphere' (2003: 130). In general, Norwegian public debate can be described as somewhat more toned down than, for instance, the Dutch debate, perhaps reflecting a particular Norwegian consensus culture (Stenius, 2010). This does not mean that extremist voices are absent in the Norwegian context. Outside the mainstream public sphere, in blogs, on Facebook and even in the commentators' sections of mainstream newspapers on the internet, such extremist voices have also flourished in Norway (Strømmen, 2011).

Geographically, Norway is situated on the north-western corner of Europe. It is a sparsely populated country of 4.8 million inhabitants. Its population has confirmed a preference to stay outside the EU through two referenda in 1972 and 1994. Nevertheless, Norway's current relation to and potential membership in the EU remain highly politicised topics in public debates. These debates are often mediated through two campaign organisations that have been active in the Norwegian public sphere from the 1990s: the Norwegian branch of the pro-European Movement and the opposing No to EU campaign. The objective of the Norwegian chapter of the European Movement is to 'work for an organised and democratic partnership between the citizens of Europe with the purpose of promoting freedom, peace and democracy'.<sup>3</sup> It aims to achieve this objective by having Norway join the EU. The main objective of No to EU (2008–2009: 2) is to fight against Norway becoming a member of the EU and 'against Norwegian society's adaptation to the form of society that the EU entails'. The NCR is a non-membership organisation whose main objective is to fight racism and discrimination. The NCR vision is 'a culturally diverse and socially just society'.<sup>4</sup> The organisation has a 'broad network among organizations and the authorities – on a local, national and international level'.<sup>5</sup> Though the NCR is traditionally associated with leftist politics (Nydal, 2007), it is actively trying to engage a wider spectrum of political actors (interview 1, NCR). In contrast to the two EU campaign organisations, none of the NCR leader interviewees held official positions in a political party. Although both EU campaign organisations are politically diverse, No to EU is more often associated with the left side of politics, while the European Movement and the Yes-campaign occupy the right (Fossum, 2010).<sup>6</sup>

The leaders interviewed are not only relevant actors in the Norwegian public sphere through their involvement in these three organisations, but some also have political

positions or affiliations at local or state levels. Three of the five informants from the European Movement are MPs, two informants are from the Labour party (AP) and one informant is from the right-wing Progress party (FrP). Four of the five informants from No to EU are currently, or have been, in local or regional political office: two from the Socialist left party (SV) and one from the Labour party (AP) and the Christian Democrats (KrF). The 16 interviewees comprised eight women and eight men. Three of the informants were born outside Norway and two of them were non-white. The interviewer is a younger white female, born in Norway. The interviewer's position and the social dynamics of the interview situation might have contributed to the particular ambivalences exhibited in the interviews. Further, given Smelser's (1998) claim of forced choice alternatives shunting aside the naturally occurring ambivalence in people's opinions, it comes as no surprise when respondents reveal ambivalent opinions in open-ended qualitative interviews. Although these points are part of the relevant context when assessing the interview extracts, there is no reason to believe they undermine the analysis.

This article does not aim to study the opinions of the three SMOs as such and the interviewees' opinions do not necessarily represent their organisations. As Fred pointed out early on in the interview, organisational affiliation can sometimes be less important to narratives and standpoints than political affiliation:

Now you are interviewing me in relation to my engagement with the European Movement, but in a way that comes [second], that is, it is the work in the parliament that is my vantage point. That's my job, right. [...] I will have a different opinion on why we should enter the EU than a representative from the Socialist party, but still we are sitting at the same table.

Despite coming from different organisations and different political and geographical backgrounds, the 16 informants are all working with issues relating to the boundaries of Norwegian identity on a daily basis and represent voices in the Norwegian public sphere. In this sense, they are relevant actors in the debate on the boundaries of Norwegian identity. The informants responded to questions from the semi-structured interview guide designed for Eurosphere.<sup>7</sup> The transcript material is translated from Norwegian by the author. The entirety of interview material has been taken into account, but this article is restricted to discussions arising from three general questions about diversity.<sup>8</sup>

## Theoretical Framing

The term 'multiculturalism' was coined by Canadian policymakers in 1971 'to support the preservation of the distinctive heritages of all the country's minorities' (Citrin et al., 2001: 250), but is now a widely diffused term within both academia and policy institutions. A substantial part of the scholarly debate on issues such as multiculturalism and citizenship has been carried out within the field of normative political theory that has focused on the individual–state relationship (cf. Kymlicka, 1995; Okin, 1999). Others have contributed with less state centred and more context sensitive analyses by engaging with issues such as postnational citizenship (Soysal, 1994) or multilayered citizenship (Yuval-Davis, 1999). Because the aim of this article is to look at the ways in which individual organisational leaders understand and relate to societal diversity more generally

rather than scrutinise the particularities of different political approaches, the coming analysis will approach societal diversity without paying particular attention to political responses or the individual/community–state relationship. For the purpose of this article, multiculturalism is employed as a shorthand description of cultural, ethnic, racial and religious diversity, or ‘multiculturalism as a fact’ (Citrin et al., 2001).

Conceiving societal diversity as concrete relationships between individuals and the community has a long history within the sociological tradition (Simmel, 1950[1908]; Thomas and Znaniecki, 1984[1918–1920]). Scholars have recently drawn inspiration from classical sociologists such as Simmel to develop models of multiculturalism against oppositional views drawn from political theory (Hartmann and Gerteis, 2005). This is to enquire into paradoxes inherent in multicultural policies (Ålund, 1995; Diken, 1998) and to capture images of strangers and outsiders in contemporary societies (Marotta, 2010; Rundell, 2004). Moreover, according to Marotta (2000, 2010), Simmel’s category of ‘the stranger’ has experienced a renaissance in contemporary social theory. Inspired by such contemporary applications and Simmel’s original work, this article explores how the essays ‘How is society possible?’ (Simmel, 1910) and ‘The stranger’ (Simmel, 1950[1908]) can contribute to society-centred analyses of diversity.

In ‘How is society possible?’, Simmel describes a split between the individual as a societal being and the individual as an individual as a central paradox of the human urge to sociability. This split is portrayed not as a harmful effect of modernity, but as a necessary condition for society. Society is thus conditional on the individual being simultaneously located inside and outside society. This ambivalence of human existence is illustrated particularly clearly in Simmel’s (1950[1908]) description of the ideal type, ‘the stranger’. In ‘How is society possible?’, Simmel describes the ambiguity of being simultaneously individual and social – of being inside and outside at the same time. The description of the stranger can be understood as a conceptual amplification of this ambiguity because it makes the negative and positive traits of the stranger’s position and his relation to the group more explicit.

One of the first passages of the essay on the stranger taps directly into the central ambiguity of the stranger as both insider and outsider: ‘The stranger like the poor and like sundry “inner enemies”, is an element of the group itself. His position as a fully-fledged member involves both being outside it and confronting it’ (Simmel, 1950[1908]: 403). Simmel describes the stranger as both a situation in relation to certain individuals or ‘strangers’ in society and our collective ‘strangeness’ even in the most intimate relationships. The stranger encompasses a range of double situations: near and distant, inside and outside, belongs to the group as an outsider and as a potential traveller who stays put. Because of his partial non-belonging, the stranger ‘imports qualities into [the group], which do not and cannot stem from the group itself’ (1950[1908]: 402). The stranger is a positive element of the group, described by Simmel as someone safe to confide in who brings an element of objectivity that full members lack. As Yuval-Davis (1997: 48) points out, compared with other understandings of the stranger, Simmel’s stranger does not seek to disappear within the native collectivity, but to engage with it in dialogue. Thus, to be a stranger in Simmel’s sense does not entail total exclusion, but the inclusion can be based on a very general similarity between the stranger and the rest of the community, which may result in alienation. Simmel’s point is that irrespective of the

weakness of the above connections, the group *does* have a relationship with the stranger. The double situation that Simmel describes is a situation strongly coloured by ambiguities. Insiders who are not quite inside a society will contribute a positive quality, but may become alienated and excluded. This concept of two-sidedness, the simultaneously positive and negative, is the vantage point taken for this analysis of Norwegian social movement leaders' perspectives on diversity.

Sociologists explicitly building on Simmel's work have conceptualised such two-sidedness as ambivalence (Bauman, 1991; Diken, 1998; Merton, 1976; Smelser, 1998). In a recent contribution to *Sociology*, Hillcoat-Nallétamby and Phillips (2011) argued for bringing the concept of ambivalence back into current sociological analyses. Merton (1976) coined the term sociological ambivalence in an essay describing tensions within social structures such as incompatible yet normative expectations of a role. In *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Bauman (1991: 1) revives the sociological significance of ambivalence as a mechanism allocating 'an object or event to more than one category'. He explores this conundrum in classification through one of Simmel's key notions: 'There are friends and enemies. And there are *strangers*' (Bauman, 1991: 53). In the modern, he argues, the ambivalence of the stranger and strangeness represents an enticing possibility to explore the unfamiliar but is also related to fear because it is unfamiliar and difficult to classify. The most extreme results of this modern urge to classify are explored in his modern classic *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Bauman, 1989). Drawing on Simmel's notion of the stranger, Bauman (1991) mainly deals with this social type and the ambivalence following in its wake in a far gloomier manner.<sup>9</sup> The following empirical analysis will suggest how Simmel's more positive notion of the stranger usefully explains the material, but will also draw on Bauman's approach to ambivalence in the following ways. It will first contrast Bauman with Simmel, and then it will investigate whether Bauman's thoughts on ambivalence and post-modernity presented in the last chapter of his 1991 book can contribute to further extending Simmel's perspective.

## The Ambivalent Position of the Stranger

This analysis argues that the term ambivalence aptly captures both central elements of the stranger and the stance taken by members of the group towards multicultural society. It starts by illustrating the relevance of Simmel's characterisation of the double situation of strangers to interpreting interviewees' accounts. Drawing on Simmel, Bauman (1991: 15) describes the stranger as someone difficult to classify and 'if modernity is about the production of order then ambivalence is *the waste of modernity*'. Because we experience ambivalence as disorder, holds Bauman (1991), we tend to feel discomfort when confronting it. Several interviewees speaking from different perspectives described a discomfort related to the ambivalent situation of the stranger. Yasemin, who works for the NCR, described the unease of the double situation from the point of view of the stranger. She refers to those who are not included in the community as 'not real Norwegians':

Even the term Norwegian, right. Many have accepted that all those who have Norwegian citizenship can be defined as Norwegians. Norwegians. Just like that. But still you divide people into ethnic Norwegian and those who are not ethnically Norwegian. It means real Norwegians and not real Norwegians.

The ambivalent position of the stranger is illustrated by a distinction commonly made between those ‘properly’ belonging to the community through heritage and those who have been formally included through citizenship status, but in practice are excluded and placed in the category ‘foreign ethnic origin’. Yasemin interestingly translates this label into what she understands it to signify in practice: ‘not real Norwegians’. By using a concept that crystallises the double situation of the citizen with a foreign background, she interprets it as a problem of exclusion from belonging to the national community. Yasemin considers the boundaries of the Norwegian and illustrates how strongly her idea of inclusion is related to being incorporated into the national community by comparing regimes of inclusion and exclusion in Norway and her country of origin:

I come from [country X], and there you try to include everyone as part of society. [...] when you are talking about nationality, you should not think ethnically, you should think that you are part of that society. That is the thought; nobody is left out. But here, if you say that you are Norwegian, people say that you cannot be Norwegian. So here, you try to exclude others.

By disowning the strong link between ethnic origin and national belonging, Yasemin comments on the difference between inclusion in the national community and feeling part of society. She describes one aspect of the stranger’s status within the community by explaining how having citizenship status does not necessarily entail a sense of belonging within a society. From the point of view of social theory, one could say that she is pointing to regularity in the situation of strangers that acknowledges that social relations can disrupt formal categories. She refers to two different countries with diverging citizenship regimes, but emphasises the greater importance of societal inclusion to the experience of belonging. According to Yuval-Davis (2007: 563), there are crucial differences between citizenship status on the one hand and belonging on the other. She points out that even when formally entitled to belong through their citizenship status, ‘people who are constructed to be members of other ethnic, racial and national collectivities, are not considered “to belong” to the national community’. The ambivalence described in relation to Simmel’s stranger, as both member and non-member, included and excluded, serves to capture how social aspects of belonging complicate and interfere with the state-regulated aspects.

With this discrepancy between citizenship and belonging, and the inherently ambivalent social status of the stranger in mind, the focus now moves to Fred, who speaks from a radically different perspective to Yasemin. Fred is a European Movement leader and a member of parliament for the populist right-wing Progress party. As does Yasemin from the NCR, this leader also expresses unease over the stranger not being quite ‘inside’, but from a different perspective. Fred’s descriptions are also coloured by his positions; he talks from a vantage point that he clearly defines as part of the national community and from a particular political position. The following examples show how Fred’s unease is related to the contrast between majority culture and minority culture. He suggests the term ‘negative diversity’ to label a kind of ‘multiculturalism as a fact’ that he and the majority of the community will not accept:



I think that we, even though we were ill-tempered and aggressive a thousand years ago, have sort of moderated ourselves in that area and I am proud of living in a country where conflict is resolved in the court-room rather than by blood feuds between families. And that [...] instead of coup d'état [found] in many countries, you choose a government in a peaceful way by putting a piece of paper in the ballot box. And I do perhaps feel that it is a challenge for those who come to Norway that this is how you solve challenges and conflicts, in the court-room, through elections and so on.

[...]

Ethnic belonging is perhaps not exactly problematic, but ethnic belonging also means that you have a cultural background that is not always easy to integrate into Norwegian society. And that can create challenges and problems which are important to tackle, right? It is related both to forced marriages, and very few Norwegians will accept that people are married off against their will. And of course circumcision [FGM] and so on. Those are things that for you and for most people in Norwegian society will have difficulties accepting. So that is a type of diversity that society will not accept and I will not accept and the majority will not accept, I think. But that is also diversity, sort of. But it is negative diversity.

The mention of negative diversity is clearly associated with Muslim minorities and is an example of how racism is 'expressed in a language of culture, where "culture" appears as a coded word for "race"' (Hagelund, 2003: 220). Further, Fred exemplifies one of the ways in which norms of gender equality are linked with boundaries of the nation (see also Bygnes, 2010, 2012a). In the interview material, this is a very central way to label bad or problematic diversity. Using gender equality as an example of the line drawn between 'us' and 'them' is not limited to Norwegian or Nordic debates. Ian Buruma, for instance, quotes Bolkstein 'the first mainstream politician [in The Netherlands] to warn about the dire consequences of accepting too many Muslim immigrants' claiming that certain values 'such as gender equality' are non-negotiable (Buruma, 2006: 29). In my material, the value of gender equality as non-negotiable was mentioned even in the answers of interviewees from the Norwegian Centre against Racism. In this part of the interview material, however, the discussion included references to the comparatively modest scope of female genital mutilation and forced marriages in Norway (Bredal and Skjerven, 2007; Lidén and Bendzen, 2008).

As suggested in Yasemin's account and in Yuval-Davis (2007), the issue of ethnic belonging also figures as a central signifier of 'we' and 'them' categories. This signifier can be related to Fred's opinions uttered here and elsewhere in the interview on how the state should act vis-a-vis people with an ethnic identity or cultural background that indicates 'strangeness'. Ethnicity and culture as signifiers for belonging in Fred's accounts are part of a social imaginary of strangeness grounded in narratives that divide strangers (them) from the community (us) rather than more politically stringent categories such as citizen and foreigner. He specifically suggests that minorities' dissociation from unacceptable behaviours labelled 'negative diversity' is a more central signifier of belonging than citizenship status as such:

It is my opinion that I am elected for the Norwegian parliament and should therefore first and foremost look after the interests of Norwegians, those who have elected me in a sense. Those

who are established in Norway. Whether they have a Norwegian citizenship or not is perhaps not decisive, but those who are integrated into the Norwegian. The majority, right?

Bauman (1991: 78) argues that 'natives feel insecure in their home ways and truths' when faced with the outside point of view 'epitomised by the stranger's status'. The view of diversity exemplified by Fred from the European Movement is consistent with his role within a populist right-wing party in the Norwegian parliament. In another part of the interview, the ambivalence in Fred's reflections on strangeness and the community can be interpreted in a different and more positive sense than Bauman (1991).

## **Ambivalent Accounts of Multiculturalism**

In this particular part of the interview, Fred appears reflexive of his previous depictions of the imagined Norwegian community. When asked specifically, he discusses the contributions diversity can offer, depicting a far more positive image of multicultural society:

Interviewer: Do you think that ethnic diversity represents possibilities for this society?

Fred: I think we Norwegians have a tendency to think that we Norwegians, we in Norway, are the ideal, we are superior Norwegians, right? And all norms which deviate from that are inferior vis-a-vis our Norwegian norms, they are inferior and perhaps despicable. It is like that. And that is why I think it's great that we get to experience ethnic diversity because it opens a lot of people's eyes and they get a wider perspective on things. And think more internationally.

It is possible that his membership on the board of the European Movement comes more to the fore in this part of the account than the previously cited parts. As illustrated at the beginning of this article, however, Fred concludes that his political affiliation precedes his European Movement affiliation in questions relating to diversity. Still, it seems that despite feeling primarily affiliated with a right-wing populist party, Fred's stance towards societal diversity is ambivalent and includes several positive images of the stranger. Marotta's (2010) concept of 'in-between strangers' offers an analysis that seems to capture some of the elements in Fred's more hopeful version of multiculturalism. Marotta (2010: 109) claims that the promotion of an alternative interpretation of the world inaccessible to both parties when 'confined to their local perspectives' is more pertinent than the possibility of uncertainty, stress and feelings of being threatened that may arise in meetings between strangers and hosts. Therefore, the gaze of the stranger from outside presents an opportunity to the host group to be more self-reflexive. Such self-reflexivity is integral to ambivalence, not as a harmful effect of modernity, but as a societal trait, a suitable label for Fred's accounts of strangeness.

A similar kind of ambivalence can be linked to the accounts of a No to EU board member and local politician representing the Christian Democrats. Erik applies the stark term 'assimilation' and makes an implicit distinction between 'ethnically remote' and 'ethnically similar' in his answer to a follow-up question:

Interviewer: Does that mean that you primarily think of ethnic diversity when we talk about diversity?

Erik: Not only that, because I experience the Germans and Dutch as relatively similar to Norwegians [...], so it is clear that those who are in a special situation are those who come from other cultures. They are often illiterate; it is a large leap before they are assimilated or become a natural part of society. It is a more painful process for them and perhaps also for us.

Erik's mention of 'assimilation' and 'natural parts of society' resonates with Bauman's description of the modern longing for order and fear of ambivalence, but contrasts with the general tone set in the interview. Erik emphasises the importance to himself and No to EU as an organisation of a stance against Norway's inclusion in the EU not being interpreted as also being against diversity or lacking openness to the 'outside world'. He also strongly emphasises the role of strangers in contributing to positive development and change in Norwegian society:

It is only natural and right that societies have this will to change. That we get new groups represented in the people. I think we as a nation must be open to the positive possibility it gives us to get something new and valuable, to try our existing norms, ways of living and traditions and have a development which is valuable and not filled with conflict.

The elements of positive dynamism in Erik's account of a social will to change, the value of development in society and testing existing norms clearly resonate with a positive understanding of strangeness and acknowledgement of its potential for alternative interpretations. However, parts of Erik's interview including the initial quotation also illustrate the inherent ambivalence in his approach to strangeness and societal diversity.

Several authors have pointed out (cf. Ålund, 1995; Yuval-Davis, 1997) that Simmel's accounts of the stranger are more positive than other descriptions. For instance, while Schütz's (1964) stranger lacks dialogue with the group, Simmel describes the stranger as adding a desired quality to the group through dialogue. Simmel's approach to strangeness is helpful for understanding the accounts given by the leaders interviewed here. However, it is not only the stranger's position vis-a-vis the group that represents optimism in Simmel's version. The stranger also contributes to the positive development of the group by importing 'qualities to it, which do not and cannot stem from the group itself' (Simmel, 1950[1908]: 402). As already indicated in Fred's and Eric's more positive reflections on multiculturalism, descriptions in Simmel's text of how strangers and their double situation represent development and improvement to society are also highly relevant to the interview material. Accounts from other interviews are more overtly positive in their depictions, such as this account of the experience of moving to Norway from a neighbouring country by Robert, an NCR leader:

You could say that when I came here in 1974, Norway was quite dull. Oslo was a hole of a town, a few Pakistanis stood on a corner and so on. And I have to say that in terms of ethnic diversity, it has become something quite pulsating (...) some new and exciting dynamics and problem areas have come up that used to be completely unthinkable.

Through the increasing presence of strangers, Norway's capital Oslo is described as going from 'quite dull' and 'a hole of a town' to a more cosmopolitan and interesting place. Similarly, Robert suggests that the described development also entails new and previously unthinkable problem areas. Simmel's understanding of the dynamism between the stranger and the group resonates very well with Robert's outlook on societal diversity. They both capture a very positive concept of strangeness and consider the problem areas that may follow from the stranger's double situation that 'involves both being outside' and 'confronting' the group (Simmel, 1950[1908]: 403). Lastly, some interviewees were even more overtly positive and portrayed a diverse society almost as a utopia. Nevertheless, the ambivalence and two-sidedness of multiculturalism came to the fore throughout the interview material, including the interview with Johanne quoted here:

To me, it seems like a sort of ideal society, to have a diverse society and make it work. Idealistically, that is what I think, that's an ideal. So for me it comes off as an exciting place to live. (Johanne, the European Movement and Labour party MP)

The analysis of this interview material has looked into the position of the stranger and shown how ambivalence is acknowledged by Norwegian organisational leaders through implicit and explicit separation of concepts of citizenship on the one hand and belonging on the other. The ambivalence inherent in the interviewees' accounts of multiculturalism also indicates a shared assumption of simultaneously positive and negative traits of societal diversity. The interview extracts have illustrated how the presence of such 'in-between positions' are described as sources of fear and exclusion but also as positive contributions to society by the 16 leaders interviewed here. Ambivalence as a social trait in responding to the stranger and strangeness is thus clearly a relevant concept for capturing descriptions of multicultural society provided by leaders ranging from professional anti-racist campaigners to an MP for the Progress party.

## Concluding Discussion

Although similarities between political tendencies in Norway and other European countries are not hard to come by, the Norwegian debate is also particular. Compared to otherwise similar contexts, mainstream debate on diversity in Norway can be described as somewhat more toned down due to strong social norms about the importance of being decent and the focus on equality and consensus (Gullestad, 2002; Hagelund, 2003; Stenius, 2010). Perhaps because of this, the terrible acts of 22 July 2011 provoked a particularly strong shock both nationally and internationally. Based on the current climate of debate in Norway very few predicted such events. In this sense, the ambivalence expressed in the interviews can be understood as particular to a toned down Norwegian context. However, the presence of a sameness-centred logic can also provide a suitable platform for maintaining boundaries against those who are 'too different' (Bygnes, 2010, 2012a; Gullestad, 2002). A key point is that the Islamophobic killings *did* happen in Norway, and although the terrorist presumably acted alone, his ideas were not developed and bred in a vacuum (Strømme, 2011). As in other European countries, Islamophobic and extreme right-wing rhetoric has been flourishing outside the mainstream debate.

In such debates ambivalence and otherness are looked upon as ‘the waste’ of an order-producing modernity (Bauman, 1991: 272). Many of these voices are part of transnational networks and forums that are not confined to the space of national public spheres (Strømme, 2011). Strømme (2011) has, however, also argued that the climate of debate in Norway has become less cautious and more explicitly racist in recent years, and that the rhetoric used by the 22 July terrorist can be recognised in mainstream national debate.

Therefore, I suggest that a focus on ambivalence is relevant to analyses of mainstream attitudes and approaches to diversity beyond the Norwegian context.<sup>10</sup> Following Bauman (1991) and Simmel (1950[1908]), ambivalent expressions and attitudes are particularly relevant when the issue at hand is the position of strangers and the relationship between the stranger and the group. Bauman (1991: 15) understands ambivalence as something deeply problematic to members of modern society, describing it as ‘the waste’ of an order-producing modernity. Though such an approach to ambivalence can be partly recognised in voices such as Fred from the Progress party, the ambivalence noted in the interview material on the whole is radically different. Here, the ambivalence lies in simultaneously negative and positive valuations of societal diversity. This ambivalence does not seem particularly disturbing to the leaders, but rather like an anticipated or integral part of a realistic understanding of multiculturalism as a fact. The interview material is not lacking descriptions of the strains of being a stranger or the problems and challenges related to making a diverse society work well, but such descriptions are in all 16 examples teamed up with accounts of the benefits of diversity, or positive aspects of strangeness. Based on Simmel’s reflections on the simultaneous closeness and remoteness of the stranger and the group, it is suggested here that considering ambivalence not as something inherently negative but as a frequently occurring element of opinions and attitudes to diversity can be a useful way of looking anew at seeming inconsistency and political correctness. Bauman’s thoughts on ambivalence and post-modernity in the last chapter of his 1991 book can serve as a concretisation of this suggestion.

After declaring ambivalence to be the waste of an order-producing modernity, Bauman (1991: 272) suggests that post-modernity allows us to look at modernity ‘from a distance rather than from inside’. From this position, ambivalence ‘[o]nce declared to be the enemy of all social and political order [...] is not the “enemy at the gate” anymore’ (1991: 279). The hopeful potential of the postmodern condition lies in accepting to live with ambivalence and contingency, embracing that ‘[t]he state of tolerance is intrinsically and incurably ambivalent’ (1991: 237). Bauman argues that the modern ideals of liberty, equality and brotherhood are replaced by the postmodern elements of liberty, diversity and tolerance that accept rather than fear the ambivalence of otherness.<sup>11</sup> Bauman’s thoughts on the postmodern approach to ambivalence thus have potential to serve as a useful contemporary companion to Simmel when making sense of the ambivalence in people’s approach to diversity. In general, to consider this ambivalence is central to understanding the elements of public debate that are not ‘either/or’ and provides an important supplement to analyses geared towards classifying specific political preferences on multiculturalism. Ambivalence might also prove useful in the analysis of future developments of Norwegian debates. The news about the Oslo and Utøya attacks being carried out by a blonde man with a posh Norwegian accent and racist motives have

forced reflexivity and introspection with regard to the Norwegian 'community's' relationship with its 'strangers' (Marotta, 2010). To what degree this will have a lasting effect on the public debate on diversity in Norway remains to be seen.

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### Notes

- 1 Eurospheres.org
- 2 Currently, a few platforms such as Stop the Islamisation of Norway (SIAN), Honest Thinking and Human Rights Service could fit such a profile. Human Rights Service was included in Eurosphere's selection of Think Tanks, and SIAN was launched after the actor selection took place (see: <http://sian.no/node/1259>). The web site Honest Thinking did not fit the project's definition of SMO. However, such anti-Islamic web communities have played a central role in the ideological foundations of the so-called 'manifesto' of the 22 July terrorist.
- 3 <http://www.jasiden.no> (accessed 20 November 2008).
- 4 <http://www.antirasistisk-senter.no/english.109478.no.html> (accessed 29 September 2011).
- 5 <http://www.antirasistisk-senter.no/english.109478.no.html> (accessed 29 September 2011).
- 6 The EU question also follows other political cleavages. For example, more men and urban voters are pro membership (Fossum, 2010).
- 7 Unpublished.
- 8 1) In your own notion of diversity, which groups do you believe are relevant for defining a diverse society? 2) What do you think about ethno-nationally diverse societies? 3) In what ways do you see ethno-national diversity as an advantage or challenge in society?
- 9 Bauman (1995) revisits 'the stranger' in *Life in Fragments*, but the current analysis is based on the depictions in *Modernity and Ambivalence* (Bauman, 1991).
- 10 With regard to social movements, Williams (2003) and Bygnes (2012b) have demonstrated how ambivalence is central also in the discourse on diversity in the transnational European Women's Lobby.
- 11 The last chapter of Bauman's book also points to an over-emphasis on individualism and superficial consumer attitudes towards diversity as new obstacles in the postmodern political agenda (1991: 273).

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