

Codes, ideologies and markets

Unrational mechanisms for cultural selection

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Abstract:

There are several sociological reasons to doubt an assumption made by spokesmen from the Age of Enlightenment, that cultural selection over time could be understood by the principle of rational superiority and of functionality. Economic market mechanisms; political mechanisms around ideologies and linguistic codes have to be considered in the process of cultural selection. In this article the concept of code is elaborated, it is argued that several competing chains of codes can exist within the same language system. To illustrate this phenomenon alternative interpretations of "national" attitudes in Norwegian public debate since World War II are presented as examples.

Ideas about culture, power and the sociology of knowledge

As we all know, "culture" is a term with many meanings. If we try to categorise the more than hundred different academic definitions of culture, we could start with a division into three classes:

A first class of definitions could be those based upon the difference between nature and culture. Nature is what exists independently of human consciousness; this is at least our partly culturally determined concept of nature. Culture is then seen as everything that has been cultivated by man. This very broad definition has been of some help to social anthropologists when they need to explain the behaviour of primitive people, – formerly seen as men of nature – in terms of culture and social organisation and not in terms of instinct and genetic race variations. These definitions will, however, need a considerable clarification before they can be useful in explaining and predicting development in modern differentiated societies – especially if the cultural explanations are to be contrasted to and combined with other types of explanations. Overall general concepts of culture are usually not very useful for dividing cultural patterns into variables, so as to study, for instance, alternative structures and forms of cultural control.

Secondly, we have several concepts of culture focusing upon specialised, often institutionalised, activities like artistic performances. Notions of "the cultural life" fit this class of definitions. Cultural life may be seen as objects of art, as professional performances or as the institutions and organisations around these artistic activities. Definitions focusing upon the cultural life may include activities going on in theatres, concert halls, galleries, museums, probably also in ordinary libraries and perhaps even

in churches and in the universities. It seems though as if in later years the widening of the concept of the "cultural sector", which is what a ministry of cultural affairs should be concerned about, has made the football players and amateur singers more central cultural actors than university professors.

The concepts mostly used in contemporary sociology belong to a third class of definitions. When sociologists talk about norms and values as cultural variables, they wish to emphasise that cultural patterns are, at least analytically, something different from social organisation, material conditions of life and even different from individual thoughts and motives. To what extent features observable on a specific cultural "level" determine or are being determined by material conditions, can be disputed. But no educated sociologist will deny the existence of collective cultural values and variables. When culture is seen as a set of observable variables – of cognitive, ethical or emotionally activating symbols – this also means that different values can be found on these variables, at least in principle. Cultural variables can compete with other variables in explaining different social structures and processes, for instance structures of power and processes of social control. A methodological limitation of studies on culture conducted as a set of operationalised variables is, however, that this perspective may invite a somewhat incoherent understanding of culture as a menu of separate "values" and "norms".

Talcott Parsons indirectly warned against this tendency, when in a footnote he stated that "systems of action are functional systems; cultural systems are symbolic systems in which the components have logical or meaningful rather than functional relationship with one another". "Cultural man" acts according to what makes sense in his universe of meaning. Cultural systems regulate the activation of symbols relevant for an actor in specific situations. The functionality, or dysfunctionality, of the activated symbols could, in principle, be analysed in relation to the selective mechanisms of the wider cultural system of which they are a part.

In order to be politically relevant, studies of culture should relate to structures of power. According to Max Weber, power can be understood as one actor's possibility to accomplish his or her own will, even when this will is opposed by other actors. It is not all easy to see how concepts of culture will fit into such a concept of power. Especially not if actors are seen as independent individuals with autonomous "wills", and the struggle for power only. However, to the extent that the actor's concepts of social reality, as well as his notions of own potentialities, are part of a collective cultural system, this connection may be easier to see.

Collective notions of reality are not only culturally transmitted from collective traditions to specific use, they are also selected and recreated in different ways, and they may be politically manipulated. People in different social positions see the world differently. This observation can be a basis for regarding the sociology of knowledge as a starting point in studying the relations between cultural control and social interests.

Mechanisms of selection

According to a rationalistic program from the Age of Enlightenment reason should be universal standard for selecting sense from nonsense in an inherited tradition. Many philosophers have claimed that rules for rational arguments could in principle solve both the problem of selecting between different proposals under consideration and also of inventing new sensitive proposals.

Even spokesmen, who have not had the same confidence in the rational potentiality of mankind, have often taken for granted that the mechanisms of selection in history will in the long run necessarily favour the most functional alternatives. This has been a way of thinking typical for social darwinism, but not only for this or any other particular school of thought. Ordinary people often use a language presupposing that the winners in a period of development, represents the best alternative of adjustment. The concept of functionality is seldom confronted with an operational concept of dysfunctionality or with a hypothesis of non-functional adjustment.

The selection of an activated part of culture from a wide range of cultural traditions may, however, be influenced by mechanism that in no way guarantees rationality and functionality to win. Sociologist of knowledge should be able to say something about such mechanisms.

Some sociologist might think of ignorance among the masses or lust of power among the rulers as the main explanation to non-rational selections. The structural mechanisms for cultural selection will, however, be more systematic than what could be found out by studies of particular groups of people.

On such mechanism is *the market*. What can be sold to most buyers will have a tendency to be preferred produced and transmitted. The mechanism of the market will usually, but not always, be determined by economic motives of profit. In the sub-cultures of media-workers the prestige of great audiences can function as a motive for certain selections independently of the salaries of the journalists.

The market mechanism may under some conditions be functional, not least when a rapid economic change is required, but it may also be highly dysfunctional. However, the profit motive, and its probable effect upon the ideal of economic equality in society, is not necessarily the best approach to understand the dysfunctionality of a marketing culture. More important for understanding its dysfunctional effects is the overall motive to choose that kind of culture that can easily reach the big audiences. This could in itself mean an appeal to vulgarity. But even in societies with elaborated cultural traditions may the marketing orientation lead to dysfunctional selection, when the selection leads to preferences for the sort of minimum culture supposed to be common for people with various orientation, in order to reach as many receivers/listeners/buyers as possible. By program, the cultural borders are then said to exceed the social borders and to become more universal. What we see however, for instance in the market oriented TV-business, is rather a selection of effectfull superficiality, repetitions of stereotype dramas, and a series of programs stressing violence, sex and comics. The kind of human drama that requires insight in a particular culture in order to be understood is seldom selected. The long run effect of this will be a restriction of the variation of different cultures on this earth. And that is hardly functional for a long-term human adjustment.

The dysfunctions of market-thinking is one kind of selective mechanism that will easily run counter to the assumptions made by people who only think selection in terms of rationality and natural functionality. A sociologist of knowledge should also be familiar with other mechanisms disposing for dysfunctionality. We will here mention some structural characteristics of ideologies and of codes.

Ideology and control

This is not the place for tracing the whole history of the concept of ideology. I have written a doctoral dissertation about ideologies, and refer Norwegian readers to that. Of importance in this connection, is to emphasise the possibilities and the limitations in using a term like ideology in studying relations between culture and social control, culture and power.

The contemporary literature about ideologies can appear quite divided as to whether the authors regard Marx, or a Marxian tradition, as the basis for ideological analysis or whether they regard Marxism itself as an archetype of ideological deception. This may also be one of the reasons why not only the study of ideologies, but also whole areas of sociology of knowledge has had a slightly dubious reputation with regard to scientific standards. Unless we can find analytical criteria for falsifying ideological postulates, the whole business of ideological analysis might be suspected of devising strategies for different groups' own ideological struggle for power and social control.

However, on a certain level of abstraction I think it is possible to postulate analytical criteria for ideologies, covering both the central parts of the Marxist and of the anti-Marxist assumptions about ideologies; these can be separated from ideas that should not be analysed as ideologies. In my book from 1986 I have postulated five such criteria that must all be demonstrated if a set of ideas should be regarded as an ideology.

The first criterion is that ideas, in order to be called ideologies, must constitute a system of comprehension where one assumption supports the creditability of another assumption. The system should also have lasted for some time and been used in different fields if it is to arouse the general interest of ideological analysts.

The second criterion for regarding some ideas as ideologies is that they, at least potentially, should promote a reality deception. This criterion does not necessarily imply that someone has a standard for an absolutely objective overview while others are just prejudiced. The difference is a relative one, and this relativity depends upon testable categories. Many axiomatic and metaphysical positions cannot be judged as ideological just because they are not testable. The reason for the diffusion of various forms of "false consciousness", as seen from both Marxists and anti-Marxists, is not to be found primarily in epistemological misunderstanding, but in the social fact that someone with power has interests in legitimating their own particular interest in social matters as the universal interests of society as such.

This leads on to a third criterion: ideologies must be related to organised social interest. Even if all groups have some sort of interest in social matters, not all have

developed ideologies to defend these interests, and not all groups with ideologies have the resources or strength to become generally viable. Usually the most dominant ideologies will primarily interest a sociologist, but this last point is not a criterion for defining a system of ideas as an ideology.

Our fourth criterion refers to the suppressive character of ideologies. Ideas that are in the interests of some groups at one end of social variables will normally have losers at the other end. In the literature about ideologies the losers are seen as those groups and people who supposedly are being suppressed by a dominant ideology, and who should consequently develop a counter-ideology to free themselves. The underlying assumption is that this counter-ideology, or a synthesis of the dominant ideology and the counter-ideology, will promote more freedom for creative forces, and also more reality orientation in society, as the need for suppression and false consciousness becomes smaller. Behind this assumption lies a notion of historical development as progress in human ability to take care of own destiny. A more moderate version of this criterion four would simply be that fixed ideologies are in the long run seldom very functional for a maximum reality orientation and a sustainable adjustment.

The fifth and last criterion to be found in the literature about ideologies is that they should all have a self-immunising character. If an ideology based upon particular interests, and perhaps contradictory principles, is to remain in power as a dominant power, it has to defend itself against critical analysis. The strategies to achieve this might differ. One of the most common ways of defending oneself against attack is camouflage. In the battle between ideologies one can present own interpretations as directly derived from the order of nature, the order of reason, democracy or of common sense. In addition one can promote all sorts of suspicious symbolisation around potential critics.

When indicators of all these five criteria are found, there is reason to analyse a set of ideas as an ideology. This means, among other things, that we should look for what alternative interpretations could have been given on relevant matters. Such contrasting perspectives can reveal the particular status of many ideas, usually taken more or less for granted. The dominance of a particular perspective may also tell something about cultural power and probably also social control in a society. Studies of ideologies may be a central core in the sociology of knowledge, in studies of functional and dysfunctional cultural patterns, and in the study of culture and power.

The concept of ideology can lead to the development of useful methodological tools for the study of cultural dominance, not least in an age of mass media influence and of centralised abstract learning. But the tool has its limitations. In various versions the concept of ideology implies identifiable social interests related to the spokesmen for the ideological interpretations. The actors are assumed to have at least some intentional interests in their choice of interpretations, even if they have not developed the ideological pattern themselves.

If no such social interests can be demonstrated, an ideological analysis might be a bit far-fetched, perhaps even appear as part of a counter-ideological attack. Nevertheless, not all ideas falling outside the concept of ideologies can be regarded as individually developed opinions or as convictions falling outside the field for sociological concern.

Language can be an example of a forming cultural structure that should definitely be of interest for sociologists. But a language system cannot normally be described as an ideology or explained by common interests among all individuals who use that particular language. Sociologists should nevertheless be able to analyse language, both in relation to the sociology of knowledge and in relation to social control. A focus on language leads on to the concept of "codes".

Codes

In lexia a "code" (from Latin *codex*) is usually defined as a system of secret writing, where sentences, words, letters or figures are replaced by certain fixed combination of symbols, agreed upon by the users of the code. Examples of codes may be the kind of messages transmitted over the radio during war, understandable for the allied receiver but not for the enemy listener. The term might also cover short combinations of letters and signs on technical machinery, meaningful for the educated technician but usually not for an ordinary layman.

It can be argued that codes may be a useful tool in the construction of models for the understanding of cultural conflicts. This does not mean that codes can replace the heavier building blocks, such as "ideologies", but "codes" may nevertheless add something to improve the model building. Codes are constructions related to a system of communication rather than to specific interests among its common users. People who use a precoded language in their communication do not necessarily have personal or social interests in the codes they use.

Studies of codes have primarily been related to the study of language or language-systems. Here we should refer to the central theoretician, Ferdinand de Saussure. According to him, language cannot be analysed as a system of naming, where each word corresponds to a thing. The linguistic signs do not directly unite thing and name, but rather concepts and sound-images or "phonemes". The relation between the symbolic signifier and the signified is in principle arbitrary. When we nevertheless can communicate by language, it is because the specific signs have a meaning by social conventions and by the system of contrasts and similarities that can be found in any particular language.

Saussure's theories have led to the study of language as a special case of semiotics, the science of signs, and to a focus on "structural analysis" rather than on specific situational exigencies. In accordance with this tradition we could regard each language as composed of one set of codes, not in the sense that one word can have one meaning only, but in the sense that one set of coded phonemes has one common meaning. This view may limit our readiness to see and analyse competing codes connected to the apparently same words. Semiotics does not easily open up for studies of competing codes within the same language system.

A code means that a certain symbol, with several possible meanings, is fixed to one definite set of associations. In order to function this way when it is activated, the code has to be loaded with meaning in a previous period of time. Studying codes therefore

implies both a study of loading or incoding, probably also of the process of decoding alternative associations, and of the use of coded symbols in specific situations.

In order to develop a hypothesis about codes we can read messages and observe behaviour. To test the hypothesis we could make interviews or use the method of associations. From loaded symbols and words, with historically and analytically many different meanings, like "freedom", "democracy", "modernity", "feudalism", "fascism", "suppression", we could give open or closed questions to our subjects and ask them what other words they found similar and what they found dissimilar to the symbols to be studied.

Chain of codes

Codes do not have the sole function to activate a correct interpretation of a word or a short message; they are also often meant to arouse certain emotions in the direction of a desired action. The emotionally activating dimension in a code can be studied during the periods of incoding, as well as when the codes are applied.

An *incoding* will usually consist of two operations. Certain events, generally experienced as positive on a personal or social level, need to be directly connected to certain words or symbols. The various alternatives - a word or a symbol associated with the events - have to be restrained. This limitation will usually be most efficient if the choice between alternatives could be presented as a simple choice between a good and a bad alternative. To achieve this kind of moral/emotional activation the lines of associations from a symbol usually have to be lengthened, so that the good alternative will hang together with something seen as definite or indisputably good, while the bad alternative becomes connected to something indisputably bad.

As long as most people are firm religious believers, an agent of incoding will often try to connect the desired alternative to the will of God and the bad alternative to temptation by the Devil. In secular society this may have become more complicated, but not necessarily less totalitarian. We are all familiar with examples of the totalitarian propaganda under Hitler and Stalin, even if the assumed efficiency of this kind of propaganda has been exaggerated. Less is publicly known about the forms of incoding and decoding in the modern media-liberal democracies. This is in itself a reason for being concerned about this field of research.

An example of contemporary use of a precoded language can be found in mass media interpretations of what has been going on in Eastern Europe during the last years. The first interpretation of these events, in media all over Western Europe and Northern America, was that this could be interpreted as the people's revolt against collectivistic dictatorships and for democratic freedom, in order to become more like us - a positively loaded coding. A chain of coded associations could connect these links: *nationalism - authoritarian collectivity - ethnocentrism - suppression of minorities - fascistic political order - pre-democratic*.

The confusion about "nationalism" has in some media apparently been solved by assuming that most people in the East want freedom and bread, while others, fishing in

murky waters, are irresponsible "nationalists". The potential danger then consists of a nationalistic bait that could appear tempting for people when they have nothing else to eat.

Such interpretations tell more about precoded ways of thinking in a Western media world than about a real division between freedom fighters and nationalists in Eastern Europe. Most people in the East want both freedom, national independence and bread, and they see no problematic contradiction in this. It is the dominant negative association tied to "nationalism" in contemporary European media that is problematic. To entangle, or "decode", our way of associating we should go some decades back in time. We could very well use the development of codes in Norway as an example.

Competing codes

If we look for a coherent development of dominant public codes, as these have been developed during the last half century, we can see that the process of incoding cannot be directly explained by the interest or initiative of one single group, nor by any invisible hand of historic reason and functionality. In principle it is nevertheless possible to trace origins of use and conditions and preconditions of widely accepted patterns of coding.

The changes in the meaning of "national" and "nationalism" during the last half century cannot be explained satisfactorily by references to common collective experiences with concrete political events, as these are very versatile indeed. The changes may be related to groups of an interpreting power, but hardly in the sense of an ideology to defend class interests. Rather, some codes, or chain of codes, have become dominant over other codes.

If we go back to the period of the Second World War, all participating countries paid great homage to the virtue of patriotism and to the moral duties of national sacrifice. Expressions such as "a good Norwegian" were at that time a code for an important social recommendation, meaning that the actual person was a person to be trusted among the anti-Nazis, a man or woman you should help, in some situations at the risk of your own life. People who were regarded as ambiguous in national questions, who had "stripes" of foreign sympathy, should be avoided. People with a predominant sympathy for the foreign invaders were called "un-national elements" and should be actively opposed, in some cases even liquidated. The war was seen as a war between own nationalist feelings and other people's nationalism, or rather against the leader in one nation who had broken the rules of national peace and invaded the border of others, in opposition to the European principle of syncretism between national and political borders. To actively oppose this coding could be an indicator of belonging to the wrong side.

The strong positive associations connected to national values, dominant during the war, have later changed gradually, but not peacefully. The extended international cooperation after the war, in economics, politics, cultural transmission and in private

travelling, is all part of the story, but this does not in itself explain the development of another code, competing with an original national one. The national adherence to organisations like the United Nations, NATO and other supranational institutions is here of importance, not least because the UN in 1948 proclaimed a charter of so-called universal Human Rights, supposed to be valid for all individual independent of their national identity.

During the 1950's an alternative explanation of the Second World War was developed. Instead of seeing the war as a battle between a joint nationalism of allied forces and an imperialistic aggression of one enemy nation, the war was, in the West, now seen more as a conflict between those who had supported democracy and a peaceful development and those who were reactionary or who had totalitarian ambitions. Democracy was supposed to rely upon people with an open, more or less liberal attitude, while dictatorships relied upon an "authoritarian personality". According to the anti-authoritarian democratic view the Second World War had basically been a battle between rigid and authoritarian antidemocrats and people who promoted extended freedom and rights for individuals, independent of nationality. In this perspective neither national borders, nor cultural borders nor religious loyalty in the name of a collective morality were to be regarded as virtues. People in the social sciences were quite active in this process. They exercised ideological power and have done so ever since, a fact that has been conspicuously ignored in the official Norwegian explanation of political power, written by social scientists. The anti-Nazi forces were now seen as composed of people with quite different attitudes: some undemocratic communists, some naive nationalists and some liberal democrats with perspectives for the future.

For some people the decade of the 1950's was a period when the war against the Nazi regimes could be seen as one variant of liberal democratic confrontation with totalitarian governments; the other main variant would be the contemporary containment policy of that period against Soviet aggression. For other people this decade was a period when we lost contact with basic and common national experiences from the time of war.

If the fifties were a decade when the national and religious references for traditional supraindividual moral were undermined, the sixties were a period of expanding individual norms based upon principles of self-determination, self-confidence, self-feeling and self-realisation. In both traditional media and in the new audio-visual media the individual pursuit of happiness, fun and entertainment replaced the transmission of not only old puritan values themselves but also their justification in relation to religious duties and national identity. Within this new cultural frame the value of "nationalism" came under double fire, both as something authoritarian that limited individual freedom and as something that divided people into separate cultural entities - the principle of "order and border". The overall value in market-oriented big media business was a free diffusion of standardised cultural impulses, not the preservation of a variety of cultures, functional for separate national traditions and social subgroups.

For some people anti-nationalism became associated with anti-authoritarianism and a liberation of individual rights, psychologically as well as politically. For others the 1960's were a period of political confusion and moral decay, a period when the

cultural transmission between the generations was interrupted by irresponsible radical ideologists and a commercial industry directed at young people's life style.

The moral changes in the 1960's had consequences for the social and cultural development in the 1970's. A supra-individual and societal pillar like the institution of marriage was gradually replaced by private arrangements for cohabitation, first as a prelude to marriage, later to a greater extent as a substitute for marriage. A consequence of the change in expectations of marriage and of conjugal stability, and of the need for women to be their own economic supporter, was a radical decline in fertility, below the estimated population replacement level of 2.1 child per woman.

For some people the 1970's were a period when patriarchal suppression of youth and of women was radically unmasked, a period when students and women's liberation groups could claim free love, free abortion, freedom in the choice between marriage or no marriage, not having children or having children who all should be wanted. This was also supposed to be an adequate adjustment within an ecological frame of limited resources. For others it was a period when cultural vulgarity and moral irresponsibility had undermined marriage as a supra-individual and societal institution, and when the combined forces of radical individualism and commercial market orientation claimed its victims, bringing about of family disruption, single mothers and neglected children, and now the country was no longer able even to reproduce itself.

The 1980's were the decade when Norway experienced a considerable influx of immigrants, to a large extent from non-European countries. Some groups saw a relatively liberal policy for refugees and the granting of asylum on humanitarian reasons as part of a moral duty against unfortunate people. Others saw this policy as a guarantee for keeping the number of working people in the country at a more or less constant level, as the native population intended to decline and to get older. On the other side, many people regarded the humanitarian ideals in the country's immigration policy as illusory, when facing overpopulation and migration pressure on a global scale. The supporters of this view also argued that in a chaotic world our primary task was to take care of our own population. An adequate reproduction would depend upon the institution of marriage and upon moral standards, which in turn would depend upon commitment to a common national culture.

Even the immigration debate in the 1980's and 1990's has therefore a double character. Some see a liberal attitude toward immigration as part of a liberal, humanistic view with reference to the UN's Declaration of Human Rights. Others see a liberal attitude toward immigrants as part of a liberal and naive humanism among politicians and social workers who just give potential voters and clients new "rights", at the cost of the functionality of society.

In order to understand the intensity of these controversies it is not enough to look at the case in dispute itself, for instance at how many immigrants we admit and what they cost society. The intensity of emotional commitment has to do with the coded chains of associations, and with the double standards of competing chains of associations.

"Neo-Nazism" as coded self-immunisation

To understand the emotional intensity associated with coded symbols it is seldom adequate to look for hidden "rationalised" motives within each actor using a code, as these actors are usually part of wider symbolic systems of orientation. Nor is it sufficient to look for hidden ideologies of social groups with which the actors identify themselves. Codes will, like language itself, be part of symbolic communicative systems used by many more people than those who benefit from its particularities. The sources of particular codes should be sought among the interpreting elites in communicative systems rather than among its users.

The existence of a competition between alternative codes is seldom presented as something to be discussed openly in a scientific and democratic atmosphere. A democratic debate on this level would hardly leave one code as the only true and obvious one. Supporters of each code will therefore normally try to ignore, ridicule or warn against alternative codes. The side that could hope to make its code the dominant one will normally increase its own power and limit the political potentialities of a competitor.

If "nationalism" is associated with German *nationalsozialismus*, or with the civil war in former Yugoslavia, in media presented as expressions of meaningless violence, we can be sure that the symbol has got a negative connotation. The symbol can then be used by those debating in the media to characterise their political opponents in such different matters as local language questions, economic support for agriculture and the evaluation of different forms of association with the EU. If "nationalism" on the other hand is seen as a political manifestation of a long historical striving for self-determination by relatively coherent ethnic groups, in opposition to both localism and imperialism, the connotations will normally be positive. The symbol could then be used as a balancing reference against particular interests for making maximum profit for private purposes or as a moral reference in opposition to social deviants.

The debate over "nationalism" is normally not presented as a discussion between people who primarily see manifestations of nationalism as an expression of lasting ethnic, geographic and culturally identifiable groups, and who see a contradiction between ethnic nationalism and political nazism, and people who first of all see nationalism as an ideological construction over political interests, where nazism becomes the most extreme example. Nationalism is rather seen as something to be for or against. The codes will then be important, especially if the coded associations will activate self-immunising symbols.

The interpretation of events connected to "nationalism" in contemporary public debate is coded in relation to two different chains, at least.

The links in one chain would be: nationalism - authoritarian ethnocentrism - antidemocratic closed minds - intolerant moralism - traditionalistic condemnation of liberating movements - prejudiced anti-feminism - anti-immigration, and connected with this: racism, fascism, a continuation of holocaust. It is quite safe to say that this chain contains self-immunising mechanisms. Those who choose wrongly, according to

this chain of codes, must be really bad people. When this code becomes dominant, as it easily becomes in our type of society with its implicit appeal to both market and media interests and to an intellectual "moral elite", ordinary people will feel the necessity to start conversations by saying: "I am not a (nationalist/ moralist/racist) but..."

The links connected to "nationalism", or a commitment to national traditions, could also be positive: a long and hard struggle and suffering for creating sufficient food; heroic initiatives for claiming national independence; great cultural creativity and economic enterprise to consolidate the nation; a political frame for the promotion of democracy among people with approximately the same cultural and historical background; a reference for the people to keep elites with foreign roots at their proper place; a basis for political discipline to avoid destructive class conflicts; an appeal for pride and military courage to prevent imperialistic invaders from taking over the nation; a reference to ideals of equality and internal moral control over egotism; an example of a peaceful and decent policy towards other people to help them win their national and democratic independence. One would be a bad patriot to go against these values.

From the point of view of the sociology of knowledge it is interesting to note that there is seldom an attempt to combine these two chains of coded associations. Different elites "use" them more or less indiscriminately for their own purposes. It is, then, interesting, though perhaps disheartening, to see how groups using an alternative code are attacked and ridiculed by being associated with the worst possible evils. In a secular society that is "neo-Nazism" and "holocaust".

Why this appears theoretically interesting, is because both codes open up for interpreting the other side as a kind of "neo-Nazism". According to the first code, all kinds of "nationalism" are related to the rhetoric of Adolf Hitler. People who oppose the official relatively liberal policy of giving foreigners asylum on a humanitarian basis, are to be interpreted as "racists" and potentially violent people. To make this connection convincing it is necessary to appeal to the code chain mentioned. The characteristics of Nazis will then be: unintellectual, frightening, hating, authoritarian racists. Some concrete versions with these characteristics can certainly also be found, and these are given much publicity, but it is still far fetched to use frustrated skinheads as a reason for preventing an open democratic debate over the policy of immigration.

According to the competing code, "neo-Nazism" can also be used in the debate over immigration, but then on the liberal side of the debate. These "neo-Nazists" are then seen as patriotic traitors, championing the immigrant invaders while they suppress good Norwegians from their right to public speech in own country, or they are seen as people with weak national morale and naive principles supporting immigrants without understanding the long term consequences of their activity. This picture of anti-national Nazis corresponds very much to the picture of the internal enemy found in illegal Norwegian newspapers during the period of occupation.

There are reasons to regard part of the debate around immigration in our country as a civil war between different groups of Norwegian code makers, just as much as a debate about the actual immigrants. Those who publicly win the interpretation of their opponent as a variant of "neo-Nazism", have not only immunised themselves from

their competitor's critique, but have also got the upper hand in the interpretation of a long range of disputed themes from the post-war period.

Attempts to associate a competitor's interpretation with "neo-Nazism" can be seen as one version of a variety of attempts to make competitors harmless by labelling them so that the public will not listen to what they might have to offer, perhaps even to limit their possibilities of media communication. Another version, well known from the cold war period, has been to associate opponents with symbols of "communist dictatorship". In earlier periods symbols associated with "moral decadence" and "unpatriotic treason" were often stuck as labels on critics. In the post-war liberal period symbols associated with "fanatical moralism" or "puritanical hypocrisy" have been used to code certain psychological interpretations of opponents into the contemporary mechanisms of a liberal culture market. An activation of symbols of authoritarian threats may have the latent function of legitimating a liberal order; the opponents could call it a liberal disorder.

When we are confronted with coded symbols associated with strong emotional content, the first reaction by sociologists of knowledge should be to look for what the codes might hide, rather than accepting their associations at face value. The strong emotional appeal might be part of a coded structure for self-immunisation. A strategy for cultural control and political power might lie behind.