



# **The Sociology of Ethnic Relations**

Michael Banton

## **► To cite this version:**

Michael Banton. The Sociology of Ethnic Relations. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2008, 31 (07), pp.1267-1285. [10.1080/01419870701710922](https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870701710922). <hal-00513302>

**HAL Id: hal-00513302**

**<https://hal.science/hal-00513302v1>**

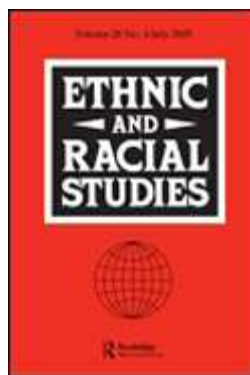
Submitted on 1 Sep 2010

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



HAL Authorization



### The Sociology of Ethnic Relations

Journal:	<i>Ethnic and Racial Studies</i>
Manuscript ID:	RERS-2007-0036.R2
Manuscript Type:	Original Manuscript
Keywords:	assimilation, Ethnic Groups, Ethnic Relations, Immigration, Max Weber, Collective Action



**The Sociology of Ethnic Relations**

Michael Banton

Abstract

The sociological problems presented by ethnic relations should be distinguished from problems of social policy. The foundations for a micro-sociology of ethnic relations laid by Max Weber in 1906-11 have to be inter-related with the macro-sociological contexts within which ethnic groups are constructed by collective action. When ethnic relations have their origin in trans-national migration, much depends on the immigrants' points of entry into the receiving society's scale of socio-economic status, and, thereafter, on transmitted inequalities. While the nature and causes of social differences associated with ethnic origin have been illuminated by quantitative and qualitative studies, new styles of research are needed to bridge these modes of analysis, such as the measurement of relative preferences for association with co-ethnics.

Keywords

Assimilation; collective action; ethnic group; ethnic relations; immigration; Max Weber.

Over the last one hundred years academics in the West have given much attention to the study of ethnic and racial relations. While one of their priorities has been to correct popular misconceptions about race, they have also, more positively, built up a substantial body of knowledge about inter-group relations. That this knowledge is not currently well organized can be seen from the textbooks produced for students. Few of them review the whole field. Most are concerned with particular countries and are either of an introductory character or assemble selected extracts from the literature. One reason why the knowledge is not better organised is that so many of the contributors have been more interested in policy questions, including the political dimensions, than in purely sociological questions. Their concern with matters of policy has led them to concentrate on ethnic and racial relations in their own countries and to rely on ordinary language concepts because these structure the ways those they wish to influence think about such matters. Sociology, by contrast, attempts to *explain* features of ethnic and racial relations, subsuming observations about particular countries within a larger body of knowledge. It seeks transcultural concepts, such that the findings of research in one country can illuminate observations about ethnic relations in other countries. While sociology and the study of social policy are rarely far apart, the pursuit of policy questions will benefit in the long term if accumulated sociological knowledge is organised more systematically.

In the aftermath of World War II the focus was on race, and more particularly upon finding better explanations of behaviour that some observers, scientists as well as members of the general public, believed to be biologically determined. The search for better explanations led to a spreading of the explanatory net to cover ethnic relations, because much that was thought to be racial also characterised ethnic relations. In *Racial and Ethnic Competition* (1983) I offered a synoptic view of this body of knowledge as it was at that time. Political changes reinforced the academic reorientation that was under way. More sociologists now conceptualise ethnic relations as comprehending racial relations, a move that helps supersede some of the misconceptions fathered by ideas of race.

### The characteristics of groups

When they review the scope of ethnic relations, many sociologists assess what authors, editors and publishers have represented as belonging in that field. This leads them to accept the underlying assumptions of those whose work they discuss and the vocabulary they employ. Few contemporary sociologists, apart from the Marxists, start from an original theoretical position, as Max Weber did. Marxists and Weberians can agree that any approach from sociological theory should first examine the main social relationships and identify the intellectual problems they pose; it has then to consider what concepts best help resolve those problems.

Weber's project was more ambitious than the elaboration of concepts of status to correct and supplement those of class. Between 1906 and 1911 he started to work out his thoughts on concepts applicable in all kinds of society. He began by describing a sequence of six 'universal types of groups'. It ran: household, neighbourhood, kin group, ethnic group, religious group, and then political group (Weber 1968: *lxxiii*; 356-398). To

judge from the text, Weber was trying to decide which of these groups were 'natural' rather than *kunstlich* ('artificial', or 'synthetic', being of human manufacture).

Of the household he wrote: 'The relationships between father, mother and children, established by a stable sexual union, appear to us today as particularly "natural" relationships' but 'only the mother-child relationship is "natural", because it is a biologically based household unit that lasts until the child is able to search for means of subsistence on his own'. Being 'natural' the mother-child relationship is universal. All the other relationships that constitute a household vary from one society to another. 'The concept of marriage can be defined only with reference to other groups' and the concept of the family is variable.

In opposition to those of his contemporaries who believed that race created natural groups, Weber insisted that biological traits could not be the basis for group formation unless they were perceived as shared characteristics. Whereas the conventional concepts of the tribe and the people implied that blood relationships were a natural basis for social relationships, Weber argued that in the creation of groups, differences of physical type and differences of tradition operated in basically the same way; ethnic groups were distinguished by their customs, even if economic influences underlay the forms they assumed. He declared that 'Ethnic membership differs from the kinship group precisely by being a presumed identity'; it was *kunstlich*. A shared ethnic origin 'does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation... particularly in the political sphere'.

Weber's treatment of the topic is such that the editors of the standard English language translation inserted a caption that reads 'The Disutility of the Notion of "Ethnic Group"' to introduce the following section. This is misleading. Weber did not deny that the notion of an ethnic group could be useful in some contexts (e.g., for administrative purposes). He denied that it could be a *theoretical* concept. Yet the grounds for his denial were specious. He contended that everything attributed to membership in an ethnic group could be accounted for by other factors (including language, religion, politics, and the feelings of attraction and repulsion generated by beliefs about blood relationships). Therefore, he wrote, the concept of an ethnic group 'dissolves if we define our terms exactly'. Weber insisted that the same considerations applied with at least equal force to any suggestion that the word 'nation' could be used as a sociological concept.

Two difficulties with this passage should be noted. First, *all* classes of social group can be dissolved into their constituent elements. If concepts are to be defined, it is important to be clear about the purposes for which they are to be employed. What is it that has to be explained? That a concept can be broken down into constituent elements may be irrelevant. It does not 'dissolve' in all contexts. Second, while for some purposes politics can be treated as a separate sphere, they can also penetrate all forms of social life. The household, the neighbourhood and the kin group can all be highly political. All groups have a political dimension even though it is not always important. Many groups have an ethnic dimension.

In everyday language, groups of the kinds in question are identified by proper names. The classification of groups, and the names given to the resulting classes, flows from the purpose of the classification. For political and administrative purposes, such as the conduct of a census, the Smiths at number ten in the street and the Robertsons at number fourteen may be classed as households; for urban planning the inhabitants of a given area may be classed as a neighbourhood. Degrees of kinship have been drawn up for determining rights (such as who may inherit an estate) or obligations (who should care for an elderly relative), and for the regulation of marriage. The purpose of classification in science is different: it is to aid the search for causal relationships. Classifications of natural phenomena, whether inanimate, like chemicals, or animate, like plants and animals, aim to promote discovery of the causes that underlie the differences between things classified separately. The classifications are of a technical character, reflecting knowledge about the nature of these phenomena, so they need technical names. If groups are to be classified for sociological purposes, the purpose of the exercise must be equally explicit.

It is important to recognize that the manuscript of Weber's that has been presented as a chapter on ethnic groups was only a draft, for in it there was much that he might have improved had he not died an early and unexpected death (Banton, 2007). He looked forward to the prospect of 'a rigorous sociological analysis' that 'we do not attempt here'. His line of thought can be better appreciated if a distinction is drawn between a category and a group. A category is objective, a set of things or persons possessing one or more common characteristics. A social group may be an objective reality, but it is constituted by the subjective feeling of its members that they belong together. Weber acknowledged that membership of a race was thought to be decided by the possession of similar inherited or inheritable characteristics resulting from actual common descent (i.e., a category), but he insisted that only when the individuals concerned had a subjective feeling of shared identity did they become a group. That feeling might arise from the experience of being treated as a category.

By starting from the concept of *membership* in a group, Weber limited his vision. When asked by an interviewer about their voting intentions, or their opinions about some social problem, members of the public are ready to align themselves with one or other of the alternatives presented to them. Important decisions are based on the findings of such polls. The social processes that underlie ethnic and racial relations, and many other kinds of relation, begin with individual alignment and identification and may not be very different from an answer to a pollster's question. This offers a broader starting point than that of group, as can be seen from the readiness of humans to align themselves on a basis of gender. Gender does not constitute a group of the kind Weber had in mind. Sometimes an alignment translates into the formation of a single-issue association; sometimes it translates into the formation of a community, i.e., a group serving a multitude of interests shared by the members, usually to different degrees, for some community members are activists while others support collective action only occasionally.

Instead of a sequence of different kinds of group there is a medley. Categories may be uni-dimensional, but groups are multidimensional. Jews are both a religious group and an

ethnic group; so are Sikhs. Persons who do not practice the religion by which their group is identified sometimes count themselves as ethnic Jews, ethnic Muslims or ethnic Catholics. Where there is a difference of skin colour, categories and groups are conventionally described as racial, but they are ethnic also. It is an error to treat one as a subdivision of the other. Social alignment may be a mixture of self-identification (e.g., by ethnic or national origin) or a response to others (e.g., how they react to a person's appearance). Ethnic and racial identification is rarely separate from considerations of socio-economic status, for being in a particular social category usually has status connotations.

The multidimensionality of actual groups creates problems for the classifier, as has been illustrated by the difficulties at the United Nations in defining who may count as indigenous peoples. It can also be important to the analysis of relations between groups. Commentators on current affairs often write about ethnic conflicts as if they were a special class of conflicts. This may be acceptable for non-scientific purposes, but presenting them as a special class distracts attention from the many elements in ethnic conflicts which are also found in conflicts between religious groups, language groups, caste groups, and other kinds of groups. It hampers the generalized analysis of group formation and maintenance. Just as groups are never uni-dimensional, neither are the relations between persons regarded as members of groups.

**Differences between societies**

Weber noted that 'clear-cut linguistic boundaries and sharply demarcated political or religious communities ... are lacking in wide areas of the African and South American continents'. He would have been aware that there are some world regions, such as the Indian subcontinent, where, in his day, there were no social formations corresponding to the North American notion of an ethnic group. An explanation for their absence is not far to seek.

Most Indians grow up in the knowledge that they belong in a caste. The purposes that elsewhere are served by the formation of ethnic groups in India are served by the caste system. Its assumptions permeate all spheres of social life, affecting even groups practicing religions which deny caste distinction. Thus in practice there is a caste dimension to some Muslim groups, as there was to the life of the Bene Israel, the so-called 'black Jews of Cochin'. The one sub-continental group which does correspond to the North American conception of an ethnic group is that constituted by the Mohajirs in Karachi. They cannot be differentiated from other Pakistanis by religion or national aspiration. Their group consists of refugees who fled from India at the time of partition in 1948, and their descendants. They have organized as a group because of shared grievances and are recognized as having a distinctive identity. They fit Weber's proposition about migration as a stimulus to the formation of ethnic groups.

Such examples demonstrate the duality in the formation of groups based upon the recognition of a common ethnic origin. On the one hand, such groups enable their



members to combine in the pursuit of shared ends. On the other hand, societies and cultures differ in their institutional structure and some present each new generation with a range of means alternative to ethnic identification as a basis for combining with others. Each new generation modifies an inherited structure, sometimes radically - as by the campaigning of the 1960s black consciousness movement in the USA – and sometimes slowly and incrementally.

If sociological knowledge about ethnic relations is to be better systematized, it will have to include a review of the differences in group formation in the various world regions. It will also have to extend Weber's discussion of the ethnic group and the nation to include subsequent developments, such as the way that in international law the two categories have been coupled in the standard reference to 'ethnic or national origin', and the way that Arabs claim to be one nation although distributed among a variety of states. The word 'nationalism' is mostly used to designate the sentiments and activities of persons who wish to establish a nation-state. These sentiments have to be distinguished from those encouraged by governments which seek to cultivate national unity in an established state, though they too are often called nationalist.

Likewise, the significance attributed to shared ethnic origin among those who are content to be citizens of a state that includes many other such groups (like German-Americans in the USA) is to be distinguished from the significance attributed to it by those dissatisfied with the way a state boundary has been drawn (like some ethnic Hungarians in Romania and Slovakia, and republicans in Northern Ireland). In Weber's sociology, an ethnic group formed when the significance that individuals ascribed to their shared ethnic origin enabled them to form a group. His reference to German-Americans strengthens the impression that he thought of an ethnic group as a minority within a state. Persons dissatisfied with the drawing of a state boundary ascribe significance to the origin they share with the citizens of *another* state so they may be better accounted a national minority. A possible clarification is to count self-identification with shared ethnic origin at the state level as primary ethnicity, and self-identification with shared ethnic origin at the sub-state level as secondary ethnicity.

A different usage featured in the statement on race sponsored by UNESCO in 1950; referring to popular parlance, it concluded that 'it would be better when speaking of human races to drop the term 'race' altogether and speak of ethnic groups.' This was a statement about how populations should be identified by a classifier according to the characteristics they shared. It used *ethnic group* as the name for a category.

Weber's scheme did not allow for disagreement about whether persons were entitled to form a minority within a state or for the actions of majorities when they assign minority members to some particular kind of category. In Turkey in 1915 Turkish nationalists could not agree that Armenians might constitute a minority within the new state they planned to establish. In Germany, the Nazis would not accept that Jews could be a minority within a state serving the German *Volk*. On one view, such cases are better considered within the politics of ethnic relations rather than within the sociology of ethnic relations.



**Microfoundations**

Part One of *Economy and Society*, written about 1919, was to have introduced a much longer work. Its account of the fundamental concepts of sociology opened with a reference to a conceptually pure type of rational action. This ideal type was to provide a standard against which actual actions could be assessed, clarifying the nature and strength of miscalculations, emotional influences and unanticipated circumstances. Weber started from the individual actor in his attempt to lay microfoundations for a general theory comprehending economic and political institutions. He got as far as a preliminary discussion of class and status but did not live long enough to complete his task; to do so he would have had to reconsider his earlier thoughts on ethnic group and nation.

How might Weber’s line of reasoning be updated and extended? On one reading, the core assertion in Weber’s 1911 draft was his proposition that a belief in shared ethnic origin facilitates group formation. Recognizing that not all groups last long, his objective could be reformulated as the explanation of how shared ethnic origin can contribute to collective action. The actor can be represented as a person seeking to maximize his or her satisfactions in respect of a multitude of short and long term ends, some hedonistic, some in conformity with civic, kin, class and religious norms. In some situations the actor himself or herself initiates the action, exercising a freedom of choice. In other situations the actor has to respond to a challenge in which he or she has to choose within a limited range of alternatives. Sometimes the actor feels that he or she has no choice, but is obliged to follow a particular course; there are degrees of freedom. In any event the actor may pursue his or her goals either individually or by associating himself or herself with an ethnic, class, religious, or other kind of group.

Individuals seek to maximize their satisfactions, and though they are not always efficient or rational in the way they go about this, in the long run they generally learn from the mistakes that they make and employ more effectively the available means for attaining their ends. To do so they will at times be obliged to join with others in collective action or to follow strategies that assume that others will engage in such action. They create social institutions. At other times they may be able to attain their ends by individual action, as when they go to buy goods in the market. This is not to suggest that all actions in a market are individual, for the producers of goods often combine to support the prices they set or to create monopolies, while consumers may also combine to further their interests.

Collective action results in the formation of a series of groups, ranging from single-purpose associations to communities that provide for, and regulate, every aspiration of the individuals who constitute their membership. Trade unions illustrate the variability. Some are single-purpose associations; others have provided a variety of benefits and have aimed to act as solidary political groups. The proportion of employees belonging to a union varies with the character of the relations between employer and employee and varies over time. The proportion of persons taking part in political activity or seeing

themselves as members of a class varies likewise. Ethnic group formation shows some resemblance; it has an origin in the encounters of persons from different societies (often resulting from migration). Ethnic groups (like other groups) are identified by proper names ('We are Jews, Sikhs', etc.) and are multidimensional<sup>1</sup>. Social relations have an ethnic dimension whenever one of the parties, consciously or unconsciously, regards any difference in ethnic origin (real or assumed) as a sign that the other person is to be treated differently. Group dimensions (cultural, ethnic, linguistic, racial, religious, status, etc.,) are of different significance for different persons; the significance varies over time and from situation to situation<sup>2</sup>. Circumstances determine the extent to which an individual feels free to disidentify with such a group or feels obliged to show solidarity with co-ethnics. Political considerations may decide which dimensions affect the parties' definition of a social situation, but there is no separate political dimension.

Members of any society tend in some degree to see their social world in terms of their shared values, a form of bias named ethnocentrism. Members of both majorities and minorities display ethnocentric attitudes; it is a normal feature of social life. If individuals value their membership in an ethnic group, they will, in certain circumstances at least, display a preference for association with co-ethnics. The strength of this preference is likely to vary from one individual to another and to be influenced by experience of interaction with members of other groups. It reflects shared experience and anticipated fellowship. One of the reasons for association with co-ethnics is the desire for friendship, for contact with persons who provide emotional support to a person's feelings about himself or herself. It is sometimes expressed as a desire for community. This desire helps explain the formation and maintenance of many social bonds and can contribute to political movements. Individuals are apt to assume that they hold more in common with co-ethnics and that they are therefore more likely to be able to establish psychologically satisfying relationships with them. This is one important factor explaining the formation of social clubs and similar associations based upon ethnic origin.

Existing studies fail to identify the sociological problems associated with the recognition of shared ethnic origin. How do two people learn that they share an ethnic origin? In what circumstances does shared ethnic origin influence conduct? Are the signs of ethnic origin compounded with signs of other differences? What do they signify to outsiders?

One sign of ethnic origin is a personal name. In the western highlands of Scotland, the Campbells and Macdonalds at one time regarded one another as hereditary enemies, but if today a Campbell and a Macdonald were to meet in a foreign country they might treat their names as signs of a shared national identity. Back in Scotland, their names might be a basis for joking about the historical grounds they have for mistrusting one another. In some parts of Africa facial scarification serves as a sign of ethnic identity. Similarity of skin colour has a similar significance and is often taken to indicate shared racial identity. When there is no outward sign it is often only in personal conversation that two people discover that they share an ethnic origin, and only occasionally do people explore such possibilities. What influence shared origin has upon conduct depends upon how unusual it is, upon the parties' other relations, and upon whether it is seen as a basis for cooperation.

Costume also serves as a social sign. The Sikh turban and the Jewish *yarmulka* are signs both of ethnic origin and of faith. When Muslims and Christians display symbols of their faith these may have ethnic as well as religious significance. Skin colour, and other phenotypical differences like crinkly hair and eye colour, may lead persons to be assigned to racial categories by outsiders and be a basis for the forming of bonds among those who are affected by such assignments. These are the considerations which structure everyday interaction. It is the attempt to account for them that has led to the invention of the concept of ethnic relations.

A prime stimulus to collective action is the sense of opposition to another group. Humans grow up in groups without being conscious of this until they come into contact with members of other groups. The nature of the contact influences the kinds of category and group that result. These processes were first analyzed in studies of migration to employment in the copper-mining towns of Zambia conducted by social anthropologists (summarized in Banton, 1967: 236-240). Their arguments have been generalized to show how identity construction is influenced by whether the opposed reference group is positive or negative, and internal or external to the political unit (Petersoo, 2007). Sentiments of opposition to another set of persons can inspire the recognition of shared interests and aspirations, resulting in a process of ethnogenesis.

Such a set of assumptions would form part of the core theory. However, much of the sociology of ethnic relations (and even more of the politics of ethnic relations) is concerned with particular societies and with variations between societies. Just as different individuals have different motivations for joining in collective action, so societies differ in the degree to which they inculcate desires for individual achievement and for group approval. Life is organized around different institutions.

The core theory and the regional studies can be inter-related in the course of research. It is important to be able to explain why, in particular settings, individuals align themselves with co-ethnics rather than with persons with whom they share some other characteristic, and how co-ethnics are identified. A study of relations in a region of the Russian Federation, Bashkortostan, has provided a striking example of how ethnic identifications can respond to circumstances. In the Czarist era it was to a person's advantage to be counted as a Bashkir. This changed with the Communist revolution and the introduction of a system of ethnic republics with privileges for the members of the titular ethnic group and internal passports that registered membership of an ethnic group chosen from a list of recognised groups. In the part of Bashkortostan adjacent to Tatarstan the percentage of persons recorded as Bashkirs fell substantially after the revolution and the percentage recorded as Tatars rose until the 1970s when Tatar-speakers came under pressure to identify as Bashkir. In 1989 the Gorbachov reforms eliminated ethnic privileges. Tatars who had identified as Bashkirs switched back. Most of the changes were in public ethnic labels rather than in behaviour or social relations (Gorenburg, 1999). In neighbouring Tatarstan there has been, since the early 1990s, an ethnic mobilization movement manifested in the establishment of elite schools that use Tatar as the medium for teaching and cultivate a Tatar identity and culture (Alvarez Veinguer and Davis, 2007). These

examples show how alignments can change when ethnic groups control particular institutions and influence the alternatives made available in governmentally administered structures.

In Western industrial cities the alternatives are different. A prime objective of public policy in European and North American countries in recent times has been the reduction of inequalities associated with social categories. The measures adopted have been only partially successful because some economic and political forces have exerted a contrary effect. One of these is the intensification of competition between and within countries. Competition can change categories into groups, making individuals more conscious of whatever differentiates them. In the longer term, competition on an individual basis reduces the salience of the signs of category membership by increasing the attention paid to the other attributes of competitors.

It is not difficult to interpret social alignments after the event and easy to overlook the circumstances in which individuals fail to combine in the pursuit of shared interests. For example, it is often observed that although humans have a shared interest in the protection of their environment, it can be difficult to mobilize them to organise for effective environmental protection. One of the central tasks of the social sciences is to account for the occurrence and absence of collective action.

## Migration

Weber's association of the formation of ethnic groups with 'memories of colonization and migration' was a recognition that it is within the Western experience of transnational migration – particularly of migration to the USA – that the concepts of an ethnic group and of secondary ethnicity were created.

Much knowledge has been built up about who migrates, why, to which destinations, and how. Much depends upon the point of entry into the receiving society's scale of socio-economic status. In the days of the European empires, the colonial administrator entered a receiving society near the top of the scale. He (for they were mostly male) was expected to change only enough to do the job for which he had been sent. The same applies to the representative of the transnational enterprise. Those who enter at the bottom of the receiving society's socio-economic structure have to change most if they are to progress towards their objectives. Immigrants have to observe the laws of the receiving society, and these may be very different from those of the society from which they have come. They may have to master sufficient of the receiving society's language to obtain employment or to qualify for a driving license. These are changes in the direction towards conformity with majority ways and the speed of change is greatest in the spheres important to making a living.

Socio-economic status is represented spatially as well as by statistics of occupation and wealth. Within industrial societies there are almost always distinctive localities where the rich, the middle-income earners, and the poor form distinct communities. Children attend

neighbourhood schools together with other pupils from social backgrounds similar to their own. Most of their parents' contacts, in both their workplaces and their neighbourhoods, are with people similar to themselves in status. If immigrants enter near the bottom of the scale, this, and any concentration of residence in particular localities, decides whom they meet among the native population and their children's chances of social advancement. The sociology of ethnic relations then overlaps with the geography of ethnic relations.

The changes in relations between the generations of settlement in the USA prior to World War II were analyzed in a classic series of studies. Most of the immigrants into that country in the nineteenth and early twentieth century brought with them the norms of a patriarchal family structure adapted to life in a relatively simple agrarian economy. They came to a society in which family groups were no longer self-sufficient, co-operative, production units. The children no longer worked with their parents; they went off to school where they were taught in a new language how they should behave in the United States. They were taught, by their peer groups if not by their teachers, norms of conduct incompatible with those cherished by their parents. Indeed, their parents might have to consult them about the American way of doing things. The authority structure of the family was turned upside-down. The children often felt that they had to combat parental expectations. This generated emotional stresses encapsulated in the proposition, known as Hansen's law, that what the second generation wishes to forget, the third generation wishes to remember.

Immigrant settlement in European countries after World War II has contrasted with that in the USA prior to World War I with respect to the power relations between the sending and receiving societies. Improvements in communication mean that potential migrants learn more about opportunities for employment in different countries and can choose between potential destinations. Improved transport and new technology has made it much easier for immigrants to remain in touch with their countries of origin. They may watch television transmissions from these countries, pay return visits, play a part in homeland politics, and influence their new country's policies in respect of their homelands. For the earlier immigrants to the USA there was no alternative future as attractive as that of Americanization, but for many groups in the new century there is the possibility of belonging to a transnational community, and being part of a diaspora. In these new circumstances, immigrants and their descendants are under less pressure to adopt the customs of members of the majority population.

Power relations have also changed in that the governments of sending countries have an interest in migrant remittances and through their consular and diplomatic services are able to help their nationals much more than in the earlier period. Political disputes in other parts of the world sometimes influence elections in the receiving societies. The rights of minorities and non-citizens have been specified in international law and institutions have been created, on both the international and regional levels, to monitor the protection of these rights. The UN human rights treaties are complemented by the European Convention on Human Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights, the



African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, and plans for a comparable convention for the Asia-Pacific region.

Most studies prior to World War II showed how minorities came to conform to the norms of the ethnic majority. The change in the power relations between sending and receiving societies has meant that more minority individuals in European countries now either persist in reconstructing homeland institutions or react against pressure from the majority by increasing their distinctiveness, notably by emphasizing distinctive religious beliefs and practices. The existence of an alternative future given substance by distinctive institutions increases tensions within immigrant families. In Britain these have been most serious within families of South Asian origin (e.g., those from Mirpur in northern Pakistan) when young women have adopted some of the gender norms of the receiving society. Some bridegrooms brought from the homeland, themselves faced with major strains of readjustment, have insisted on homeland norms and the conflicts have often been acute.

Reacting to immigration, ethnic majorities also change, with variations from one sphere to another, in both direction and speed. Reactions in the political sphere can decide what happens in other spheres. The entry of immigrant workers is perceived as advantageous by employers and as a source of illegitimate competition by workers in the occupations most affected. It is easiest for immigrants to obtain work in those sectors in which the native workers have least power to exclude them, and in those in which individual talent is most evident, as in entertainment, sports, catering, etc.

The ability of the natives to restrict the immigration of competitors or, if they have been admitted, their employment, can depend upon the strength of any feeling that the immigrants are 'other', 'not our kind'; this is sometimes called alterity. Ethnocentrism, which is commonly measured by scales of social distance, is one form of it. Discourse analysis has shown how sentiments of alterity can be sustained and transmitted by the use of distinctive expressions to refer to those assigned to other social categories. Comparative studies usually demonstrate diminutions over time in the distance expressed by members of the ethnic majority towards members of different minorities. The use of distance scales and other measures of attitudes has uncovered variations in hostility associated with downward mobility and personality characteristics. The reduction in social distance is exemplified in rates of intermarriage, while the opposition between ethnic minorities and the ethnic majority is blunted by the growth in the number of persons who have parents or ancestors both in the ethnic majority and in one or more minorities. They may exercise any freedom to choose with which line of descent to identify themselves, or they may insist on acknowledging more than one line of ancestry. They may also reconcile any differences in the gender norms of the majority and a minority.

Ethnocentrism can take various forms. Hostility towards others is strongest when it draws upon racist or nationalist doctrines or imagery. In the mid-nineteenth century some anthropologists maintained that the unequal economic development of the peoples of the world was caused by differences in their biological inheritance: the differences between

the populations originating in different world regions were thought to demonstrate the permanence of racial types. To some, 'race' appeared to be the key to human history so they classified ethnic groups as races. There was a process of racialization that magnified the differences and provided an excuse for policies of repression and extermination. After World War II an international counter movement (exemplified in the UNESCO statements of 1950 and subsequent years) inspired an effective political and educational campaign that stigmatized as 'racist' any expressions of such doctrines. Displays of ethnocentrism have often been described as expressions of racism, and in this way an important distinction has been elided. Sociological usage should be stricter than popular parlance and should stipulate that only when there is an explicit reliance upon a doctrine of racial difference does ethnocentrism become racism.

In several countries research has been undertaken to measure and account for variations between ethnic categories in educational attainment, employment and income. Research has demonstrated that social advancement in both the sending and the receiving societies is characterized by the transmission of inequalities from one generation to the next; social mobility has therefore been likened to an inter-generational relay race. There may be relevant differences between sets of immigrants originating in the same country. Those from agricultural regions have usually had less human capital invested in their education and training. They may have been brought up in a culture with relatively low achievement motivation and their occupational skills will probably be less valued in the receiving societies than those of immigrants coming from cities. Some variations in attainment derive from the collective strategies unconsciously adopted by groups. Others are attributable to discriminatory practices on the part of the ethnic majority.

Because of policy concerns, sociologists have continued to focus on changes in ethnic minority populations (as helpfully reviewed in Brubaker, 2001). Roger Waldinger (2007) has maintained that for US researchers the explanation of changes displayed by Mexican-Americans is of central importance. He discusses three hypotheses: segmented assimilation, predicting downward assimilation into an underclass (a hypothesis developed by Alejandro Portes); conventional assimilation, forecasting individualistic mobility into the mainstream (a hypothesis advanced by Richard Alba); and incorporation into the working class (which he considers the most realistic). The challenge to sociologists is to explain differences in attainment within ethnic minorities *and majorities* within the *same* conceptual framework. This must call into question the use of the metaphor of 'integration' as a policy objective. When the governments of receiving societies perceive immigration as occasioning problems of national integration they often imply that it is the immigrant-descended population that has to change. This may be effective as political rhetoric, but before integration can ever become a viable sociological concept it will have to be possible to measure the degree to which *all* individuals, whatever their ethnic origin, are integrated. Emile Durkheim's famous study, measuring the degrees to which various forms of integration protected men and women against suicide, still serves to indicate the magnitude and difficulties of such a task. (It is also a classical example of a study in sociology as distinct from social policy.)



Quantitative studies based upon national censuses and on large-scale surveys in which interviewees assign themselves to categories similar to those used in a census, are an important source of information. Such studies have identified a variety of factors responsible for differential rates of status attainment, both intra- and internationally (e.g., Loury, Modood & Telles, 2005; Selberman, Alba & Fournier, 2007). The focus on comparative attainment conveys an image of sections of the population engaged in a continuing competition for material success, as if everyone were dissatisfied not to have done better. This gives a special slant to the argument, for there are other values in life. It can be as important to account for equilibrium as for change.

The value of most quantitative studies is limited in so far as individuals identify themselves socially in more complex ways than can be comprehended in census-style classifications, even though these are altered from time to time to take account of changes in popular identification. While sociographic studies of the kind carried out by social anthropologists (e.g., Ballard, 1994) are a necessary complement, this does not exhaust the sociological field. The further development of the sociology of ethnic relations will require more studies which bridge the quantitative-qualitative distinction by addressing to samples drawn from the population standardized questions that separate the different dimensions underlying self-assignment to large-scale ethnic categories. Only in this way will it be possible explain why actors sometimes identify socially with those seen as co-ethnics and at other times with class allies or co-religionists.

How people align themselves depends upon their values and the ways in which they interpret the situations with which they are faced. The complexity of values can be illustrated by considering the preferences for skin colour which often enter into conceptions of ethnicity. Some men and women prefer a light complexion, some a dark one. Some may want their children to have a similar colour to their own, whatever that may be. Some may hope that their children will be neither too fair nor too dark, especially in societies where an intermediate complexion is the norm. Some individuals may prize a particular shade; others may give it a zero score. In similar fashion, individuals vary in the significance they attach to their ethnic, status, and other identifications.

Ethnic identification can be important to individuals in some settings (e.g., in political conflicts) and unimportant in others (e.g., those governed by bureaucratic or technical norms). A study of ethnic identification on the part of Creoles, Muslims and Hindus in Mauritius found that it varied between groups, between settings and on the basis of socio-demographic variables (sex, age, education, income). Ethnic identification with respect to political resources (representation, influence) was significant for Hindus but not for Creoles and Muslims. Ethnic identification with respect to economic resources (jobs, housing) was significant for Creoles and Muslims but not for Hindus. One factor affecting the political setting is the 'winner takes all' character of many appointments, so that political resources may be less divisible than economic resources (Hemple & Costello, *forthcoming*).

Because the alternatives with which individuals are faced are so varied, the research worker does well to devise imaginary situations in which values are likely to conflict, and to invent ways of measuring the extent to which individuals trade off the satisfaction gained by realizing one value (e.g., ethnic identification) against that obtained by realizing another (e.g., personal advantage). Thus a study of Malay attitudes towards association with Chinese-Malaysians concluded that inter-group contacts in a suburb of the capital city had reduced the value that metropolitan Malays placed upon own-group association. Research workers have compared the value that Malays and Chinese-Malaysians placed upon association with co-ethnics compared with financial gain, status gain, and personal obligation towards neighbours and workmates (Banton, 2000). Research that measures the relative values attaching to alternative identifications can bridge the gap between the findings of quantitative and qualitative research.

Interaction between ethnic minorities and majorities changes both parties. Some groups coalesce, others divide. The speed and direction of change reflects changes in values. Some of these may be the result of legislative action (exemplified by the effectiveness of the legislation against racial discrimination). Some may be due to shared experience and greater personal acquaintance with persons of different background (and here social psychologists have stressed the significance of equal-status contacts and the disposition of individuals to conform to what they believe to be the norms of their peers). Some may stem from changes within families (as parents learn from their children's experience and conclude that norms have changed). The influence of the mass media can also account for the reinforcement or change of social norms. Such possibilities constitute an agenda for new research.

Much has been learned about the rates at which inequalities between ethnic categories within states are reduced, and there are some data enabling comparisons between the relative attainments in different states of migrants from the same region of origin. Sociologists have a rough understanding of the causal connections, but much remains to be discovered about them. More systematic knowledge about the ways in which mutually reinforcing values underlie social institutions might help explain why some relations (such as those between blacks and whites in the USA, between the ethnic majority in Japan and the Burakumin, and between Roma and non-Roma in parts of Europe) change more slowly than the relations between some other majorities and minorities.

**Conclusion**

The growth of knowledge is facilitated if research workers have a conception of their field of study such that they can spot gaps, weak connections, and questionable explanations. If new findings can be fitted into an overall scheme, it becomes easier to assess their significance. This essay has claimed that Weber's analysis of the use of available means to attain changing ends can still inspire the construction of such a scheme, indicating what remains to be done if it is to be filled out, and helping to locate the sociology of ethnic relations within the wider sociological enterprise.

Suitably extended, Weber's approach provides the microfoundations constituting the core theory of the sociology of ethnic relations. Major difficulties are posed by the variations in the form that ethnic relations take in different world regions, but if these forms are analysed in the terms of the core theory, lessons learned in one locality may be applied in other localities.

### Note

1. Colours (like black and white) may be used as proper names for social categories that can, in some circumstances, become groups.
2. In some world regions (parts of Africa, India and Russia) the linguistic and religious dimensions may be more important than they have been in European and North American cities. How the sociology of ethnic relations will develop in China cannot yet be foreseen. Globally, the sociology of ethnic relations may be absorbed into a broader sociology of collective action.

### References

- ALVAREZ VEINIGUER, AURORA, and DAVIS, HOWARD M., 2007 'Building a Tatar Elite: language and national schooling in Kazan', *Ethnicities*, 7(2):186-207.
- BALLARD, ROGER, (ed.) 1994 *Desh Pardesh. The South Asian Presence in Britain*. London: Hurst.
- BANTON, MICHAEL, 1967 *Race Relations*. London: Tavistock.
- 1983 *Racial and Ethnic Competition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (reprinted, Aldershot: Gregg Revivals).
- 2000 'Ethnic Conflict', *Sociology*, 34(3):481-98.
- 2007 'Max Weber on 'Ethnic Communities': a critique', *Nations and Nationalism*, 13(1):19-35.
- BRUBAKER, ROGERS, 2001 'The Return of Assimilation? Changing perspectives on immigration and its sequels in France, Germany and the United States' *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 24(4):531-548.
- DURKHEIM, EMILE, 1897/1952 *Suicide. A Study in Sociology*. English translation. London: Routledge.

1  
2  
3  
4 GORENBURG, DIMITRY, 1999 'Identity Change in Bashkortostan: Tatars into  
5 Bashkirs and back', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 22(3):554-580.  
6  
7  
8 HEMPLE, LYNN, & COSTELLO, HUMPHREY, 'Power, Wealth and Common  
9 Identity. Access to Resources and Ethnic Identification in a Plural Society'  
10 *forthcoming in Ethnic and Racial Studies*.  
11  
12 LOURY, GLENN C., MODOOD, TARIQ, & TELES, STEVEN M., (eds.) 2005  
13 *Ethnicity, Social Mobility and Public Policy. Comparing the US and the UK*.  
14 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.  
15  
16  
17 PETERSOO, PILLE, 2007 'Reconsidering Otherness: constructing Estonian identity'  
18 *Nations and Nationalism*, 13(1):117-133.  
19  
20  
21 SELBERMAN, ROXANNE, ALBA, RICHARD, & FOURNIER, IRENE, 2007  
22 'Segmented Assimilation in France? Discrimination in the labour market against  
23 the second generation', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30(1):1-27.  
24  
25  
26 WALDINGER, ROGER, LIM, NELSON, & CORT, DAVOD, 2007 'Bad Jobs, Good  
27 Jobs, No Jobs? The Employment Experience of the Mexican American Second  
28 Generation', *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33(1):1-35.  
29  
30  
31 WEBER, MAX, 1968 *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Edited  
32 by Guenther Roth & Claus Wittich. New York: Bedminster.  
33  
34  
35  
36  
37  
38  
39  
40  
41  
42  
43  
44  
45  
46  
47  
48  
49  
50  
51  
52  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60