

**Scattered Seeds: The Theoretical Roots of Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity**

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12/2004

The concept of ethnic identity is more than the sum of its parts. The term 'ethnicity' finds its roots in the Greek word *ethnos*, meaning people, multitude, or nation. Identity is defined as "the set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group." (American Heritage 2002) Yet the general notion of ethnicity as belonging to a group, people or nation one affiliates with according to specific characteristics is where the agreement ends, and the debate begins.

There is no one way to define ethnicity, as illustrated by the debate on how best to do so, which has spanned nearly two centuries and four social sciences. Yet hardly has understanding the nature and processes of ethnic identity been more important than in today's world. Ethnicity has emerged as one of the most powerful forces for social change, as a means for tremendous celebration, as well as horrendous conflict. In response to the increasing relevance of ethnicity to world politics, ethnicity has become a central focus for scholars seek to explain the phenomenon.

It is fitting that a topic as emotional and illusive as ethnicity has invoked such uniquely poignant and personal debates from its scholars. Views on the nature of ethnicity seem to closely parallel personal views of human nature, mankind and his motivations. Consequently, there seems to be among many scholars the propensity affix a sort of personal priority to their theories, a practice that is a likely contributor to such lively debates. Scholastically, with such a vast array of social scientists attempting to best describe a singular topic, theories have the tendency to be viewed as representative of the overall integrity of the social science from whence they emerged. Given these considerations, it is hardly a surprise that ethnic studies would never suffer from a lack of differing opinions.

This work will document the predominant theories and approaches to ethnic identity, paying particular attention to the relationships between race, nationalism, and ethnicity. As will be demonstrated, treating ethnicity with an inclusive, rather than an exclusive approach is instrumental in identifying and understanding the many contributing factors to the contemporary, multi-faceted notion of ethnicity we know today. This work does not, however, attempt a comprehensive literature review on ethnicity, as it has been noted that such a "literature review would require far more text than readers, not to mention journal editors, would want to stomach." (Hale 2003: 4)

The first section will present different conceptualizations of ethnicity and ethnic identity, as well as ethnicity as it relates to both race and nationality. The second section will contrast various viewpoints on ethnicity as they fall into two general schools of thought, namely primordialism and instrumentalism. The conclusion will be brief discussion of the implications different theories have on the capacity for ethnic identity change, as well as relevance to contemporary studies and world affairs.

It is important to briefly introduce the two schools of thought, as they quickly become recurring themes within the theory and literature, even that dealing with race and nationality. The varying approaches and theories on ethnicity can effectively be categorized into two schools: primordialism and instrumentalism (though it has been referred to as constructivism, circumstantialism, or perennialism.) (Hale 2003) Primordialists stress the determinant quality of the blood, language, and culture into which an individual is born as the factors that make up the powerful, seemingly biological ties that bind them to ethnic groups. Despite the different terms of constructivism, circumstantialism etc., what distinguishes the instrumentalist school of

thought is the treatment of ethnicity as a socially constructed phenomenon. Individuals or groups, based on different motivating factors (instrumentalism), categorize themselves according to certain characteristics. Specific attention will be placed to the degree to which scholars who are considered of the same school differ in views. As Hale aptly observed in his article, *Explaining Ethnicity*, " It is somewhat ironic that scholars so sensitive to nuance in the behavior of their "ethnic" subjects should so readily endorse these labels, which in many cases reduce to gross oversimplifications of the works discussed." (Hale 2003)

Central to this work will be the utilization of the Oxford Ethnicity Reader, not only for much of the literature that will be discussed, but also for framework, which will be used in determining the order of topics. (Hutchinson and Smith 1996) It is a highly relevant and competent work in its ability to present the widely disputed notion of ethnicity in the modern age. The format is most effective, as it is a collection of relevant sections of larger works of the most predominant scholars in ethnicity studies. The editors effectively create a roundtable format, which permits scholars to make their case in their own words. The room allowed for debate within *Ethnicity* has both its strengths and weaknesses. Certain exchanges, such as those between Eller and Grosby seem so preoccupied with personal vendettas so as to obscure the points. Such exchanges, however, typify the ongoing deliberation on ethnicity, and serve to capture the vibrant spirit of disagreement surrounding the topic.

The ethnic group can best be summarized by Schermerhorn, as quoted in Smith & Hutchinson (1996):

"An ethnic group is defined here as a collectivity within a larger society having real

or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood. Examples of such symbolic elements are: kinship patterns, physical contiguity (as in localism or sectionalism), religious affiliation, language or dialect forms, tribal affiliation, nationality, phenotypical features, or any combination of these. A necessary accompaniment is some consciousness of kind among members of the group.

Smith and Hutchinson itemizes Schermerhorn's definition into a list of attributes "habitually exhibited, albeit in varying degrees" of ethnic groups. (Smith and Hutchinson 1996)

1. a common proper name, to identify and express the 'essence' of the community
2. a myth of common ancestry, a myth rather than a fact, a myth that includes the idea of common origin in time and place and that gives an ethnic a sense of fictive kinship, what Horowitz terms a 'super-family' (Horowitz 1985) ethnic groups in conflict
3. shared historical memories, or better, shared memories of a common past or pasts, including heroes, events and their commemoration;
4. one or more elements of common culture, which need not be specified but normally include religion, customs, or language;
5. a *link* with a *homeland*, not necessarily its physical occupation by the *ethnic*, only its symbolic attachment to the ancestral land, as with diaspora peoples;
6. a *sense of solidarity* on the part of at least some sections of the *ethnic's* population

While itemizing the characteristic of what constitutes an ethnic group can be rather straightforward, the concept of ethnicity as it relates to the ethnic group is more difficult to pin down. The notion of ethnicity has been defined in one instance as 'an abstract known meaning what it is you have if you are an 'ethnic group'. (Tonkin 1989) It is thus a rather complicated term, as it deals with the unspoken context of relativities and identification. (Tonkin 1989) The concept of ethnicity has been elaborated upon to actually represent a state of being, doing, and knowing. (Fishman 1980) In this sense, our ethnicity becomes inseparable from what we are, what we do, and how interpret the world. For utility purposes, ethnicity has largely come to be understood as the actualization of the characteristics, the emotion, and the ties that are characteristic of ethnic groups.

Countless definitions intended to illustrate the characteristics of ethnicity also allude to the ways in which it is related to both race and nationalism. The way in which the individual concepts are treated and defined overlap and merge so often that it becomes quite difficult to tell where one begins and the other ends. This can be explained because in many instances, they are essentially one in the same. For this reason, theories on race and nationality will be reviewed in their relation to ethnicity.

Perhaps one reason why ethnicity is often referred to as a "modern term" is because for so long it had been considered synonymous with race. (Eriksen 1993, Smith and Hutchinson 1996) Max Weber is seen as the first to categorize ethnic groups, as they were distinctly separate from race. He recognized that ethnic groups entertained a subjective belief in common descent because of physical or cultural similarities, noting that the belief in common descent superseded the demand for evidence of such. This

definition and summations of ethnic groups become an enduring foundation upon which most modern deviations have originated from. Weber's work with ethnic groups did not venture much further than conceptualization, and ethnic studies remained relatively stagnant until the 60's and 70's.

The work of Omi and Winant in the 90's was focused specifically on challenging the notion that race and ethnicity were one in the same. They argued that theories designed to explain the evolution of ethnic groups, namely the shifting of boundaries, did not apply to race. (Bolaffi 2003) They defined race as 'an autonomous field of social conflict, political organization, and cultural/ideological meaning.' (Omi and Winant 1994: 48) Their claims lack conviction due to the limited scope by which they define race and ethnicity, which is primarily according to the origins of their inequalities in society. Such claims constitute an attempt to shape and define the core concepts by comparing dimensions from the peripheral.

Thomas Eriksen makes a offers a less confrontational interpretation of the distinctions between ethnicity and race in his book *Ethnicity and Nationalism*. (Eriksen 1993) He argues that while the concept of race has grown increasingly 'dubious', ethnicity has become more relevant. This is largely due to the massive interbreeding, that has led to the abandonment of classifying humanity into four main races, as well as made identification based on 'racial' categories utterly impossible. Thus race as a cultural construct remains relevant in modern times primarily inasmuch as it relates to and overlaps with ethnicity. Understanding race, however, is not vital in understanding ethnicity, and has consequently been demoted to a contextual ingredient in ethnic studies. (Eriksen 1993)

Eriksen's work *Ethnicity and Nationalism* has become a popular work on ethnicity largely because of his highly lucid writing ability, as well as his keen sense for making insightful comparisons between the vast array of scholars and theories on ethnicity. His treatment of modern ethnicity theories in their relation to nationalism, race, and class is especially beneficial. He deals particularly with boundaries and their maintenance, paying strict attention to how that relates to anthropology. In this sense his work is marked by a less than subtle agenda to promote social anthropology as the missing ingredient to understanding the misconceptions about ethnicity.

Shifting attention to the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism, Eriksen argues it is quite similar to that of ethnicity and race. Both are socially categorizing groups that stress the important of similarity of its members and specific boundaries. They differ in that nationalism is inherently political, while ethnicity is social. Eriksen argues, however, that ethnicity has the potential to become nationalism, as political leaders often use ethnicity as a tool for political means. In this case, ethnicity is transmuted into nationalism. (Eriksen 1993)

The inseparable nature of nationalism and ethnicity is to a degree represented by the fact that the same two scholars that edited the *Ethnicity Oxford Reader*, Hutchinson and Smith, also edited the *Nationalism Oxford Reader*. Nationalism and ethnicity not only share a central theme of common descent, but are also referred to in terms of the potential for powerful influence on individuals and groups as a result. Nationalism represents loyalty to the nation. The term nation has its origins in the Latin verb *nasci*, meaning to 'be born.' (Connor 2002: 25) The biological subtleties of its origin seem to intrinsically link nationalism and ethnicity. Theorists on nationalism tend to fall into two

schools: modernists – who consider the nation a modern phenomenon - and perennialists - who argue the longevity and history of ethnic and national ties, despite their changing forms and application in the modern era. Each is unique in their treatment of nationalism, of its origins, and how it relates to ethnicity.

Connor is most respected for the prescient nature of his essays, which span the course of 25 years, and remain unrivaled in their persistent relevance to current world affairs. He is also well known for his clear conceptualizations. If there is one thing that rubs Walker Connor the wrong way, it has been the flagrant, and repetitive misuse of the terms nation, state, and ethnicity among scholars in the field of international relations. International relations, he claims, is "plagued by improper utilization of key terms." (Connor 1994) His work, *Ethnonationalism*, sets the conceptual record straight as to what nationalism, ethnicity, and the state really are. He seems particularly perturbed by the common misuse of the terms state and nation, the relationship between which is usefully clarified by the difference between nationalism and patriotism. Whereas nationalism is loyalty to the nation, patriotism is loyalty to the state. As such they can be, and often are, in opposition to each other. The evidence of such is in the thousands of ethno-national groups in the world despite fewer than 200 states. (Connor 1994)

The powerful relationship between ethnicity and nationalism, according to Connor, justifies their union in the term ethno-nationalism. "Nationalism is ethnically predicated," as nation is a self-differentiating, self-perceived group commonly based along ethnic elements of common origin and myths. (Connor 1994) Like Weber, Connor argues that the reality of the relation is not as important as the perception thereof. Connor asserts that the power of nationalism originates from the strong emotional bonds

of ethnicity, and that the true nation state is virtually synonymous with an ethnic group. While his common reference to biological, ethnic ties has many convinced he is a primordialist, Connor holds that the biological reality of such ties are at best dubitable, the real power of such ties is the degree to which they are believed. Still, some would argue that the recognition of the biological root of such ties, whether real or perceived, is what separates primordialism from other theories.

While the perception of nationalism is considered of importance to Benedict Anderson, he offers a distinctly different notion of origins of the nation and nationalism in his popular book, *Imagined Communities*. His account is in many respects unique and controversial as it attributes the emergence of the modern nation as a necessary component of industrial society, and as such came about because of the decline of religious monarchies and the development of capitalism, more specifically that the emergence of print laid the foundation for national consciousness. The nation, as defined by Anderson, is an imagined community insomuch that the members will never actually meet each other, yet there persists a significant feeling of deep, horizontal comradeship. (Andersen 1993) The imagination of such a community is comparable to the perception, and its power is illustrated by nationalism, which is an anomaly as it is a phenomenon of perception. Though Anderson's concept of nationalism reverberates with the notion of ethnicity, he does not specifically address the relationship between the two.

Like Anderson, Ernest Gellner argues that the modern nation emerged as the result of functions to meet the demands stemming from the industrial revolution, and those ethnic bonds, though social creations, exhibit a phenomenal emotional persistence. As the industrial revolution and capitalism created the economic need for cultural

homogeneity, the creation of a common past, culture, and language. As the socially constructed "high culture" demands an education and training system, that same subsequent system demands protection from a state.

Gellner's defines nationalism as "a political principle which holds that that political and the national unit should be congruent." (Gellner 1983) It should be noted, however, that this definition confines the purposes of nationalism to the acquisition of a state. Inasmuch as he isolates nationalism as a political phenomenon, Gellner fails to explain the deep passions aroused by nationalist agendas, which is most likely because of his functionalist approach to its creation and purpose. As this work would highlight, the failure of Gellner to properly equate ethnicity into his functionalist explanation of nationalism is the reason he fails to account for those passions.

Anthony D. Smith argues takes a perennialist approach to explaining the nation and nationalism, as he is willing to admit the "antiquity of collective cultural ties and sentiments," but clarifies that such a claim "falls well short of any presumption that such ties are universal." (Smith 1991: 12) The very attributes that define a nation - territory, common myths, historical memories, and common culture are ethnically based, and indeed codify the powerful bonds felt both within ethnic groups and nations. In this respect his view of the nation stands in sharp contrast to Anderson and Gellner, and more in line with Connor when he claims that nationalism cannot be explained as a 'mere invention,' and that the core of the nation is as much described by ethnicity than anything else. Smith also builds upon Connor's distinction between patriotism and nationalism by clarifying that the former means the love of territorial state, while the latter is the love of the ethnic nation.

Smith asserts that the key to understanding the complexity of the nation is in its unique ability of the nation to draw upon other facets of collective identity, such as class, religion, or ethnicity. This ability makes the concept of the nation abstract, multidimensional, and independent of ethnic groups, or the state. He also avoids linking nationalism as having any ideological link to the state, and dismisses the Gellnerian notion that nationalist movements are in any way preoccupied with the "acquisition of the state for its nation." (Smith 1991: 71) An important element of nationalism, argues Smith, is the language of symbols that serve as the "most potent and durable aspects of nationalism." (Smith 1991: 77) Inasmuch as the nation is at its core based on ethnicity, the phenomenon of "ethno-symbolism" represents the powerful ethnic current that runs through the concept of the nation and nationalism.

The interrelatedness of ethnicity and nationalism have caused some to question whether the two can be clearly and distinctly conceptualized. Diane Conversi argues that while the topics are so closely related, and should be studied together, a new approach is needed to conceptually clarify between the ideas. She questions how much politics can be removed from the notion of ethnicity, and what bearing that has on the working definitions of nationalism. Much of the problem exists in scholars' attempts to categorize the different phenomena, in which 'we end up constructing exclusivist categories while erecting our own boundaries.' (Conversi 2004: 86) In the study of Ethnicity and nationalism, Conversi promotes the application of two approaches; the 'emic', which is the perspective of the insider, and 'etic', which is the perspective of the outsider, or researcher. In the application of more 'etic' studies, Conversi feels that the existing confusion over conceptual definitions can be avoided.

One method used to distinguish between different theorists of nationalism and ethnicity has been their acknowledgement of what are termed primordial ties. Primordialism is not only the most controversial approach to ethnic studies, but is the most commonly misunderstood and misrepresented. In essence, primordialism seeks to explain the strength of ethnic bonds in relation to powerful influence ties of common blood, culture, and community have on mankind. While primordialism is one of the earlier schools of study on ethnicity, it remains the area of theory that fittingly evokes the heartiest debate. What is most interesting about primordialism is its unique inclusion of biology, in various degrees, into a concept that many feel can only be explained using behavioral, or psychological theories.

Interestingly, Clifford Geertz, who is the most frequently referenced source of primordialism, consistently deferred the credit for his ideas to Edward Shils. While much of Shils introduction and treatment of primordial ties were reiterated by Geertz, those ideas were reiterated and reinforced throughout Geertz's works. Consequently, Geertz is more noteworthy in his distinct and original piece 'The Integrative Revolution' (Geertz 1963) which, in efforts to describe sources of political and social stability in 'new states,' ventured into the uncharted territory of primordial ties that bind mankind.

According to Geertz, identity is acquired at birth, as it stems from the circumstance to which an individual is born, and are thus permanent and unchangeable. In a frequently cited passage Geertz elaborates on what is meant by the term 'primordial':

"By a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the 'givens' of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community,

speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices. These congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves. One is bound to one's kinsman, one's neighbor, one's fellow believer, ipso facto; as the result not merely of personal affection, practical necessity, common interest, or incurred obligation, but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute import attributed to the very tie itself. The general strength of such primordial bonds, and the types of them that are important, differ from person to person, from society to society, and from time to time. But for virtually every person, in every society, at almost all times, some attachments seem to flow more from a sense of natural affinity than from social interaction. (Geertz 1996)

Geertz adds three additional dimensions to primordial ties that are worth mentioning. First is that they are not tangible, or "for the most part a matter of calculation," meaning that they are acted out by an individual without their knowing. (Fenton 2003: 82) Secondly, the depth of feeling with which one feels primordial ties are "not easily renounced or evaded." (Fenton 2003: 82) Lastly, the importance Geertz attaches to the tie itself, 'because a certain ineffable significance is attributed to the tie of blood.' (Geertz 1993)

In a most infamous and inflammatory rebuttal of the Geertzian account of primordialism, Eller and Coughlin renounced the notion of primordialism and its claims as "theoretically vacuous and empirically indefensible." (Eller and Coughlan 1993) In quite strong speech, they present and refute the basic assumptions as asserted by primordialism. Their objections deal with the insufficiency of assigning ethnic ties to

'given' conditions ascribed at birth in light of recent works that have 'adequately' proven ethnicity to be a social construction. They also contest the 'ineffable' quality of primordialism, which means 'incapable of being expressed in words.' (Eller and Coughlan 1996) They condescendingly add that 'sociologists ought not to be satisfied with this layman's view of the world.' (Eller and Coughlan 1996) Lastly, thought not the least, they accuse primordialism of inflating the nature of the ties they speak of to include all that is deemed 'emotional.'

In a manner befitting a debate on ethnicity, it becomes rather obvious that Coughlan and Eller let emotion get the best of them, a weakness that undermines the legitimacy of their argument against primordialism as the reader gets a distinct flavor of personal vendetta. At times the reader is apt to wonder whether A& C are more convinced in the falsity of primordialism as much as they are personally offended that Geertz would have the audacity to proffer such a theory with so little by way of substantiation. Their argument does touch on several predominant critiques with primordialism, centrally that it is 'invented or elaborated in order to explicate a dimension of 'ethnicity'.' (Fenton 2003) To their discredit, however, they fail to see primordialism in the context as was intended by Geertz. Ironically, a reading of E & C's critique can prove inversely informative as they outline the main arguments of primordialism in a manner that is arguably clearer and more coherent than Geertz himself.

The most ardent of primordialists is Pierre van den Berghe, whose sociobiological theory claims that human sociability and cooperation can be explained by the mechanism of kin selection. Fenton aptly summarized van den Berghe's theory, "the inclination to act in the interest of one's ethnic group is a manifestation of natural

investment that the individual has in group preservation." (Fenton 2003: 181) Central to his notion is the individual's intrinsic tendency to favor relatives over non relatives and their kin over other kin, helping your near kin is not altruism, but a form of "genetic egotism." In this van den Berghe is profoundly distinct in his reliance upon a biological for primordialism.

The most common problem found with van den Berghe's claim is the implicit demands on clear and concise group boundaries needed in order for an individual to act in favor of. In response, van den Berghe highlights the modern emphasis on culture as interbreeding has made it even more difficult to distinguish one's own group. Thus ethnicity takes preeminence in relation to the biological nepotism, as it becomes a mechanism utilized to elucidate the differentiating characteristics of man from his neighbor. In this regard van den Berghe emphasizes that inasmuch as ethnicity must be believed to work it must correlate with already existing and accepted population bound by common historical experience.

Modern research by Os0s stands in stark contrast to van den Berghe's claims on biological nepotism. The research attempted to discover whether or not ethnic favoritism is indeed based on genetic factors, or based predominantly on 'pragmatic considerations.' Hypothetical scenarios were presented to various respondents who then decided whether in such an instance they would favor members of their own, self-defined ethnic group. The previous decision was made under the consideration of the conditions whereby: 1. there was no cost or risk to the subject whatever the choice 2. there was a minimal cost or risk to the subject if his or her own ethnic group was favored or 3. there was a substantial cost or risk to the subject if his or her own ethnic group was favored. They

also extend their analysis of ethnocentric vs. pragmatic motives to several ethnic conflicts, including the former Yugoslavia. Their evidence found that 'human group alliances' were fundamentally pragmatic, rather than ethnocentric, and that 'ethnocentric attitudes are outcomes rather than antecedents of group conflict.' ( pgl. 404)

In general, the primordial perspective has slowly declined in significance, despite gaining the attention of some recent works, including *The Case for Primordialism*. (Stack 1986) The book is introduced and edited by John F. Stack Jr. who argues that 'the concept of primordial attachments ... is a useful perspective from which to analyze the dynamics of ethnicity throughout the world.'" (Stack 1986) While Stack's argument on the relevance of primordialism in the modern world, the book on a whole reflects the notion as observed by Hale that "primordialists rarely adhere so strictly to such tenets as their scholarly rivals often assume." (Hale 2003) The content varies immensely in its treatment of primordialism, at times causing reflection on the relevance of their inclusion in a book named such.

The way that primordialism confines ethnicity to such rigid criteria and behavior is the most common arguments used to refute its claims. Sandra Joirman, in her book *Nationalism and Political Identity* describes the three main arguments against primorialism. (Joireman 2001) The first is that primordialists have distanced themselves from too close an association much with blood ties because of their controversial nature. However, blood ties are actually the strength and heart of their claims. Secondly, the unchangeable nature of ethnicity as presented by primordilaists has been well established to be a false notion. An individual can be born into one ethnic group and choose another, experience varying degrees of ethnicity, or identify with multiple ethnic groups. None of

these circumstances are adequately dealt with by primordialism. As argued by Eller and Coughlan, the ineffability of primordialism makes the differentiating of whether primordial ties are actually primordial highly controversial and will likely remain a subject open to debate.

While primordialists argue for the deeply rooted emotion that make ethnic ties so distinct, instrumentalists fall at the other side of the spectrum, arguing that ethnic bonds originate from economic, situational, or functional purposes. Instrumentalism has been referred to as constructivism, circumstantialism, yet the latter two terms emerge more clearly as derivations of the inclusive school of instrumentalism. Though they differ considerably in their explanation for the emergence of ethnic groups, instrumentalists, like modernists (Anderson 1991, Gellner 1994) highlight the phenomenon of ethnicity as a social construction. From this beginning the various instrumentalism theorists delve further and further away from the notion of primordial ties to the point where ethnicity is argued as simply a political tool.

Donald Horowitz does recognize the strength of ethnic ties, but refers to explanation of ethnicity and ethnic groups as 'inappropriate.' (Horowitz 1975) Horowitz stresses the complicated manner by which ethnic groups distinguish themselves as indicative of their highly contextual nature. He differentiates between the criteria and indicia of ethnicity. Ethnic groups are defined using criteria 'on which judgments of *collective* likeness and unlikeness are based,' whereas indicia 'on which ready judgments of *individual* membership are made.' (Horowitz 1975: 119 emphases added) Though distinct in their own right, both the criteria and indicia of ethnicity are generally based on symbols that come to represent the group.

Similarly, Fredrick Barth stresses the significance of ethnic group boundaries, and the vital influence interaction with other ethnic groups play on those boundaries. He offers a criticism of the study of ethnicity as it has proven in actuality the study of culture. He clarifies what he means by ethnic groups as having four consistent characteristics;

1. they are largely biological and self-perpetuating
2. share fundamental cultural values overt unity in cultural forms
3. make up a field of communication and interaction
4. a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others as distinct.

In essence, to Barth, ethnicity is the putting of borders between individuals and groups according to self-defined terms. He further differentiates himself by noting that the groups are formed specifically to achieve political and economic purposes. The terms used to define the group are those that are viewed as significant to the group. In some instances radical differences are ignored, while other times the smallest differences determine who is in and who is out. There is no way to predict which factors will become the determinants to a group; in this sense ethnic groups are extremely contextual. The culture and history that so many other theorists emphasize are simply mechanisms for boundary maintenance.

Central to the reinforcement and maintenance of borders is also the interaction ethnic groups have with each other. This phenomenon, Barth argues, is in actuality the pure study of ethnic groups, and not the cultural content that simply denote the group. Interaction with other groups serve to further refine the criteria for membership in a specific group, while also serving to increase group cohesion, whereas exposure to other

groups serves as a reminder of why they do not want to be a part of that group.

Despite his insistence of ethnic boundaries as social creations, his treatment of the factors involved in changing one's ethnic identity reveals a rather unpredictable rigidity of those boundaries. According to Barth, the situation in which one could change one's ethnicity is a difficult and complicated one, which requires that two conditions be met: the cultural mechanisms to implement such an incorporation, and the incentive or obvious advantage to the 'assimilating household and leader.' (Barth 1969: 22) In using the examples east Asia and India used in the validation of such claims, a weakness of Barth's work is revealed, which is the over-utilization of certain examples that prove his points, but lack in overall applicability and generalization. In this sense Barth is often considered a primordialists, and draws critique from many theorists whose ideas, though quite similar in essence, reject the notion of ethnic identity as an 'imperitive status.' (Eriksen 1993)

Abner Cohen is one such scholar who dismisses the manner in which Barth treats ethnicity as a mandatory as 'primordial', and argues that ethnic groups are actually responses to the need to secure the groups 'symbolic capital' which can be interpreted as resources. Ethnic groups are the result of tribal groups who 'organized themselves politically' to increase the efficacy of their struggle for resources. Thus, according to cohen, 'ethnicity is essentially a political phenomenon, as traditional customs are used only as idioms, and as mechanism for political alignment.' (Cohen 1996) In this sense, ethnicity has become a modern social creation for social purposes and needs to historical or cultural explanation.

Brass takes Cohen's argument makes even further from any recognition of

primordial ties, even referring to ethnicity as a 'strategic instrument' for securing interests. Brass defines ethnicity as "a sense of ethnic identity...consisting of the subjective, symbolic or emblematic use by a group of people...of any aspect of culture...in order to create internal cohesion and differentiate themselves from other groups." (Brass 1991) Ethnicity as so defined is a contingent and changeable status, much like class - it may or may not be articulated in particular contexts. Ethnic groups, however, are creations of elite, who, in competition for political and economic advantage, who are known to utilize, manipulate, distort, and fabricate aspects of existing 'cultural repertoires. Leaders or elites stand to benefit and others to lose from the choices that are made. The treatment, or mistreatment, of these cultural symbols is central to Brass's argument in explaining the purposes and power of ethnic groups in contemporary politics.

Interestingly, the difference between the ways in which varying theories address the possibility of change in ethnic identity is "the most striking divide." (Hale 2003: 5) The notion of change in ethnicity is intrinsically related to the manner by which different theories designate its origins. Primordialism treats ethnicity as an unchangeable assignment of birth, one that has permanent and irreversible designation upon one's ethnic designation. Thus ethnicity is not a decision; rather it is a status that one carries throughout life. Yet instrumentalists refer to ethnicity in terms of its artificiality, meaning an individual has the ability to choose or change ethnic affiliation. Such choices are based largely on circumstances, as individuals choose groups they will be the most beneficial to them.

Barth and Horowitz differentiate the process of ethnic identity change as it relates

to groups and individuals. Group boundaries that make up distinct ethnic groups have been argued are rather fluid, and constantly in flux. (Horowitz 1975) According to Horowitz, ethnic groups are either combined into each other or broken up into smaller groups. The prior is considered the process of assimilation, in which ethnic groups are either amalgamated, where a new group identity is formed, or incorporated, where one group simply gives up their identity in place of the larger group's identity. The latter is the process of differentiation, in which ethnic groups are either divided, where they split into their separate parts, or proliferated, where a new group deviates without affecting the identity of the 'parent group.' (Horowitz 1975)

This work has endeavored to illustrate the vast spectrum of concepts, approaches, and explanations that must be understood in dealing with ethnicity. One of the contributions this work will hopefully make is to present a wide variety of approaches to not only ethnicity, but also to nationalism and race inasmuch as they relate. Special attention has been placed not only on the dimensions of ethnicity and ethnic groups, but more specifically to illustrate the implications of those respective theories on ethnic identity change. It has been illustrated that treatment of ethnic identity change falls on the same fault line between those who assert ethnic ties are primordial, or socially constructed.

Whether one definition of ethnicity will gain universal acceptance is highly unlikely, in regards to the highly personal nature of ethnic identity theories, as well as the different schools of thought who seem to convene on the field of ethnic studies. One recurring theme of the most noted works on ethnicity, as noted by Hale, was the ability (or inability) to source other works in making their claims. (Hale 2003) There is much

room for empirical research, such as that done by (primordial vs. pragmatism) to put these theories to the test. Only then, perhaps, will some of the highly charged debates over ethnicity find some resolution. On second thought, that probably won't ever happen.

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