

The Ethnic Dimension

Michael Banton

International migration affects societies, occasioning concern about their integration or social cohesion. Social science conducted in Europe and North America throws light upon what has been happening. This essay reviews that research from a perspective that has been influenced by experience in the United Kingdom. It is selective, but that may be excused for two reasons. Much of the research in this field has been pioneered in the United States, and in this, as in some other respects, the United Kingdom has often served as a mid-way point, or even an intellectual bridge, between North America and Europe. Moreover, after 1945 immigration into the United Kingdom from outside Europe started earlier than in other countries. The processes that point towards possible 'integration' have advanced further in the United Kingdom than in most other European countries. British experience may therefore foreshadow future developments elsewhere.

From adjective to noun

The adjective *ethnic*, and associated words, came into increased use in the second half of the twentieth century. Responding to a reconsideration of nomenclature in anthropology, a UNESCO committee in 1950 advised that 'it would be better when speaking of human groups to drop the term 'race' altogether and speak of ethnic groups'. In US sociology at the same time, the expression 'ethnic group' was used to identify the cultural distinctiveness associated with the national origin of European immigrants. In 1965 a process was started in the United Nations General Assembly by which all states have been required to prohibit discrimination based upon ethnic or national origin. The UN has advised that when individuals are identified as members of ethnic groups 'such identification shall, if no justification exists to the contrary, be based on self-identification by the individual concerned'. In Britain the law refers to 'ethnic origins' in the plural. This recognizes that an individual may have multiple ethnic origins, so self-identification allows that individual to choose the origin by which he or she is to be identified. Thus the conception of ethnic origin is now clear in law.

Anthropologists had been accustomed to using the expression 'ethnic group' to designate a population that was largely self-perpetuating, that shared cultural values, and was regarded as distinctive by members of other groups. This was challenged in 1969 when some Norwegian anthropologists, commenting on how individuals might move out of and into such groups, introduced the concept of an 'ethnic boundary' (Barth 1969). Six years later an influential collection of essays by American sociologists caused a further reorientation (Glazer & Moynihan 1975). Earlier writers had assumed that ethnicity (or the differentiation of the population according to ethnic origin), would be superseded by class differentiation; yet, contrary to expectation, it was undergoing a revival. Contributors to the volume reoriented attention from use of *ethnic* as an adjective to a focus upon *ethnicity* as a noun. This proved unhelpful.

The problem was to account for a form of social behaviour. The concept of *ethnicity* could be a tool helping to explain that behaviour, i.e., an *explanans*. Instead, *ethnicity* was treated as an *explanandum*, something to be explained. Sociologists debated whether ethnicity as a general phenomenon was an inherent disposition or a product of social circumstances. These discussions evoked a new interest in an untitled and uncompleted draft from 1911 that, after his death, had been found among Max Weber's papers. Weber, it transpired, had at that time been wondering whether there were any universal types of group, and had concluded that if there were, then the ethnic group was not among them. Shortly afterwards he started to pioneer a different approach (Banton 2007). It looks – though this is contentious – as if he had concluded that it might be better to build his sociology, not on types of group, but on the analysis of social relations, beginning with what he called his *Kategorienlehre* (Weber 1968:c).

In everyday life individuals identify themselves and others with nations, classes, families, and so on. They designate these by proper names, like 'the Germans', 'the working class', 'the Schmidts', etc. By the end of the twentieth century some sociologists were trying to reconcile their analytical classifications with these everyday or folk classifications. Like authors in many other fields, they had often failed to distinguish between a *group* and a *grouping*. The word *group* should be reserved for aggregations constituted by the shared or collective self-identifications of individuals. A *grouping*, or category, is one constituted by outsiders who assemble observations, as when they distinguish 'income groups' or 'age groups'.

What sociologists had to say about such matters was reviewed by Siniša Malešević (2004) in a series of chapters about neo-Marxism, functionalism, symbolic interactionism, sociobiology, rational choice theory, elite theory, neo-Weberianism, and what he called anti-foundationalism. Some of these schools had their own sub-divisions. This approach had advantages for the purpose of exposition, but it did not sufficiently emphasize that those classified as exponents of different theories were addressing different *explananda*, and that when they addressed the same *explanandum* they could often agree upon what constituted an explanation. These two weaknesses stemmed from the author's assumption that the *explanandum* must be *ethnicity* as a noun rather than the appropriateness of *ethnic* as an adjective describing a social relation. It runs the risk of reifying the notion of ethnicity.

More recently, Rogers Brubaker (2004:2-3; Brubaker *et al.* 2006:11-12, 329) has maintained that the tendency to take bounded groups as fundamental units of analysis should be superseded by a conception of 'ethnicity without groups'. Yet Brubaker has continued to refer to ethnicity as a noun, discussing 'the way in which ethnicity is enacted, negotiated, and sometimes problematized in everyday interaction'.

An alternative approach, which continues to use *ethnic* as an adjective, regards social relations as multi-dimensional. The first explicit statement to this effect may have been in an article in which I criticised writings that represented ethnic conflicts as a distinct class of conflicts. It was better, I contended, to represent them as conflicts that had an ethnic dimension, maintaining that 'large-scale conflicts are between groups that are distinctive on more than one dimension, and this multidimensionality makes it easier for their

members to act collectively' (Banton 2000:485). It had been noted much earlier that racial and ethnic differences were important when they were associated with other kinds of difference, particularly those that involved competition for resources, so by this time others of my colleagues were thinking along similar lines. For example, when Malešević (2004:141) remarked 'Ethnic groups can simultaneously have features of status, class, caste, estate, etc...' it did not read as if he thought he was stating anything novel, but as simply taking the precaution of reminding his readers of something that should have been obvious to everybody.

The assumption that the study of the social significance of ethnic difference must start from a conception of the ethnic group is an example of methodological collectivism. Nothing illustrates the weakness of this approach better than the situation of persons who wish to acknowledge more than one ethnic origin, especially when this puts them in a position intermediate between what members of the surrounding society regard as two distinct ethnic or racial groups. In some parts of Britain there are people who start from the assumption that there is a white ethnic group and a black ethnic group so that anyone of partly white and partly black ancestry, if not an anomaly, must occupy a marginal status.

It should be possible to construct a sociology that starts instead from the individual of multiple ethnic origins. Before trying to outline such a sociology, it is best to air some preliminary considerations.

Practice and theory

Social relations have a potentially infinite number of dimensions. Some derive from physical characteristics, like those of sex and phenotype, some from cultural characteristics, like language, religion, descent, ethnic and national origin. Anything that influences expected behaviour can be treated as a dimension, though, it should be noted, there is no separate dimension of power. Differences of power can be significant in any dimension.

Whether an influence is to be treated as creating a dimension depends upon the purpose for doing so. In everyday life – which encompasses arguments about social policies – any discussion has to be conducted in ordinary language. By contrast, for scientific research into underlying causes it is necessary to develop and employ technical languages. Thus those involved in social science research may find it meaningful to distinguish dimensions that are of no significance in everyday life, or they may find that they have to construct a quite new vocabulary. For the purposes of law it makes good sense to pair ethnic origin with national origin as a single dimension that only rarely has to be divided. In other circumstances they are split, the adjective *national* being identified with a group or grouping at the level of the state, and the adjective *ethnic* kept for a group or grouping within a state. Yet this is not always the case, for there are circumstances in which *ethnic* identifies a trans-national collectivity.

The reality is that humans often feel a sense of 'we-ness' or solidarity, aligning themselves with those with whom they share interests, frequently interests of multiple kinds, and that sense of belonging is distinguished by a proper name. The social scientist sets out to discover the source and nature of this sense, whether it sustains the local community, the ethnic group, the nation, or, indeed, the region (Corsica, South Tyrol, and Finnmark in arctic Norway, being instances that cannot be unambiguously classed as either national or ethnic). Brubaker (2004:78-82) has argued to similar effect.

It is almost certain that it will not be possible to identify the source and nature of this sense of 'we-ness' without the development of a new vocabulary. As an illustration of the magnitude of the task, I quote the words of a colleague who has written:

'The basic epistemological premise of social anthropology is that to understand Others they must be encountered. If the *sine qua non* of history is engagement with primary sources, the equivalent for anthropology is fieldwork... An anthropologist's claim... is typically... 'I know because *I* was there' (Jenkins 2008:5).

The *I* is italicized as a shorthand way of asserting 'I was there and you were not'. Yet the claim of a social anthropologist, as of any social scientist, is more audacious than this. In the course of fieldwork the anthropologist discovers underlying regularities in the social lives of the peoples studied of which they will be only partially conscious. The anthropologist who studies Ruritanian life hopes to be in a position, eventually, to claim 'I know things about Ruritanian life that even Ruritanians do not know unless they have studied anthropology'. The justifiability of any such claim will be dependent upon the development of a theoretical knowledge different in kind from practical knowledge.

While there may be a basis in the practical vocabulary for differentiating an ethnic and a national dimension to social relations, the theoretical vocabulary has to find concepts that illuminate social alignment as a general phenomenon. Many authors have recognized this distinction between two vocabularies, though they have given them different names, such as folk and analytical, or *emic* and *etic*. Brubaker similarly distinguishes analytical and practical categories. He employs the distinction forcefully when he criticizes the sloppy manner in which some have employed the notion of 'identity'. Writing with a colleague, Brubaker (2004:61) has criticized some attempts to use 'identity' as an analytical concept, suggesting that others too should ask 'what work the concept is supposed to do, and how well it does it'.

What work is Brubaker's concept of ethnicity supposed to do, and how well is that work done? Ethnicity is a folk or *emic* construct, a practical category. It is used in that sense in the observation that 'Ethnicity and nationhood... are performed in public demonstrations, holiday celebrations, commemorations, pilgrimages and rituals such as the singing of the national anthems; and they are enacted in ordinary private interaction' (Brubaker *et al* 2006:359-360). This statement presents the ethnic identification of Hungarian Romanians in Cluj as a product of history; it re-describes events so as to draw attention to ways in which they resemble certain other events, but it explains nothing. The statement does not help explain why ethnic identification in Cluj is not stronger (as in, say, Bosnia) or weaker (as in, say, Friesland). It does not consider whether ethnic identification for Roma

in Transylvania is similar to that for Hungarian Romanians, or, if it is different, why it is different. It does not explain why, in certain circumstances, other identifications trump any ethnic identification.

This last question was addressed in a study of how residents in three immigrant neighbourhoods in Switzerland perceived their environment and the classifications they employed. It was directed by an author, Andreas Wimmer (2004:3), who, like Brubaker and myself, rejected the assumption that ethnic groups were the relevant units of analysis. Wimmer found that ethnic-national groups did not play any central role in their informants' description and understanding of their social world and its transformations. They used a 'scheme of order' to differentiate insiders and outsiders. It was a scale of socio-economic status based on neighbourhood rather than national values. According to this scale, or scheme, it was more important whether the courtyard was kept tidy and the rules of the building followed, than whether a family was black or white or of Swiss or foreign origin. Though ethnic categories were recognised, they were of only secondary significance.

These findings strengthen the conclusion that only when *ethnic* as an adjective is joined with some noun may it be possible to create an analytical or *etic* construct. For example, giving one reason why in Transylvania Hungarian-Romanians are more sensitive than Romanian-Romanians to ethnic categorization and symbols, Brubaker (2006:18) states that speaking Hungarian is more likely than speaking Romanian to indicate ethnic category membership. By joining the adjective *ethnic* to the noun *category membership* an explanation has become possible. Category membership is an *etic* construct.

Without groups

Much current research, for example research into diasporas, samples on the ethnic variable. Therefore it loses contact with people who no longer identify themselves, or are identified, by ethnic characteristics. Nor does it connect with the study of situations that no longer have an ethnic dimension. If an analysis is to be truly 'without groups', it must start from fundamentals.

In the course of their socialization, children learn the social significance of their physical and cultural characteristics. Because of the expectations of others, many children will be obliged to assume ethnic roles. Yet there are circumstances in which they themselves may be able to decide how much significance they will vest in one of their characteristics. An example is given in a recent study of the parenting of children of mixed origin. The authors write:

Lesley and her partner Susan are a lesbian couple. They have had a son by donor, with Lesley as the birth mother... Lesley is white British and Jewish, while Susan is white British and Christian... In the time before [Joseph] went to school we just quite happily celebrated Hanukkah and then Christmas and Passover and then Easter... and that worked really well. And we weren't synagogue-goers or anything like that, or churchgoers. And then when he started school he just said, quite

shocked, 'But Mummy, where are the other Jewish children? Why am I the only one?' So then we found ourselves joining a local synagogue to do something about his Jewish identity, which I didn't feel I needed to do about mine. And he went on to develop a very, very strong sense of himself as a Jewish child, understanding which bits of him are Jewish and which bits aren't. His donor isn't Jewish, but he very strongly identified himself as a Jewish child... he kind of had... a deep sense of identity that he's made himself really. (Caballero, Edwards & Puthussery 2008:50).

Something similar happens with children whose parents are of different colour or ethnic origin. The same authors also report that 'Those parents who were mixing race and ethnicity were often very proud of the physical appearance of their children, regarding them as attractively embodying the best of both sides of their genetic heritage'. These parents, in effect, were encouraging their children to identify themselves as neither black nor white. Whether such children will succeed in getting others to regard them as neither black nor white may depend upon their own determination and upon whether they have classmates in a similar situation to themselves, and, if so, on these children's attitudes. In some circumstances it may be difficult for children to secure recognition as individuals independently of ethnic categories; they may be unable to avoid others' expectation that everyone belongs in some such category¹.

To sort out what is involved, it is best to envisage a situation in which there is no ethnic dimension. In computer-speak, this would be the default condition. It may be one in which all concerned are of the same ethnic origin. Then, when someone like Joseph joins his classmates at school, he is at first regarded as an individual who is peculiar in some respect. That is stage one. If the newcomer identifies himself as Jewish, or Black, or Bengali, or if someone else declares that he is Jewish, or Black, or Bengali, he is allocated a place in a category known by a proper name. That is stage two. Then someone may say that it is a particular kind of category – religious, or racial or ethnic, etc. That is stage three. Implicit in the use of such adjectives is the claim that certain social relations are better understood if they are seen as representatives of a class of relations. It is a claim to explain an observation.

Inter-category relations in such settings are dynamic, because the relative importance of different dimensions is subject to change from one day to the next. The mass media report that an offender has been convicted, that an athlete has won a gold medal or that someone has been commended for a noble action. A photograph of the person is shown on television. Many members of the public will perceive him or her as a representative of an ethnic category. In this way their values are reinforced or revised, though, of course, not everyone interprets the information in the same way.

The sources of longer term changes in relative values are considered later, but it should be noted here that one source of change is the demographic. In situations of immigration, there is likely to be an increase in the number of children of minority origin enrolling in the schools. Often these children will have been born to parents of the same ethnic origin, but as one generation succeeds another, more and more children of mixed ethnic origin

will be born, making it increasingly misleading to represent the population as divided into a finite number of distinctive ethnic groups.

Change in relative values does not, of itself, reduce the significance attributed to perceived ethnic origin, and that varies from one country to another. Elsewhere I have maintained that in some societies differences in skin colour are used to create a *colour line* (in which individuals are divided into distinct social categories of differential entitlement). A colour line draws a boundary, often a relatively hard one. In European societies differences in skin colour are more often used to create a *colour scale* (in which individuals are ranked by socio-economic status with complexion as one of the constituent elements that is taken into account). Any indication that a person is of distinctive ethnic origin may similarly be used, along with other characteristics, to assess a person's status or suitability for some role.

Whether a child in primary school will want to be regarded as Jewish, or Black, or Bengali, will depend upon the value the child ascribes to that attribute. It will reflect the balance of advantages to the child. Possible benefits will include the personal satisfaction obtained, plus, possibly, the benefits of association with others who identify themselves similarly, or are so identified by others. There may also be costs, such as those incurred when individuals set themselves apart from the majority, or those that derive from association with a low status category. It may not be worthwhile trying to test the balance of advantages hypothesis because it is too difficult to measure psychic benefits. To find a good research problem, it would probably be better to try to identify the dimensions to social relations that can trump the ethnic one.

Reference groups

When persons come to settle in a new country, they are judged by the established population from the majority's standpoint. The United Kingdom is a monarchy and most of its residents are subjects of the Queen. France and Germany are republics, and their residents are divided into citizens and non-citizens. The French constitution can recognize no intermediary between the citizen and the state. Citizenship is relatively easily acquired. The German outlook has been governed by a nationality law that defined as Germans all those descended from people who lived on what counted as German soil in 1913. It has been more difficult for those not of this descent to acquire citizenship. Any 'integration' has to be within the constitution of the receiving country.

The notion of what it is to be British, or French, or German, etc., provides the standard against which members of the ethnic majority judge others. The immigrants, in turn, judge the receiving society according to the extent to which its members live up to their proclaimed values, but they also interpret their experience in terms of the expectations they bring with them. The concept of reference group made famous by Robert Merton (1950) is useful in the examination of how this is done.

The first generation of post-1945 West Indian settlers in Britain came from societies with long experience of migration to North America, sometimes seasonal migration,

sometimes for settlement in the USA. They were in close accord with the political movements of African-Americans. They also, as colonials, had high expectations of Britain as 'the mother country'. So the USA, the British monarchy, and white society generally, were important reference groups for them. Up to about 1958 they benefited from the colonial connection. White Britons believed that they also benefited from that connection, and that because of it colonial students and others would come to the mother country for a time. About 1958, when it became apparent that the West Indian newcomers were settlers, when the colonies were becoming independent, and immigration from South Asia was increasing, white attitudes towards New Commonwealth immigration became much more restrictive (Banton 1983b).

'The West Indians', it was said, 'were the least prepared of all the immigrant groups for their reception... and the least equipped to meet antagonism. Their expectations were so high; the reality so different' (Rose et al 1969:420). Most had to contend with racial discrimination. They followed the progress of the civil rights movement in the USA and learned from its strategies. One lesson was that of 'black pride' and that the polarization of Black and White; by counting as Black everyone who was not white, could create a maximal constituency.

South Asian immigrants to Britain had different reference groups. 'If to many West Indians Britain was the mother country, to Pakistanis it was a foreign land whose language, customs and religion, and way of life were totally alien to them. Their loyalties were to their own new nation, to their region, to their village, and above all to their kin. They came to England asking nothing of their hosts except to settle for a little while, work, and earn for their families at home...' (Rose *et al* 1969:440). That new nation was to divide in 1971 when Bangladesh became independent. The immigrants of Indian national origin were very diverse. Some were Sikhs, some Hindus. Some came from agricultural areas, some were middle-class urban professionals. Their reference groups varied accordingly.

For some migrants from South Asia, as so well analysed by Katy Gardener (e.g. 2008) in her studies of migration from the Sylhet area of Bangladesh, ties with the villages of origin remain strong. Someone in the village who marries a person with the right to reside in Britain, may, in turn, be admitted to residence there. The white population of Britain may not constitute so important a reference group for those who live within an incapsulated minority community.

Those persons of South Asian origin who were 'twice migrants' (Bachu 1986), had the experience of living as immigrants in East Africa, where the different Asian minorities often compared their progress relative to that of other migrant communities. By far the most successful were the Ismailis, who, while remaining a very separate community (Dahya 1996), have been able, because of their economic progress, to associate with middle and upper-class white Britons in ways that would be unthinkable for the Sylhetis in London's East End. Some minorities are very conscious of their progress relative to other minorities.

The immigrants from South Asia, and their descendants, remain very critical of certain features of contemporary European society. They condemn the flaunting of sexuality, the drunkenness, drug-taking, gambling, and incivility. They deplore the frequency of divorce, the lack of respect for elder members of the family, and that the aged are placed in homes rather than being cared for by relatives. They ask, if there is to be integration, does it mean that they have to drop their standards in these respects? Whose reference groups are to prevail?

Changes in relative values

In the Swiss research, Wimmer (2004:12) found considerable variation in the reference groups used. The Italian and Turkish immigrants dissociated themselves from newer arrivals (especially those from ex-Yugoslavia and the developing world) even more than did the Swiss. The system of categorization embodied a distinction between legitimate and illegitimate immigrants. Furthermore, the children of Italian immigrants had developed a conception of themselves as following a more spontaneous and pleasure-oriented way of life than that of the Swiss. This qualifies, but does not negate, the expectation that second and subsequent generations members of a minority are increasingly likely to compare their experiences with those of their coevals in the ethnic majority rather than with the country from which their forebears emigrated.

Changes in reference groups are reflected in changed valuations of shared ethnic origin relative to other characteristics. As members of the majority become better acquainted with members of minorities, either from personal experience or from impressions conveyed by the mass media, they are likely to attach less significance to ethnic characteristics relative to other characteristics. As immigrant settlement progresses, therefore, many of the initially hard boundaries between ethnic categories will change to soft boundaries (Banton 1983a:125-128). Richard Alba (2005), discussing second-generation assimilation and exclusion in France, Germany, and the United States, describes this change as a move from bright to blurred boundaries. The other identifications which are likely to gain increased relative significance are of two main kinds: civic and personal. The distinction reflects the division between the public and the private spheres.

The civic dimension is manifest in the obligations of citizenship, but is wider than just citizenship. All residents in a country are under obligations to obey the laws, which include the liability to pay taxes, and the like. These obligations are supposed to override any consideration of ethnic difference. They are now international or Europe-wide, as I have outlined in a Briefing Paper about the international obligations of states. The prohibition of discrimination on grounds of race or ethnic origin is intended to remove any ethnic boundary in the public sphere. The laws define rights and provide for their protection. Their scope is such that, in one British city, a horticultural society - a club consisting of persons interested in gardening - was found by a tribunal to have engaged in racial discrimination because it had elected no black persons to membership.

The personal dimension is manifest in the bonds between family members, neighbours, workmates, and friends. The laws for the prohibition of discrimination do not regulate personal relations of this kind, so persons may lawfully be excluded from membership in informal groups. Social research has established that when persons become personally acquainted with others, particularly in equal-status relations, and in actions directed to shared objectives, any tendency to define the other party as belonging in a different ethnic category is reduced. Wimmer's research in Switzerland offers evidence of this and supports the conclusion that a central task for social research is to discover more about the causes of changes in relative values (Banton 2000).

Ethnic stratification

Social research also showed, long ago, that in the pursuit of shared, or superordinate, goals, other differences are side-lined (Sherif 1953, 1958). Yet the likelihood that members of minorities and majorities will enter into equal-status social relations, or perceive that they share objectives and might join in collective action, is very much restricted by the social structure. If they live in separate social worlds, the reasons are not far to seek.

Post-1945 international migration into Europe has been in response to economic growth. New sources of employment became available in the industrial centres. Workers in the less attractive and less well-paid jobs had the opportunity to move up the occupational ladder. New workers came in to fill the vacancies majority workers did not want, such as the dirty jobs and those requiring work during the night or at unsocial hours. Many were employed in cleaning. They were low down in the system of informal stratification. At the very bottom were the contract work groups managed by so-called gangmasters; as demonstrated in Germany in Gunter Wallraff's book *Ganz Unten*, and, in the UK, by the Chinese workers drowned in Morecambe Bay while picking cockles, these workers lived in social isolation.

One response to the structure of opportunities has been the growth of minority self-employment, notably in the restaurant sector. Another has been for minority workers to be better represented in public sector employment since controls upon discrimination are more effective in this sector. In the United Kingdom, the institution which corresponds most (but far from perfectly) to the ideal of ethnic equality at work is the hospital. There are many employees of overseas origin at all levels of the medical hierarchy, consultants, registrars, nurses, pharmacists, laboratory technicians, and many secretaries, porters and cleaners. In dealings with patients or fellow-employees, the position that a person holds trumps any differentiation by ethnic origin. But if hospital employment offers better opportunities for equal-status social contact between persons assigned to different ethnic categories, the effects of this have not yet, so far as I know, been studied.

More research has been conducted into the effects of ethnic origin upon social mobility. Evidence gathered in the course of a major international study indicates that in European societies a non-European origin continues as a major handicap in the second generation, particularly with regard to the risk of unemployment (Heath *et al* 2007). In all the twelve

countries studied, there was ethnic stratification, in that persons of North-West European origin were ranked above those from other parts of Europe, while those of non-European origin came further down. This hierarchy, which was similar for males and females, was closely linked with educational attainment. In general, persons classed in ethnic minorities got returns on their investments in education similar to or slightly poorer than those of persons classed as belonging in the ethnic majority. When the figures indicated that, after allowing for differences in age and education, persons assigned to an ethnic category remained disadvantaged in obtaining employment or a higher class position, the disadvantage was the measure of the ethnic penalty these persons experienced. The study found that workers from other European countries faced significant ethnic penalties in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany and Sweden. Non-Europeans were disadvantaged with respect both to unemployment and access to the salariat in Belgium, France, Germany, Israel and the Netherlands.

Access to employment of one kind or another is a major influence upon social relations because it determines income, and that, in turn, influences housing and access to services of many kinds. Research into discrimination in these fields has therefore been regarded as a social priority. It has benefited greatly from the analysis of racial discrimination in the employment market that was pioneered by Gary S. Becker in 1957. This offered an analytical framework that posed good questions for further investigation. In a competitive market, other things being equal, an employer who does not hire equally qualified workers incurs a higher cost. Therefore he pays a price, either for his own prejudice, or for yielding to the prejudices of employees who object to his hiring minority workers. Becker named this a taste for discrimination (Banton, 1983a:368). This name implies that individuals enjoy discriminating. It is more likely that they prefer the company of people similar to themselves, those whom they can see as companions as well as workmates or neighbours. This is a positive preference, not a negative one, and for present purposes it is better named as a preference for association with co-ethnics. Preferences are necessarily relative.

The model of perfect competition is a useful abstraction, even if most markets are not fully competitive. Analysis of market imperfections can point to the causes of unequal outcomes. Markets arise when a seller can find a buyer who places a higher value on whatever it is that is to be sold. Different parties to market relations have different relative values. Differences associated with ethnic origin can be traced in markets other than those for employment. The buyers of houses may have preferences for neighbourhoods with particular degrees of ethnic mixture. The market model can also help account for decisions in which there is no financial transaction. It can be used to analyze situations in which parents compete to gain places for their children in particular schools. The parents may have to balance a variety of considerations, such as those of cost, academic standards and travel time, together with any preferences they may have for schools with a particular mix of children of the same ethnic origin or religion as their child. Any preference for association with co-ethnics is likely to decline in the long term, but it may decline more slowly when shared ethnic origin serves as a proxy for some other difference (such as socio-economic status).

One feature of research in the tradition of social anthropology is that it shows, from the perspective of the individual, how an individual's position in one market influences his or her behaviour in another market. However, socio-anthropological research can trace the inter-relations for only a limited number of individuals, whereas the number of discrete variables is so great as to be unmanageable. This makes it the more important to start from a theory that poses potentially fruitful questions.

Collective action

IMISCOE includes in its name the expressions 'integration' and 'social cohesion'. They have come into use because of political anxieties. Public opinion in the Netherlands has been concerned about the relatively high number of Dutch-Moroccan students who drop out of school and the high crime rate within the Moroccan second generation. In Germany, two million Turks are said to live in a parallel world detached from German society. The riots in the *banlieues* of French cities question the French model of assimilation. In Britain, the involvement of Muslim youths in terrorism has shocked majority opinion (Thomson & Crul 2007:1026).

Both 'integration' and 'cohesion' are metaphors, neither of them very suitable. In mathematics integration is the making up of a number into an integer. 'Cohesion' is a physical metaphor for sticking together. In the context of IMISCOE's activities, the quality sought might be better described as team spirit, *esprit de corps*, group morale, or a readiness to co-operate. 'Integration' and 'social cohesion' are words in the vocabulary of ordinary language. In that language they can be defined pragmatically as soon as the purpose that the definition has to serve has been made explicit. The expression that best corresponds to these words in the technical language of social science is collective action. It is this that produces co-operation.

Individuals have many goals. While they can attain some of them by individual action, to attain others they have to co-operate. If they share goals with co-ethnics, they may engage in collective action with them. If they share goals with their fellow workers, they may join with them in trade union activity. Instead of assuming that individuals belong in ethnic groups as if these were natural formations, they are to be seen as involved in multi-dimensional relations evoked by the sharing of goals. Individuals trade off the advantages of one social alignment against other possible alignments. Some earlier social theories held that while those born into middle-class families aspired to upward social mobility as individuals, members of the working class could improve their circumstances only by collective action based upon relations of employment. In recent times any appeal to class-based action has weakened. Smaller numbers of voters go to the polling booths. It looks as if the belief in the effectiveness of political action may be declining. The connections between local concerns and national institutions have weakened.

Opinion polls in Britain have found that respondents express more favourable views of ethnic relations in their own neighbourhoods than in the country as a whole. For their neighbourhood, people rely on personal experience; for the country as a whole, they rely on the impressions taken from the mass media. For the media, normality is never 'news'.

Wimmer's Swiss research reinforced earlier studies in showing that the bond between established residents with their 'scheme of order' can generate collective action locally against those considered outsiders. Collective action at the level of the whole city or the nation is less easily generated. Observations of ethnic relations in European cities therefore recall the findings of a classic work, *The American Soldier* (Stouffer *et al* 1949), which found that what kept soldiers fighting was their bond with their 'mates', the small group of men together in one unit. In the military, the small group bond encouraged behaviour that was in line with the policy of the larger entities of the army and the nation.

Among members of minorities, of the first or subsequent generations, it is likewise the bond between those who know one another and share experience that makes possible collective action at the local level. Religious institutions can sometimes facilitate collective action at a higher level more effectively than can political institutions. The anxieties in the Netherlands, Germany, France and Britain mentioned above point to situations in which the bond with the small group works counter to the policies of the municipality and the state. What light sociological theory might cast on the disconnections between behaviour at these three different levels is as yet unclear.

Conclusion

It is probable that some of the contributors to the conference will address both questions of social and political practice, and questions of social science theory. My hope is that it may be possible to revise this text to show that the conception of an ethnic dimension sketched above can provide a framework for a publishable volume as a product of the conference.

Consideration of how an ethnic dimension to social relations may appear among children in a primary school, and how it may later become more or less salient, could provide a remit for a workshop on the effects of contact. The comparative study of reference groups can cast light onto the differences between minorities and onto the ways in which their relations with members of the ethnic majority change. The use of the powers of the state to prohibit actions based racial or ethnic preferences has reduced the incidence of ethnic discrimination but has not eliminated it. To account for the persistence of ethnic discrimination and disadvantage it is important to analyse the operation of markets for employment, housing and education.

Note

- 1 It can be instructive to study the circumstances of those who appear as anomalies. For example, in West Africa a small number of persons have a condition known as albinism. Their appearance resembles that of others in their localities except that their skin is very pale, their eyes are of a pinkish colour and their vision is weaker. There are persons in Britain, of West African origin, who have this condition. They may identify as Black, but have difficulty getting acceptance as

such. As was demonstrated in a TV programme on 'Britain's Whitest Family', Channel 4 2008-10-03 reference 934154, their circumstances call into question many generalizations about identity.

References

Alba, Richard 2005 'Bright vs. blurred boundaries: Second-generation assimilation and exclusion in France, Germany, and the United States' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 28(1):20-49.

Banton, Michael 1983a *Racial and Ethnic Competition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Reprinted, 1992, Aldershot: Gregg Revivals.

- 1983b 'The Influence of Colonial Status upon Black-White Relations in England, 1948-58', *Sociology*, 17: 546-59.

- 2000 'Ethnic Conflict', *Sociology* 34(3):481-98.

- 2007 'Max Weber on 'Ethnic Communities': a critique' *Nations and Nationalism*, 13(1):1-17, with Erratum, 13(3):563.

- 2008 'The Sociology of Ethnic Relations' *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 30(7):1296-1285.

Barth, Fredrik, ed. 1969 *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Oslo : Universitets Forlaget. French translation in Philippe Poutignat & Jocelyne Streiff-Fenart, *Théories de l'ethnicité*. 2nd ed. 2008 Paris: Quadrige, Presses Universitaires de France

Bhachu, Parminder 1986 *The Twice Migrants*. London:Tavistock.

Brubaker, Rogers 2004 *Ethnicity Without Groups*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Brubaker, Rogers, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox & Liana Grancea 2006 *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Caballero, Chanion, Rosalind Edwards & Shuby Puthussey 2008 *Parenting 'Mixed' Children: Negotiating Difference and Belonging in Mixed Race, Ethnicity and Faith Families*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Dahya, Badr 1996 Ethnicity and Modernity: The case of Ismailis in Britain, pp 106-138 in Rohit Barot, ed. *The Racism Problematic: Contemporary Sociological Debates on Race and Ethnicity*. Lewiston NY: The Edwin Mellen Press.

Gardner, Katy 2008 'Keeping connected: security, place, and social capital in a 'Londoni' village in Sylhet', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 14(3):477-495.

Glazer, Nathan & Daniel Patrick Moynihan 1975 *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Heath, Anthony F., and Sin Yi Cheung with Shawna N. Smith (eds) 2007 *Unequal Chances. Ethnic Minorities in Western Labour Markets*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jenkins, Richard 2008 *Rethinking Ethnicity*. 2nd ed. London: Sage.

Malešević, Siniša 2004 *The Sociology of Ethnicity*. London: Sage.

Merton, Robert, with Alice Kitt Rossi 1950 'Contributions to the Theory of Reference Group Behavior' pp 40-105 in Robert K. Merton and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, eds. *Continuities in Social Research*. New York: The Free Press.

Rose, E. J. B., et al. 1969 *Colour and Citizenship. A Report on British Race Relations*. London: Oxford University Press.

Sherif, Muzafer 1958 'Superordinate Goals in the Reduction of Intergroup Conflict' *Journal of Sociology*, 58(4):349-356.

Sherif, Muzafer, & Carolyn W. Sherif 1953 *Groups in Harmony and Tension*. New York: Harper.

Stouffer, Samuel A., et al. 1949 *Studies in Social Psychology: The American Soldier*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 4 vols.

Thomson, Mark, & Maurice Crul 2007 'The Second Generation in Europe and the United States: How is the Transatlantic Debate Relevant for Further Research on the European Second Generation?' *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 33(7):1025-1041.

Weber, Max 1968. *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, edited by Guenther Roth & Claus Wittich. New York: Bedminster.

Wimmer, Andreas 2004 'Does ethnicity matter? Everyday group formation in three Swiss immigrant neighbourhoods', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 27(1):1-36.

2009-02-25 7,280 words