

## The Settlement in Europe of International Migrants

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### Abstract

The existing literature is reviewed selectively to identify promising avenues of theoretical development. Since differences of ethnic origin are used to create social categories, a theory of social categories is formulated. The social significance attributed to ethnic origin can be uncovered by examining the operation of social institutions. It can be measured by ascertaining the readiness of individuals to trade off the satisfactions gained from alignment with co-ethnics against other possible alignments.

IMISCOE is building a community of scholars who are studying the settlement in Europe of international migrants. If we are to compare experiences and research findings in different countries, we need a common framework. That framework has to be built from theoretical concepts. Since so much of our work has been oriented to policy concerns, the development of theory has been neglected. This conference has been convened to try to remedy that deficiency.

The two social science disciplines in which theories are best developed are economics and psychology. Economics shows us how much can be done with abstract but comprehensive theory. Psychology shows us how the experimental method can drive theory-building. It looks as if we are not learning as much as we should from advances in these disciplines. In political philosophy the word 'theory' is used in another sense. That discourse is important as it forces us to examine our assumptions, but, since the arguments cannot be formulated as sets of testable propositions, they are not theories in the sense considered here.

Much of the sociological theory available to us is the work of scholars in the USA. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, new settlers, primarily from Europe, flooded in. The settled population categorised the newcomers by their ethnic or national origin and the newcomers adapted to this<sup>1</sup>. US sociologists first conceptualised the process of interaction as one of assimilation. Then they noted that it was not necessarily a straight-line process and introduced qualifications, like the notion of segmented assimilation. Yet they continued to assume that the newcomers would ultimately be absorbed. Until recently they made little allowance for movement to-and-fro, for transnationalism and the relevance of diaspora community. This perspective was reinforced in sociology by the theorists of structural-functionalism. 'They have systematically taken for granted nationally bounded societies as the natural unit of analysis. Naturalization produced the container model of society that encompasses a culture, a polity, an economy and a bounded social group' (Wimmer & Glick Schiller 2003:579).

In more recent decades the situation in North America has been changed by the pressures on the southern border of the USA. It points up the significance of the distinction

between immigration and labour migration. Discussing the circumstances of Mexican-born workers in the USA, Alejandro Portes (2007) has argued that US policy should recognise the cyclical nature of the labour flow of Mexican workers, who, after accumulating some capital, return to their country of birth. He noted that the Mexican state has assiduously courted the US government in an attempt to improve the legal situation of its expatriates and facilitate their return. The law might be changed to make it easier for Mexican workers to enter the USA, and, in return, for there to be an improvement in the health and educational provision for their families and children left behind in Mexico. It is in the interests of the two governments to protect the migrant workers and their families. The problems should be seen as those of labour migration, not of immigration into the USA.

There are many parallels in Europe. One of its basic principles is the freedom of movement for economic activity. Workers can seek employment in other EU countries and EU citizens can locate themselves as they choose. There is pressure on Europe's southern border also. It comes from men and women of African and Asian birth who want to enter, giving rise to what is called 'extracommunitarian' immigration. Some of the Southern governments wish to preserve this as a form of labour migration. They want their nationals to remain citizens of their countries of birth and to remit some of the money they earn to their families in their home countries. The economies of some of these countries are now dependent upon the flow of remittances.

Twenty-first-century sociology requires a more sophisticated armoury of concepts for analysing the interaction. It is not a matter of finding an omnibus concept to supersede that of assimilation, but of identifying new sociological problems in contemporary processes.

### **The ethnic dimension**

The expression 'ethnic group' came into use in the English language in the late nineteenth-thirties in two quite different senses. One was as a replacement for 'race', the other as a designation of minorities in New England distinguished by their national origin. Anthropologists used the same expression 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 (Banton 2007). Just before his death he wrote to a friend 'If I now happen to be a sociologist according to my appointment papers, then I became one in order to put an end to the mischievous enterprise which still operates with collectivist concepts [*Kollektivbegriffe*]. In other words, sociology, too, can only be practiced by proceeding from the actions of one or more, few or many individuals' (Bruun, 1972:38)

'Ethnic group' was a collectivist concept, a *Kollektivbegriff*. It looks as if by 1918 Weber had abandoned an approach from the identification of groups in favour of an analysis of the *soziale Beziehung*. I believe that here *Beziehung* is better translated as 'relation' than as 'relationship'. Weber notes that parties to a social relation might be influenced by friendship, love, loyalty, fidelity to contracts, patriotism, etc., which seems to be a way of recognising that they might interact on the basis of different roles. I prefer to define a social relation as a relation between individuals and a social relationship as a relation between roles. John Doe and Rachel Roe might interact as male and female, teacher and pupil, landlord and tenant, driver and passenger, etc. Each role relationship defines a dimension of the relations between the two persons. Relations have an ethnic dimension when significance is assigned to the parties' ethnic origins. From such a starting point it is possible to re-write Weber's 1911 draft, proceeding, as he wrote, from the actions of one or more, few or many individuals. Before beginning a reformulation, though, there are some preliminaries to consider.

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 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'. He too has emphasised the distinction between groups and categories. Yet Brubaker has continued to refer to ethnicity as a noun, discussing 'the way in which ethnicity is enacted, negotiated, and sometimes problematised 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 which criticised writings that represented ethnic conflicts as a distinct class of conflicts. It was said to be better to represent them as conflicts that had an ethnic dimension, for '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). 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.

It had been remarked 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) observed '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.

The notion of an 'ethnic group' has empirical as well as conceptual limitations. In the 2001 census of the UK 677,117 persons were recorded as being of Mixed origin, 14.5 per

cent of the 'Non-White' population; half of them were under sixteen and four-fifths were born in Britain. In England and Wales, 88.7 per cent of children up to the age of 15 were recorded as belonging in the White ethnic group, 5.8 per cent as Asian, 2.5 per cent as Black, and 2.7 per cent as of Mixed origin. Some of those recorded as Black may very well have been biologically of mixed origin. There may be as high, or even higher, a percentage of persons of mixed origin in the USA, but they are not often recorded as such, and they are not thought of as having a distinct social identity to the extent that occurs in the UK.

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 category<sup>1</sup>.

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, provided that it is a recognised social category. (If Joseph had declared that he was a Martian he would only have been laughed at.) 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.

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.

### **Practice and theory**

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, in Marxist writing, between phenomenal form and essential relations. Anthropologists in North America distinguish between *emic* and *etic* constructs. *Emic* constructs are those used by ordinary people to interpret and regulate their experiences. *Etic* constructs are those shared by analysts in their attempts to explain what goes on, and why members of the public interpret experience in the light of particular *emic* constructs. The words *ethnic* and *ethnicity* are *emic* constructs. 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.

It may be agreed that ethnic categories are constructed discursively as a way of understanding and dealing with everyday situations (Verkuyten, de Jong & Masson 1995:274). Yet so are other kinds of category. The relative importance of different kinds of category was compared in a study of how residents in three immigrant neighbourhoods in Switzerland perceived their environment, and the categories they employed. It was directed by an author, Andreas Wimmer (2004:3), who, like Brubaker and the present author, 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*, an explanation has become possible. *Category membership* is an *etic* construct.

### **A theory of social categories**

Social categories are fundamental to human life. They are evident in the most basic of distinctions, that between 'us' and 'them'. In sociology, a prime reference is to Max Weber's teaching on the subject, his *Kategorienlehre*, on which he worked in his last years. One of his editors observed that 'Hundreds of students attended his courses at this time – in Vienna in 1918 and in Munich in 1919/20 – but the course on the categories



drove them away *en masse*' (Weber 1968:C). The students may have been disappointed because Weber's attempt to devise a scheme for 'the interpretive understanding of social action' proved so abstract. He could have started instead from observations that had to be accounted for, or explained.

In Germany the historical school of political economy put a particular conception of the state at the centre of its analysis. It was a collectivist concept. Weber contended, as noted earlier, that sociology had to be built from individualistic concepts. Instead of starting from the kinds of groups recognised in ordinary language, it has to analyse social categories as terms in a technical language. Such an analysis has to begin as a theory of primary categories, i.e., categories that influence conduct in a wide range of situations, as opposed to secondary categories, e.g., tax-payers, drivers, patients and music-lovers, that exercise a more restricted influence.

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'. There were, in those continents, no *emic* constructs of ethnic categories. A theory of ethnic categories has to be built with *etic* constructs. It has to be one that will facilitate the analysis of any ethnic categories that may be present in South Asia, and, in particular, in China.

The theory can start, first, from the proposition that *human individuals have distinctive characteristics*. Some are physical, such as those of sex, stature and the variation in skin colour that can be measured with a photospectrometer (as in van den Berghe & Frost 1986). Some are cultural, including the significance attributed to physical characteristics, but mainly to those of descent, including those of ethnic origin. Second, that *the attribution of significance to such characteristics results in the creation of social categories*; the characteristics may then be treated as signs of social entitlement. In all but the simplest forms of human society individuals are graded in terms of socio-economic status and where there are phenotypical differences these are given value in that scale. Third, that *individuals share these characteristics with others*, which may make them a basis for ascribed roles. Fourth, that *phenotypical characteristics are transmitted from one generation to another*, though there may be variation of colour within a family. Fifth, that *common characteristics become the bases for collective action*, either to defend shared privilege or to challenge less favourable treatment. Implicit in the third, fourth and fifth propositions is a sixth, that *social relations are multidimensional*. As already explained, they are the relations between individuals, whereas *relationships* are relations between roles.

Then come two closely related propositions. The seventh states that *the significance attributed to any particular characteristic is determined by the society's relation to its environment* and to material circumstances. Thus, for example, pastoral societies in which human groups move around together with their animals according to seasonal variations in the availability of pasture, are composed of groups defined by patrilineal descent. No other characteristic could provide a comparably effective organizing principle. The eighth proposition states that *the significance attributed to any particular*

*characteristic is also culturally determined.* There are societies – like plantation economies – in which manual labourers (possibly slaves or indentured workers) are controlled by a relatively small number of landowners and their agents. The workforce can be controlled more easily if there is an ideology of biological difference between the social categories (the classic example is Plato's thesis that it would be easier to rule his ideal republic if the members of the various categories had been brought to believe that God had made the rulers of gold, the auxiliaries of silver, and the farmers and craftsmen of copper and iron). If descent were used as a characteristic for assigning individuals to fixed categories of this kind it would not provide an organizing principle for a progressive society seeking to make best use of individual talent.

The eighth proposition recognises that human individuals are socialized into their natal societies, learning the importance of co-operation, and thus of different kinds of relationship with others. Each individual becomes familiar with a particular social order and a particular population composition. These orders are rarely static. As the social world expands, so the sense of a person's duty to his or her neighbour is affected by an expanding conception of who counts as a neighbour.

The seventh and eighth propositions help explain why more significance is attributed to one characteristic than another. For example, they explain why, in a given pastoral society, and in given circumstances, more significance is ascribed to patrilineal than to matrilineal descent, and more significance is ascribed to descent than to any variation in physical appearance. There may be none of the differences of costume, speech and education that can be important to the calculation of socio-economic status in industrial societies. In industrial societies individuals differ in the relative significance they ascribe to such characteristics, and the explanation of the variations is an important sociological problem.

To state, without qualification, that an individual is socialised into a natal society is to assume that this society is homogenous. Many are not. There may be differences associated with class, or status, or differences that result from migration and encounters between persons of different origin.

When a child is born, the child is categorised as the son or daughter of particular parents, as a relation of persons defined as kin, and perhaps as a member of a patrilineal or matrilineal descent category. These are among the most basic social institutions. The recognition of socio-economic status and of ascribed roles indicates the existence of other social institutions. A later stage of development sees the creation of the nation-state as one of the most important social institutions. It adds a new social category to the list, nationality, and a new dimension to social relations, namely the civic dimension.

In modern times, one society is distinguished from others primarily by its constitutional laws. These bring together the recognition of natural (or presumed natural) characteristics, cultural characteristics and political norms, declaring what characteristics shall determine rights and obligations in particular circumstances. It leads to an ninth proposition, that *shared sentiments are given effect in the processes of law-making and*

*law-enforcing that provide foundations for the definition of social roles and reward conformity with social norms.* Legislating is one way in which bottom-up and top-down processes are reconciled. If new laws are wanted, they have to be drafted in a manner consistent so far as possible with existing laws. This gives rise to the principle that political change is path-dependent. Prior legislation and institutions channel the opportunities open to governments that wish to make changes.

States enter into treaties with other states. One of the twentieth century's greatest achievements has been the use of treaty-making to establish a legal foundation for the conception of universal human rights. The sense of a person's duty to his or her neighbour has been expanded so that, potentially, it covers all fellow-humans. In some circumstances social relations can have a human rights dimension.

A tenth proposition then holds that *categories are under pressure, such that, if they are not maintained, they change.* Partly because of political processes, such as those associated with state institutions, *the significance of one category relative to other categories varies over time.* If categories are to persist, they have to be reinforced by the norms of everyday behaviour. The historical record shows that an ethnic minority may take control of a country (e.g., the Norman Conquest of England), that for one or two generations there is ethnic conflict, but four generations later the ethnic categories are no longer significant. Equally, members of what becomes an ethnic minority may enter, or be brought into, a country in a subordinate status, but, over time, the social division is reduced or bridged. Categories may also change in character. The gender category is a case in point. In many societies the nature of the gender dimension has changed greatly in the past century.

### **Category reinforcement and change**

Fredrik Barth (1969:16) observed forty years ago that stable inter-ethnic relations presuppose a systematic set of rules 'governing situations of contact, and allowing for articulation in some sectors or domains of activity, and a set of proscriptions on social situations preventing inter-ethnic interaction in other sectors, and thus insulating parts of the cultures from confrontation and modification'. Such rules are embodied in social institutions, notably those of government, religious observance, employment, education and residence. It is in the operation of institutions that categories are maintained or modified, for in many kinds of society inter-ethnic relations are far from stable.

One illustration of the way categories change can be seen when individuals migrate and enter other states. Frequently they find that either the state or members of the public assign them to a social category based on ethnic or national origin. They can find themselves categorised together with individuals who, in their country of origin, they would have regarded as socially very different from themselves. If they are subject to pressure from the ethnic majority, they may come to identify with their co-nationals and form an ethnic group at the same time as they are members of an ethnic category.

The significance ascribed to ethnic or national origin varies between societies and can vary over time within the same political unit (when sociologists refer to societies in the plural it is usually political units they have in mind). In the former Yugoslavia, for example, Serbs, Croats, and others, often lived together in the same villages. Sometimes they intermarried. Consciousness of ethnic difference was low. Then, when conflicts escalated elsewhere within the Federal Republic, relations changed. Many inter-ethnic marriages were broken. Ethnic identification became important to the personal security of individuals. After the dissolution of the Federal Republic and some population movements, ethnic consciousness could decline again. It has been conventional to conceive of ethnogenesis as a process by which a set of individuals come to conceive of themselves as a people, but it would be more accurate to speak of ethnoacclivity and ethnodeclivity as processes by which the significance attributed to ethnic identification rises and declines. From a sociological standpoint it is as important to account for the absence of ethnic identification as for its presence.

Ethnic identification is a composite of self-conception and categorisation by others. It gives an additional dimension to a social relation, influencing the disposition of each party towards the other. It is more than simply self-conception, in that the existence of a norm specifying differential treatment itself creates or sustains any self-concept. It has also to be seen as an interaction between the individual and his or her social environment. The environment exerts a top-down pressure, yet, important as this may be, it is not all-powerful. There is always upward pressure for change, though social boundaries based upon religious faith are much more resistant to change than class boundaries. The adherents of some religions believe that God has revealed to them important truths about life. They cannot compromise in their dealings with people who do not accept the same revelation.

Categorisation is often a stimulus to the formation of a group. Actual groups, or communities in Weber's sense, are always multidimensional. They are based on shared identifications, but the identifications are not evenly shared. Some individuals are more enthusiastic members, and norm-observers, than others. They have different reasons for identifying with the group.

Currently the central problem for sociologists is to account for the variable significance vested in differences of ethnic origin. They have to explain why, when little significance is assigned to such differences in relationships governed by legal norms (e.g. paying taxes, motor traffic), in others (especially competitive relationships), differences of ethnic origin are used to create social categories and distinctive behavioural norms. The nature of these social categories can be best examined in the operation of social institutions.

### **Social institutions**

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 gang-masters; as demonstrated in Germany in Gunter Wallraff's book *Ganz Unten*, and, in the UK, by the Chinese workers who drowned in Morecambe Bay while picking cockles; these workers lived in social isolation.

Many forms of social inequality are transmitted from each generation to the next. Parents with higher incomes are able to enrol their children in the schools that get the best results. Their children gain more qualifications and secure better-paid employment. The effects of residential segregation, schooling and employment are mutually reinforcing. 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.

Political institutions channel the course of majority-minority relations. The principle of path development is well illustrated by a recent study of how the French, German and British states have responded to the challenge posed to the liberal political philosophy by the wish of some young female Muslims to wear a veil (*niqab*) in the classroom (Joppke 2009a & b). Some female civil servants (such as teachers) and employees in the private sector have made similar demands. The challenge is the greater when they wish to dress using what have been called 'extreme' forms of veiling (*jilbab* and *burqa*).

Social categories may be designed to include persons as well as to exclude them. Because they have often been used to exclude persons, and sometimes, as in the case of genocides, to try to exterminate them, international and national laws have been put in place to prevent abuses. Some of these laws create or redefine categories to reduce the likelihood that persons will be treated less favourably on specified grounds. They may require processes of ethnic monitoring and reporting (Krizán 2001). Population censuses often operate in similar fashion. The paradox is that in order to prevent the abuse of ethnic categorization, the categories are reinforced when, according to critics, those categories might otherwise be of declining significance.

Most contacts between persons assigned to different social categories occur within the institutional frameworks that define relationships, of neighbour to neighbour, employee to employer, worker to fellow-worker, patient to nurse or doctor; or on the basis of a shared religious faith, or leisure-time interest. In many circumstances a person is obliged to interact with his or her neighbours to deal with local problems, to cope with emergencies, or to co-operate over shared concerns, as with children or pets (on neighbourhood communities, see Völker, Flap & Lindenberg 2007).

The market for housing exemplifies the nature of social categories because a person's place of residence determines access to many services. Many people seek housing in a locality of high amenity, meaning by this good access to workplace, to schools, shops, etc., and where they will find neighbours of the kind they prefer. Some individuals like to live amongst others who are socially similar to themselves in respect of socio-economic status, ethnic origin and leisure interests. Others prefer to live in a neighbourhood with a more mixed population. There are separate markets for the private purchase of houses or apartments, for private renting, and for social housing owned by local government bodies or other public institution. The private markets are more likely to display social segregation based upon socio-economic status or ethnic origin. Publicly owned housing is subject to stronger anti-discrimination controls (Banton 1983:336-365).

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 (see Table 1). 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.

Table 1 about here

One response to the restriction 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. Since the main route by which majority and minority members come to be more or less 'integrated' is through institutions, it is important to analyse the factors that can lead individuals to subordinate their personal goals to those of the institution.

If in battle the members of an army unit are to survive, they must fight as a team. Discrimination on the basis of colour or ethnic origin could be life-threatening. Likewise in the British police, black and white officers generally support one another in opposition to members of the public, but there are complaints of racial discrimination in relationships between police officers. It is more difficult to secure collective action when a shared goal lacks urgency. Football managers know this well. They sometimes have to deal with a player who keeps the ball in the hope of getting glory for himself although the team would have a better chance of scoring were he were to pass it to another player. One study found that commitment to the team was reduced when team members identified themselves strongly with their ethnic background (van der Zee, Atsma & Brodbeck 2004).

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.

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).

Marriage between persons of different ethnic origin weakens ethnic categorisation. Persons seeking a marital partner may unconsciously compare any preference for ethnic similarity with other personal attributes. For example, in Hawaii up to 1945 almost every Japanese-American bride married a Japanese-American bridegroom. Then, by 1980, 50 per cent of Japanese-Americans were marrying spouses with a different ethnic background. The young women of Japanese origin had stayed longer in the educational system; they had met boys of different ethnic background and were better informed about the expectations of marriage prevailing in other social circles. Many were not attracted to

the prospect of playing the role of the traditional Japanese wife; the non-Japanese bridegroom obtained a bride who was more deferential and solicitous than the brides of his own ethnic background. Thus, when the Japanese women married out, both of the partners got a better deal, in that she did not have to be so subservient and he had a more deferential bride. This put the pressure on the Japanese men and the non-Japanese women to be less demanding in their expectations of the marital relationship (Banton 1983:143).

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.

### **Reference categories**

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. This illustrates the principle of path dependence mentioned earlier. 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. Expectations are manifested in what Robert Merton (1950) called reference groups. He employed the word 'group' to designate what is technically a category. One of the key ways in which interaction between members of the majority and the minorities leads to new attitudes, is the change in reference categories.

The first generation of post-1945 West Indian settlers in Britain came from societies with long experience of migration to North America, sometimes as seasonal migrants, sometimes as would-be settlers. So they were in close accord with the political movements of African-Americans. They came to Britain in search of opportunity, not knowing how long they would stay. As colonials, they had high expectations of 'the mother country'. The USA, the British monarchy, and white society generally, were therefore important reference points for them.



Up to about 1958 the West Indian settlers benefited from the colonial connection. White Britons believed that they also benefited from that connection, and that because of it people like 'colonial students' were temporary visitors. About 1958 three changes came together. It became apparent that many of the West Indian newcomers were settlers rather than migrant workers. Most of Britain's remaining colonies were becoming independent. Immigration from New Commonwealth countries in South Asia was increasing. As a consequence, white attitudes towards New Commonwealth immigration became much more restrictive (Banton 1983b). Whites no longer perceived any benefit in the colonial connection.

'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. Before the sixties were out, black West Indians were proclaiming that they were 'here to stay'.

South Asian immigrants to Britain had different reference categories. '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. Some could not countenance marriage outside their jati or sub-caste. Their reference categories 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 constitute a less important reference category for those who live within a self-segregating minority community than their kinsfolk in their country of origin.

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 categories are to prevail?

Experience in Great Britain is therefore in line with experience elsewhere. Whether members of an ethnic minority are migrant workers or immigrants influences majority attitudes towards them. If the members of the minority are settlers, they more readily adopt majority reference categories. Majority attitudes towards members of ethnic minorities vary, in that less distance is displayed to those who, like the migrants from the West Indies, adopt the ways of the majority than is displayed to those who, like some South Asians, want to maintain separate communities.

In his Swiss research, Wimmer (2004:12) found considerable variation in the reference categories 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 in the 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 categories 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. 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.

Religious faith is for many people a major source of reference categories. For example, research workers in the Netherlands conducted long interviews with 21 young Muslims who identified themselves with the Salafi school of Islam. Some of them concentrated upon their faith in a way that excluded political activity; their ideas were closely associated with those of the ruling elite in Saudi Arabia. Others were very concerned about political developments in the Netherlands. Yet others, the *jihadis*, thought that revolution was needed to remedy the condition of Muslims in the wider world (Buijs 2009).

This last set of observations is a reminder of a source of weakness. Generalisations about reference categories can assume that all members of a given minority share the same outlook when in practice there is much variation from one individual to another. This poses a challenge to anyone who seeks to formulate a theory about ethnic relations.

### **Social alignment**

Research workers infer from their observations of behaviour, including speech behaviour, that significance is assigned to differences of ethnic origin. They notice that it has more significance in some situations than others, so, in a crude fashion, they are measuring it. If there is to be any theoretical and conceptual development sociologists have to find more systematic ways of measuring the significance assigned to ethnic origin.

One way of doing this is to examine the readiness of individuals to trade off the advantages of one social alignment against other possible alignments. Trade-off can be measured by asking interviewees to imagine circumstances in which an individual has to choose between alternatives. Will that individual align himself or herself with a co-ethnic, or choose instead an alternative which promises a financial reward, or identification with a higher status person, or which expresses solidarity with a fellow worker irrespective of ethnic origin? The attractions of the various kinds of reward,

material and psychological, can be manipulated experimentally. Social psychologists have taken the lead in developing experimental techniques of this kind.

The sociological study of trade-off has featured in a comparison of ethnic and class alignment in Malaysia (Banton 2000). In the first study a sample of subjects was asked about an imagined conflict between a Chinese employer and his Malay employees. It could be predicted that Chinese subjects with high incomes would side with the actions of the employer, while Malays of low income would side with the workers. But how would a Chinese worker align himself? Would a Malay employer side with his fellow employer or with his fellow Malays? The results of these and other questions showed that while ethnic alignment might be dominant at the level of national politics, class interest, the growth of common sentiment and the recognition of shared national interests could on occasion stimulate alignments crossing ethnic boundaries.

There are some circumstances in which virtually all Malays will feel bound to align themselves with their co-ethnics in relations with Chinese-Malaysians, such as in situations of political competition, and some circumstances in which the individual can decide whether or not to interpret the situation in ethnic terms. This shows that ethnic roles are recognised in Malaysia. There are relationships in which the parties' conduct is governed by shared beliefs about mutual rights and obligations deriving from their shared ethnic origin. During their socialisation individuals have been taught group norms; they have learned that they will be rewarded for conforming to these norms and they usually derive a feeling of satisfaction from actions that they believe will meet their fellow members' expectations. In this way ethnic ties may be inculcated. In similar fashion individuals frequently acquire a preference for association with co-ethnics as people who share the same norms as themselves.

The strength of the preference is related to the kind of situation (for example, it will be stronger for association by marriage than association on public transport). Some individuals will have stronger preferences than others. It is also important to appreciate that preferences can be exercised only at a price and that this varies from one situation to another. Sometimes an individual has freedom to choose between several alternatives; in other circumstances an individual may feel that he or she has no alternative but to conform to the expectations of others. In situations of ethnic cleansing individuals have been forced to identify themselves ethnically by threats to their personal security. Contrariwise, the enforcement of laws against racial and ethnic discrimination can increase the costs of exercising a preference for association with co-ethnics. By conceptualising behaviour as the expression of ethnic preferences it is easier to avoid any suggestion that ethnic alignment is an inherited disposition.

Two further studies measured the relative strength of ethnic preferences in Malaysia. Both compared the priority which a subject attached to alignment with co-ethnics to action reflecting self-interest (of either a monetary character or of association with persons of higher social status), and with action reflecting a sense of personal obligation to a co-worker or neighbour. A disposition to align with co-ethnics was called an ethnic preference and the research technique permitted a comparison, in the specified

circumstances, of the strength of an ethnic preference compared with preferences of a different kind. One asked about the preferences of Malays, the other about the preferences of Chinese-Malaysians.

A sample of persons resident in Petalingjaya, a suburb of Kuala Lumpur, were told about an imaginary individual, Husin Ali, a clerk working for a multinational engineering firm. Husin Ali had been patronising Mr Ah Kow's grocery shop, noted for its cheapness and near to his house. He had been told that someone called Ahmad was about to open a second grocery shop in the same neighbourhood. Respondents were asked whether they thought that Husin Ali would transfer his custom to the new shop. The research assumed that the names of the three individuals would be taken as signs that Husin Ali and Ahmad were Malays and Ah Kow a Chinese-Malaysian. Some respondents, so it was thought, would expect that Husin Ali would want to shop with Ahmad because he was a fellow Malay, while others would expect him to shop wherever the goods were cheapest.

There were two main reasons for expecting Husin Ali to change to Ahmad. Firstly, the possibility that the personal satisfaction he would derive from helping a co-ethnic would outweigh any greater price of the goods bought. Secondly, the possibility that he would be influenced by a concern for the judgement of his peers, who would approve his patronising a co-ethnic and disapprove of his shopping with a Chinese when he could quite easily have helped Ahmad.

As hypothesised, respondents were found to be divided in their predictions about whether Husin Ali would see shopping for groceries as a relationship governed by ethnic roles. The research showed that ethnic preferences were less important as determinants of Malay ethnic alignment than the Malay research worker had predicted. Because of past political tensions between Malays and Chinese, he and others had not noticed how much interpersonal relations had been changing in urban areas. At a time when ethnic nationalism is often interpreted as a living force, it is important to note the finding that self-interest in saving money or gaining social status, and sentiments of obligation to a friend, neighbour or fellow-worker, were often more influential than ethnic identification.

No research worker could have told *a priori* whether residents in Petalingjaya would take the names Husin Ali and Ah Kow as signs of ethnic, national, religious or any other kind of role. How the respondents perceived and categorised them was an empirical issue. How well their categorisations corresponded to those that would have been employed by a European or a North American social scientist is then a second issue. The resident of Petalingjaya rarely employed any concept of ethnicity. He or she used a practical language embodying proper names, such as Malay, Chinese and Indian. Anyone who spoke this language knew that persons assigned to these categories varied in their cultural distinctiveness. In the languages they used, the costume they wore, the use they made of their leisure, etc., some were more culturally distinctive, and in this sense more 'ethnic', than many of the adolescents who listened to the same pop music, ate similar foods and mixed readily with members of other groups. It was therefore not surprising that Malay ethnic preferences were found to be slightly weaker among subjects aged less than 30.

The research in Petalingjaya was primarily concerned with variations in Malay ethnic alignment vis-à-vis Chinese-Malaysians. A third study was later conducted in which similar questions were asked concerning the behaviour expected of Tang Seng Seng, an imaginary figure resembling Husin Ali in every respect except that he had a Chinese-Malaysian name. This study was based on written answers to a questionnaire by mature students registered for a university extra-mural qualification. Though both the sample of subjects and the manner of obtaining answers were different, the findings seem to be comparable. Table 2 summarises responses to twelve questions asking respondents whether, in specified situations like that of choosing which grocery shop to patronise, they would expect the imaginary Malay or Chinese to display a preference for a co-ethnic (EP), or a preference for association with a person of higher social status (Status), or a preference for financial advantage or personal convenience (Money), or whether his choice would be governed by a sense of personal obligation (PersOblign).

Table 2 about here

The table lists situations of possibly conflicting preferences. While it suggests that shared ethnicity is more important in the situations at the head of the list this is not proven because preferences for association with a co-ethnic are not compared against a common standard. By changing the descriptions slightly it would have been possible to evoke different responses. Nevertheless, it seems clear that ethnic preference counts for little in the situation labelled 'house key'. The question was:

'Husin Ali has to leave his house in a hurry to fetch his own family from the hospital. He has been expecting his sister to come at any moment to assist with his family, but he has waited as long as he could. He wonders whether to leave his front door unlocked or to leave the key with his next-door Chinese neighbour. What will Husin Ali do?

1. Leave the front door unlocked
2. Leave the key with his next-door Chinese neighbour
3. Other

The answers showed that ethnic preference counted for more when choosing a playmate for a child on a family trip to the zoo, and probably reached a peak in situations defined as those of political competition between Malays and Chinese-Malaysians.

Several studies of armed conflicts have shown that they escalate when activists can present association with co-ethnics (or 'ethnic purity') as a supreme value. The activists refuse to engage in any 'trade-off' in negotiations, insisting that they are 'not for sale'. These are the mobilisers. Among those whom they seek to mobilise there are many 'free-riders', individuals who profess similar aspirations but would sooner not have to make any sacrifice themselves. As a result there are situations which the mobilisers insist should be defined as requiring ethnic alignment, but which others define in terms of status, money or personal obligation.

There can be disagreements over the definition of situations. The Petalingjaya research compared the expectations of male and female subjects and assessed the possible influence of family ties by asking respondents how they thought Husin Ali's mother

would wish him to act in the situations studied. Other persons, either ideological mobilisers or members of a peer group, can impose their definition of a situation upon a person contemplating an exit option, and can sometimes conscript him or her to a movement about which he or she feels ambivalent.

The research technique could have been used to measure the priority attached to the fulfilment of religious obligations when balanced against secular inclinations. It could also have been used to compare the strength of a shared inclination to align with co-ethnics with a shared inclination to align with co-nationals or with co-believers. Respondents could have been asked to predict how Husin Ali would choose between alternatives involving Chinese-Malaysians and Indonesian immigrant workers. A question could have been drafted about the employment at a cheaper rate of someone with an Indonesian-sounding name that could have provided an indication of the significance attributed to differences of nationality. Since there are many cultural and linguistic continuities between Malays and Indonesians the ethnic/national comparison might have been seen as less clear-cut by Malay than ethnic Chinese respondents and the question might have evoked different responses from them. Nevertheless, this sort of technique offers possibilities for investigating the multidimensionality of group relations in a more systematic manner. It could be adapted for use in Europe to measure, for example, parents' preferences as to ethnic mix in the selection of schools for their children.

## **Conclusion**

Since, as demonstrated by the findings of the Malaysian research, hypotheses about relative values or ethnic preferences can be tested, the propositions advanced above constitute a theory. This theory belongs with other theories that are sometimes classified as instrumentalist or as theories of rational choice. This latter expression is often misunderstood, so it is best to emphasise that the theory presented here rests on the assumption that while individuals seek to maximise their net advantages, they do not necessarily succeed in doing so. Rationality is a criterion used to analyse their action, not a criterion for differentiating some actions from other actions.

The advantages in question include psychological as well as material satisfactions. An individual can gain satisfaction from a feeling that he or she has behaved in accordance with a social norm. When they exercise preferences, individuals choose between the alternatives open to them, so it is necessary to consider why the available alternatives differ from one social environment to another. This theory could be developed to guide research into many forms of social differentiation. The concern here has been to elucidate the nature of social differentiation on the basis of ethnic origin by comparison with other forms of social differentiation.

The everyday significance of assignment to an ethnic category, and the factors maintaining or modifying such categories, can be uncovered best through the study of

social institutions. They provide frameworks within which the significance assigned to ethnic origin can be measured by comparison with the significance assigned to other social categories.

The theory could be developed in ways that bear upon problems of social policy. Many governments seek to promote national integration. They encourage members of the national population to behave towards one another as fellow-citizens, as individuals, not as representatives of social categories. Preferences for alignment with co-ethnics may be seen as divisive. To check on the effectiveness of their anti-discrimination policies, governments utilise ethnic categories to monitor the demand for and supply of resources by public services. Ethnic preferences may be exercised only in the private sphere.

The preferences for association with co-ethnics held both by members of the majority and the minorities change in response to their experiences. In some fields they may strengthen. For example, a religious faith shared with co-ethnics may become more important for immigrants who feel under pressure from the majority. In general, however, the tendency is for majority and minority members increasingly to share the same goals and to recognise the same civic obligations. On these grounds, the study of the trade-off between ethnic and civic preferences might be considered a priority.

## Notes

- 1 In all probability they will have been categorised by their national origin until the mid-twentieth century. Thereafter their descendants will have been free to categorise themselves by their ethnic origin because that category had come into use. In the nineteenth century also, immigrants from Europe will have found themselves categorised as 'white', which will have been a new identification for some of them. An ethnic identification was only occasionally available to black immigrants from the Caribbean.
2. 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.

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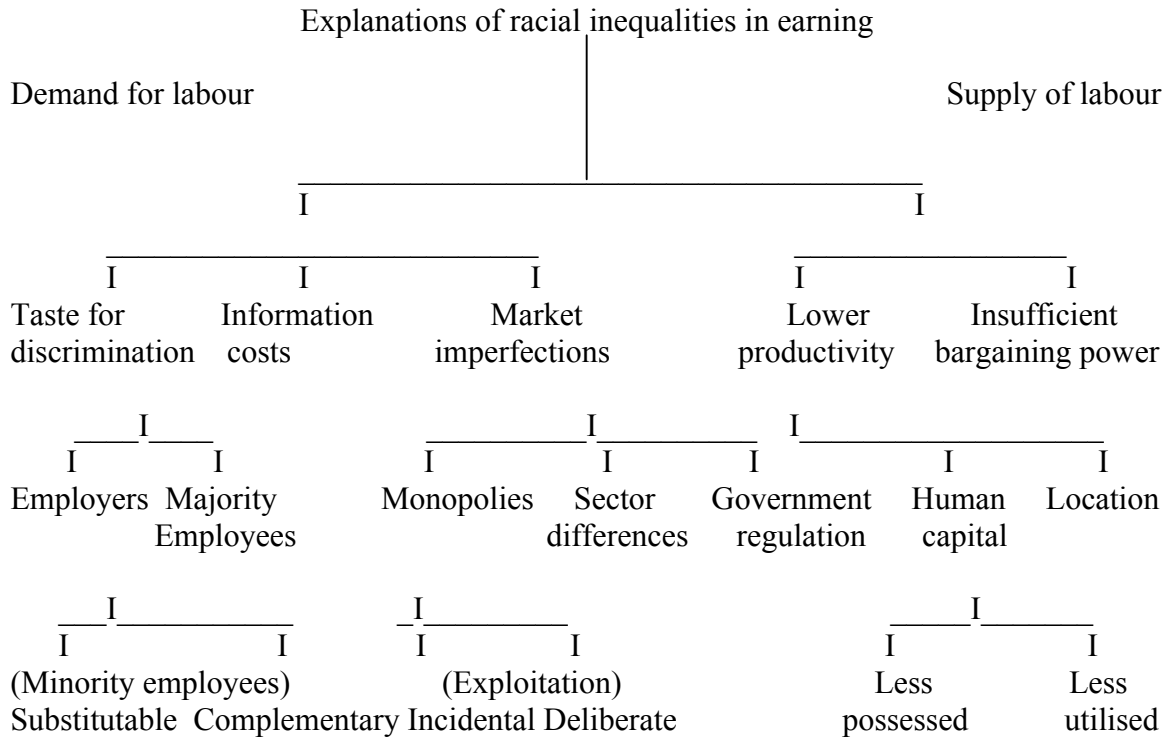
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Table 1



From Banton 1983:367

Table 2

*Percentage of respondents who expected a predominantly ethnic preference in 12 situations*

Situation	Husin Ali		Tang Seng Seng	
	Malay	Chinese	Malay	Chinese
Zoo trip (EPvStatus)	74	41	57	66
Child adoption (EPvStatus)	67	34	70	82
Wedding invitation (EPvStatus)	62	16	36	35
Shopping (EPvMoney)	47	16	28	14
Renting house (EPvMoney)	31	10	2	4
Marriage (EPvPersOblign)	28	14	80	69
Child minder (EPvMoney)	23	10	30	17
Support boss (EPvPersOblign)	20	39	32	25
Wedding party (EPvPersOblign)	18	1	1	0
Child's playmate (EPvPersOblign)	14	3	11	9
Playmate home (EPvPersOblign)	6	1	4	1
House key (EPvMoney)	0	0	2	1