

social differentiation is constituted, and tradition is enshrined. Group and individual survival meld into a personal identity. These are the basic features when the differences between groups are of the sort called 'ethnic' and when this ethnicity takes place in a system of such differences in the political organization of a nation-state.

[*The Cauldron of Ethnicity in the Modern World* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 10–15.]

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4

#### Ethnicity, Race, Class and Nation

##### *The term itself*

'Ethnicity seems to be a new term', state Nathan Glazer and Daniel Moynihan,<sup>1</sup> who point to the fact that the word's earliest dictionary appearance is in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1972. Its first usage is attributed to the American sociologist David Reisman in 1953. The word 'ethnic', however, is much older. It is derived from the Greek *ethnos* (which in turn derived from the word *ethnikos*), which originally meant heathen or pagan.<sup>2</sup> It was used in this sense in English from the mid-fourteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century, when it gradually began to refer to 'racial' characteristics. In the United States, 'ethnics' came to be used around the Second World War as a polite term referring to Jews, Italians, Irish and other people considered inferior to the dominant group of largely British descent. None of the founding fathers of sociology and social anthropology—with the partial exception of Max Weber—granted ethnicity much attention.

Since the 1960s, ethnic groups and ethnicity have become household words in Anglophone social anthropology, although, as Ronald Cohen has remarked,<sup>3</sup> few of those who use the terms bother to define them. In the course of this book, I shall examine a number of approaches to ethnicity. Most of them are closely related, although they may serve different analytical purposes. All of the approaches agree that ethnicity has something to do with the *classification of people and group relationships*.

In everyday language the word ethnicity still has a ring of 'minority issues' and 'race relations', but in social anthropology it refers to aspects of relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive. Although it is true that 'the discourse concerning ethnicity tends to concern itself with subnational units, or minorities of some kind or another',<sup>4</sup> majorities and dominant peoples are no less 'ethnic' than minorities. This will be particularly evident

in chapters 6 and 7, which discuss nationalism and minority–majority relationships.

##### *Ethnicity, race and nation*

A few words must be said initially about the relationship between ethnicity and 'race'. The term race has deliberately been placed within inverted commas in order to stress that it has dubious descriptive value. Whereas it was for some time common to divide humanity into four main races, modern genetics tends not to speak of races. There are two principal reasons for this. First, there has always been so much interbreeding between human populations that it would be meaningless to talk of fixed boundaries between races. Second, the distribution of hereditary physical traits does not follow clear boundaries. In other words, there is often greater variation within a 'racial' group than there is systematic variation between two groups.

Concepts of race can nevertheless be important to the extent that they inform people's actions; at this level, race exists as a cultural construct, whether it has a 'biological' reality or not. Racism, obviously, builds on the assumption that personality is somehow linked with hereditary characteristics which differ systematically between 'races', and in this way race may assume sociological importance even if it has no 'objective' existence. Social scientists who study race relations in Great Britain and the United States need not themselves believe in the existence of race, since their object of study is the social and cultural relevance of the *notion* that race exists. If influential people in a society had developed a similar theory about the hereditary personality traits of red-haired people, and if that theory gained social and cultural significance, 'redhead studies' would for similar reasons have become a field of academic research, even if the researchers themselves did not agree that redheads were different from others in a relevant way. In societies where ideas of race are important, they may therefore be studied as part of local discourses on ethnicity.

Should the study of race relations, in this meaning of the word, be distinguished from the study of ethnicity or ethnic relations? Pierre van den Berghe does not think so,<sup>5</sup> but would rather regard 'race' relations as a special case of ethnicity. Others, among them Michael Banton,<sup>6</sup> have argued the need to distinguish between race and ethnicity. In Banton's view, race refers to the categorisation of people, while ethnicity has to do with group identification. He argues that ethnicity is generally more concerned with the identification of 'us', while racism is more oriented to the categorisation of 'them'.<sup>7</sup> However, ethnicity can assume many forms, and since ethnic ideologies tend to stress common descent among their members, the distinction between race and ethnicity is a problematic one, even if Banton's distinction between



groups and categories can be useful. I shall not, therefore, distinguish between race relations and ethnicity. Ideas of 'race' may or may not form part of ethnic ideologies, and their presence or absence does not seem to be a decisive factor in interethnic relations.

Discrimination on ethnic grounds is spoken of as 'racism' in Trinidad and as 'communalism' in Mauritius,<sup>8</sup> but the forms of imputed discrimination referred to can be nearly identical. On the other hand, it is doubtless true that groups who 'look different' from majorities or dominating groups may be less liable to become assimilated into the majority than others, and that it can be difficult for them to escape from their ethnic identity if they wish to. However, this may also hold good for minority groups with, say, an inadequate command of the dominant language. In both cases, their ethnic identity becomes an imperative status, an ascribed aspect of their personhood from which they cannot escape entirely. Race or skin colour as such is not the decisive variable in every society.

The relationship between the terms ethnicity and nationality is nearly as complex as that between ethnicity and race. Like the words ethnic and race, the word nation has a long history<sup>9</sup> and has been used with a variety of different meanings in English. We shall refrain from discussing these meanings here, and will concentrate on the sense in which nation and nationalism are used analytically in academic discourse. Like ethnic ideologies, nationalism stresses the cultural similarity of its adherents and, by implication, it draws boundaries vis-à-vis others, who thereby become outsiders. The distinguishing mark of nationalism is by definition its relationship to the state. A nationalist holds that political boundaries should be coterminous with cultural boundaries, whereas many ethnic groups do not demand command over a state. When the political leaders of an ethnic movement make demands to this effect, the ethnic movement therefore by definition becomes a nationalist movement. Although nationalisms tend to be ethnic in character, this is not necessarily the case, and we shall look more carefully into the relationship between ethnicity and nationalism in chapters 6 and 7.

#### *Ethnicity and class*

The term ethnicity refers to relationships between groups whose members consider themselves distinctive, and these groups may be ranked hierarchically within a society. It is therefore necessary to distinguish clearly between ethnicity and social class. [...]

Theories of social class always refer to systems of social ranking and distribution of power. Ethnicity, on the contrary, does not necessarily refer to rank; ethnic relations may well be egalitarian in this regard. Still, many polyethnic societies are ranked according to ethnic membership. The criteria

for such ranking are nevertheless different from class ranking; they refer to imputed cultural differences or 'races', not to property or achieved statuses.

There may be a high *correlation* between ethnicity and class, which means that there is a high likelihood that persons belonging to specific ethnic groups also belong to specific social classes. There can be a significant interrelationship between class and ethnicity, both class and ethnicity can be criteria for rank, and ethnic membership can be an important factor in class membership. Both class differences and ethnic differences can be pervasive features of societies, but they are not one and the same thing and must be distinguished from one another analytically.

[*Ethnicity and Nationalism* (London: Pluto Press, 1993), 3-7.]