

# Lecture 3: Ethny (ethnic group)

8 March 2006

# Ethnicity

- Historically largely within the field of anthropology
- Central focus on the concept of culture
- Terms *ethnic*, *ethny* and *ethnic relations* escape the problematic nature of the term *race*

# Ethnicity - ethnic group

- the term *ethnicity* first appeared in English in the 1950s; it has various meanings: a particular ethnic group, ethnic identity, the essence of ethny, belonging to ethny, field of study...
- Greek adjective *ethnikos*: referring to heathens, the ‘others’, foreign; meant *gentile*
- derived from Greek noun *ethnos*: people, unity of people with common blood or descent; sharing some biological or cultural characteristics (it referred to a basic human category, not a subgroup) – but *others*, e.g. foreign barbarians were referred to as *ethnea*
- 15th century in English *ethnic* meant somebody not Hebrew, not Christian; a pagan --> non-ethnic ‘us’ & ethnic ‘others’
- *ethnic* ceased to be related to ‘heathen’ in the early 18<sup>th</sup> c.

# Some related concepts

- **Ethnic identity:**
- individual level of identification with a culturally defined collectivity, the sense of an individual that they belong to a particular cultural community

# Some related concepts

- **Ethnic origin:**
- refers to the individual's sense of ancestry and nativity; connected to one's parents and grandparents
- problematic collective dimension:  
migrational origins of ethnies =>  
ethnogenesis

# Some related concepts

- **Ethnocentrism:** the sense of one's own group's uniqueness and centrality in relation to other ethnies
- The belief that your own group's cultural traditions and values are correct and superior to all others. It is often coupled with dislike and even contempt for people who have other cultural traditions.

# Some related concepts

- **Ethnicism:** rarely used
- Movements of protest and resistance by ethnies and on behalf of ethnies against exploitative and oppressive outsiders
- (John Hutchinson & Anthony D. Smith “Ethnicity” Oxford Readers, 1996)

# No agreed upon definition

- Various levels of incorporation: ethnic category, ethnic network, ethnic association, ethnic community (nation) =>
- ethnic category v ethnic community



# Richard Schermerhorn

*(Comparative Ethnic Relations, 1970)*

- “An ethnic group is ... a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood... A necessary accompaniment is some consciousness of kind among members of the group.”

# Manning Nash

*(The Cauldron of Ethnicity in the Modern World, 1989)*

- “The most common ethnic identity markers ... are *kinship*, ... *commensality*, ... and a *common cult*... This trinity of boundary markers and mechanisms is the deep or basic structure of ethnic group differentiation. It is the presence of cultural markers of blood, substance, and cult that separates ethnic groupings from other kinds of social aggregates, groups, and entities.”

# Fredrik Barth

*(Ethnic Groups and Boundaries, 1969)*

- “ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves.”
- the ethnic boundary defines the group
- “ethnic categories provide an organizational vessel that may be given varying amounts and forms of content in different socio-cultural systems. They may be of great relevance to behaviour, but they may not be.”

# Clifford Geertz

*(Old Societies and New States, 1963)*

- “By a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the ‘givens’ – or, more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed ‘givens’ – of social existence: immediate contiguity and kin connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices. These congruities of blood, speech, custom, and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times overpowering, coerciveness in and of themselves.”

# 6 main features of ethnies:

(Hutchinson & Smith, 1996)

- common name
- myth of common ancestry (shared origin)
- shared historical memories
- elements of common culture
- a link with a homeland
- sense of solidarity

# Culture

(Fenton, 1999)

- The concept of culture is a central one but also a tantalising one
- Material culture: the objects created, the material reproduction of human societies
- Symbolic: valued styles and ways of life, manners, customs, rituals...
- Emphasising the importance of learning: socialisation v innate bio-psychological universals => seemingly endless variation in the construction of cultures

# Culture

(Fenton, 1999)

- How does culture construct group boundaries?
- “Culture should not be thought of as a fixed quality; cultures shift both in small incremental steps and in seemingly dramatic moments wherein we imagine we glimpse the end of a way of life or the beginning of a new one. Neither should it be thought of as ‘attached’ to a group, community, nation or people in such a way that we can, without qualification, define ‘this people’ as the people who share ‘this culture’... Devotion to specific cultural forms varies across a group and the forms are frequently contested and constantly being defined and redefined.”

# Culture

(Fenton, 1999)

- Language
- A powerful group marker but
- Languages stretch across many groups who may think of themselves as ethnic groups – ethnically distinct
- If the language is a part of an ethnic (or national) claim, it is the most important mechanism of the boundary-making process
- If unknown to outsiders, it is a means of social exclusion



# Different contexts of ethnicity

- Ethnicity is both material and symbolic; it is both grounded and constructed:
- Ethnic categories shift and change their content as circumstances change &
- Ethnicity also has a ‘real’ social basis in the enduring importance that people attach to ancestry, language, culture

# Concepts of ethnicity

- American sociological tradition: ethnic groups are parts of a larger society; ethnies are always minorities within a nation or national state
- ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ approaches:
- O: emphasis on cultural traits (language, religion, culture, customs, ‘racial characteristics’)
- S: emphasis on the contextual meaning and the fluidity of ethnic identity

# Different 'types' of ethnic groups

(Eriksen, 1993)

- Urban ethnic minorities
- Indigenous peoples
- Proto-nations (ethnonationalist movements)
- Ethnic groups in plural societies
- Post-slavery minorities (added by Fenton)

# Bringing in the ethnicity

- after the atrocities of the Second World War and the Holocaust and anti-Semitism, the word 'race' became problematic
- the word 'ethnicity' becomes the preferred choice for expressing inter-group differences
- especially from the 1960s onward; anti-colonial, anti-racist arguments => ethnicity expresses positive feelings of belonging to a cultural group
- after the collapse of communism more negative aspects of ethnicity come to the fore (esp. because of 'ethnic cleansing')
- but - the persistence of race...

## 8. Ethnicity

Please indicate with a tick the ethnic group to which you feel you belong, or give details of the group to which you feel you belong in the section marked OTHER. Ethnicity is not the same as nationality, place of birth or citizenship but is to do with colour, race, broad ethnic group and culture.

### Asian or Asian British:

- Bangladeshi
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Other Asian Background

### Black or Black British:

- African
- Caribbean
- Other Black Background

### Chinese or other ethnic group:

- Chinese
  
- Any other - please state:

### Mixed Parentage:

- White and Asian
- White and Black African
- White and Black Caribbean
- Other Mixed Background

### White:

- White British
- White Irish
- Other White Background



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**PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL**

# Lecture 4 reading list:

- From “The Ethnicity Reader” (Guibernau & Rex, 1997) read Anderson
- From the “Nationalism” Oxford reader (Hutchinson & Smith, 1994) anything from sections I, II and III or go straight to the source:
- Anthony Smith *The ethnic origins of nations*, pp. 6-13, 16-18
- Benedict Anderson *Imagined communities*, pp. 5-7
- Ernest Gellner *Nations and nationalism*, pp. 1-7 + ‘Adam’s navel...’ in Mortimer & Fine *People, Nation and State* (pp. 31-35) + Smith ‘The Nation: Real or Imagined?’ (ibid.) (pp. 36-42)
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- Eric Hobsbawm *Nations and nationalism since 1780*, pp. 8-13
- Michael Hechter *Containing nationalism* pp. 5-9
- Craig Calhoun *Nationalism* pp. 1-8
- Montserrat Guibernau *Nationalisms* pp. 46-51
- Rogers Brubaker *Nationalism reframed* pp. 13-16
- Walker Connor *Ethnonationalism* pp. 90-103
- Miroslav Hroch *Social preconditions of national revival in Europe* pp. xi-xviii, 3-17
- Pdf files!; any general book on nationalism that you can find in the library