

## **Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: Nordic Schools of Approach**

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Some 25 years ago, Fredrik Barth led a group of Nordic scholars in an attempt to reformulate some very old questions. Since the beginning of anthropology, the paradox of distinct "cultures" within the greater unity of human culture had been, implicitly as well as explicitly, the background to the debate on what kind of entities culture and society are. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969) was to become a classic in its field and among the best known of Nordic contributions to the social sciences.

It may be useful, therefore, to reiterate the dilemmas the authors were trying to resolve. In reconstituting some of these questions, I may perhaps be forgiven that the brief sketch I am attempting, is of necessity a caricature.

Let us remember, still, the, with our intellectual ancestors, of such terms as the "spirit" of a people (Volksgeist), the "genius" of a race, the "nature" of a people or a culture. Such conceptions imply that, for each people, each culture, there is an apparently irreducible specificity which can be covered only by terms which defy analytical dissection. Let us also remember how, on this very point, diffusionism offered an apparently far more scientific alternative, in reducing culture to a proliferation of single elements which could be separately analysed and mapped out. In both cases, however, the maintenance of cultural difference remains a problem.

For those following, broadly speaking, the tradition of Herder, "the nation" becomes problematic in that such units are in a sense segmentary: is the Bavarian spirit a version of the German one? Is there a Scandinavian national culture ranging across the nation-states? Should the specificity of culture be treated at the level of Bengal or Gujarat, or is there a spirit common to all India? Similar problems abound when we are dealing with groups in the process of defining their own specificity - a problem which is still very much with us, and which permeates the debate on nations and nationalism.

For the diffusionists, the same problem appeared in another guise. Why should a cultural group accept certain cultural elements

from outside, while rejecting others? In spite of the continuity of "culture" on a global level, then, boundaries remain. In fact, a debate on *Culture and Diffusion*, dealing with just this theme, preceded, in the Nordic milieu, the work on ethnic boundaries (Klausen 1961).

While these concerns continued to occupy the anthropologists, there were important parallel developments in the sociology of minorities. Thomas and Znaniecki (1921) had defined the parameters of a sociology of acculturation and assimilation which, by the fifties, had found its way to the common discourse of concerned parties everywhere. Recently, these questions have been reopened, notably by Ulf Hannerz (1991), speaking about the *creolisation* of culture in the present-day world.

Is there an end to ethnicity? While I am sceptical to such formulations, the question itself is unlikely to disappear.

The assimilationist view, however, received a major blow with the appearance of Glazer and Moynihan's work on American political ethnicity (1963). The "melting pot", the authors maintained, was largely a myth; American politics continued to be ethnically structured, and this political dimension was founded on the very real resistance of ethnic groups to assimilation.

Writing from South Africa, Philip Mayer (1961) had already shown how the minority situation of the Xhosa led, not only to de-tribalisation, but to the confirmation of ethnic distinctiveness defined by him as re-tribalisation.

And, there was yet another tradition of scholarship where similar questions presented themselves forcefully. In writing the Indian constitution, the new national elite had wanted to abolish the distinctions of caste. Yet caste not only lingered on in Indian society, as became more and more clear especially in the sixties, it seemed to adapt itself functionally to the very modernity that should have crushed it. Indian politics on the local and regional level, it became clear, could scarcely be understood unless caste solidarity was assumed in the analysis (cfr. Kothari et al. 1961).

The sixties, then, was a period when scholars came to realise that the optimism, apparent in the post-war democratic sentiments, that individualism and modernity would break down group boundaries and lead, ultimately, to the disappearance of the ugly phenomenon of racism, were checked by the realisation that cultural distinctions could not or would not disappear.

In this sense, there is certainly a parallel with the present proliferation of ethnic conflict all over the world, leading to a reopening of the scholarly interest in ethnicity which for some years has been rather lukewarm.

### **Ethnic groups and boundaries**

I have tried, then, albeit sketchily, to show how the maintenance of ethnic distinctions became a natural focus for the contributors to the symposium led by Barth. We should note two other elements that entered into the approach chosen by these scholars.

In his *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (1954), Edmund Leach had treated, rather extensively, the theme of changing ethnic allegiance. When Kachin moved to the valley, not only did they change their economic adaptation and their way of life, but they also started to view themselves as Shan. This stress on a subjective dimension of *choosing* ethnic identity implied a strong criticism of the division of the ethnographic world into objectively distinct "cultures". Barth himself had found, however, at a time when he was working more or less next door to Leach in Cambridge, that the Kurds retained their ethnic identification across a wide range of social and political forms (1953). The question of ethnic boundary-making was thus implicitly posed.

In his work on Pakistan, Barth had posed another set of questions, related to the integration of ethnic groups in a wider regional system. To my knowledge, he was the first to apply the ecological terms of competition and symbiosis to such inter-ethnic configurations (1956, 1964). While this approach apparently pre-supposed the ethnic distinctness of different populations, the stress on complementarity within a systemic context raised, implicitly, the question of why populations who occupy contrasting ecological niches should choose to remain ethnically distinct in one area, while similar contrast, elsewhere, might lead only to occupational specialisation within a single ethnic group.

In the symposium, these questions were brought together. Barth (1969b) chose to deal, precisely, with the maintenance of a single Pathan identity across a wide range of adaptations, from "tribal" nomads to dominant groups in a more or less "feudal" set-up. He thus made explicit the problems left largely implicit in his work on Kurdistan; but he also showed how the maintenance of a single ethnic identity, among the Pathans, implied a continual cultural discourse to establish the common "Pathanness" of apparently

diverse values. In a similar vein, Blom (1969) tried to demonstrate how a similar discourse linked mountain and valley farmers, in upland Norway, into a common conception of Norwegianness.

As a contrast, and clearly inspired by Leach, Haaland, Knutsson and Isikowitz (all 1969) dealt with situations where differential adaptations led to ethnic contrast. Haaland's article, in fact, reiterated Leach's point that the values associated with the adaptation itself may become cornerstones of identity, so that the change from farming Fur to nomadic Baggara led by implication to adoption of a new ethnic identity. Isikowitz painted a picture where ethnic frontiers, as in Barth's earlier work on Pakistan, were implied in a regional network of competition and complementarity. Knutsson showed how, in the Ethiopian context, several different ethnic processes coexist; dichotomisation may be weakened or strengthened, and integration may take one of several forms. But in all cases, he concludes, "any concept of ethnic group defined on the basis of "cultural content" will not suffice for the analysis of ethnicity in its various interactional contexts"(1969; 99).

Siverts (1969) dealt with ethnic identity in the context of stratification, Southern Mexico furnishing the material. Eidheim (1969), showing a strong influence from Goffman (1963), discussed the concept of stigma in the ethnic context. In both the latter cases, ethnic conversion was an apparent precondition of upward social mobility; thus the authors had to deal with identities where stratification and ethnicity were intrinsically intermingled.

The theoretical conclusions presented in this volume implied a dialectic interrelationship between choice and ascription. The dilemma, as presented by Barth (1969a), may perhaps be summed up thus: Ethnic identities are chosen, not intrinsic; they need to be constantly maintained by discourse. They are a product of social process, not a preconditioned given for its analysis. And yet, he underlines, such identities, once chosen, become imperative. They imply a whole range of identifications, a "summation of status's", as Weber might have put it. Thus there is, for the individual, a strange coincidence between the given and the chosen, between the absolute and the relative. In daily life, he or she must continually choose between under-communicating and over-communicating (Goffman 1959) the elements of ethnic distinction or sameness.

In brief, the intention of the work was to relativise ethnic identity, to contextualise its expression, in contemporary terms to decompose

or deconstruct it. Ethnicity was to be seen as a cultural construction, not as an ascriptive inheritance.

This approach, while an extremely important contribution at the time, does raise problems. But before we turn to them, let me note some other, important contributions to the debate on ethnicity which appeared at about the same time. Two British authors influenced us in Norway; there were, of course, others.

The year *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* appeared, Abner Cohen published his *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa* (1969). Here, he returned to some of the themes from Philip Mayer's work. The Hausa of Nigeria monopolise the cattle trade, and Cohen's main point is how ethnic distinctness remains a condition for the maintenance of this monopoly. Further, as Nigerian nation-building makes ethnic affirmation an illegitimate "tribalism", he shows how the Hausa of Southern Nigeria regroup under the leadership of an Islamic sect, thus finding a new ideational framework for the expression of ethnicity. The intimate bond between economic interest and ethnic identity makes Cohen insist on the essentially political dimension of ethnicity. Here he parallels the approaches developing, at the same time, in America from Glazer and Moynihan's work.

John Rex had been noted for his insistence on aligning British sociology with the classical tradition coming down from Marx, Durkheim, Pareto, and - perhaps above all - Max Weber (1967). He wrote in the context of studies on "race relations", a British tradition which, while contributing a large amount of material, had not been noted for its theoretical contributions. In *Race Relations in Sociological Theory* (1970) he sets out to show that minority studies do, indeed, form an intrinsic part of the mainstream of sociological theory. Two distinct points of departure may be noted. Complex society implies, first, a degree of competition, and the individual can only assert himself in such a situation by the intermediary of the group. Secondly, complexity implies a need for simplification, if society is to be intelligible to the individual; this implies the need for categorisation.

Historically, categorisation and group formation produce a dialectic movement whereby groups become stereotyped and stereotypes contribute to group formation. Rex follows this up by tracing the genesis of stereotypes through the colonial process, concentrating especially on the way in which blacks become characterised, in the metropolis, as inferior human beings (see also 1975).

These contributions, as well as the American tradition from Glazer and Moynihan's work (also 1975), tended to form, in the seventies, a counterpoint to Barth's approach. Where the latter concentrated on cultural distinction, the former stressed social conflict and competition. Ethnicity, then, became a phenomenon viewed either from a cultural, or from a political, angle.

In Norway, several writers tried to integrate these two approaches. Eidheim showed how ethnic stigma, among the Lapps, was gradually replaced by what he called ethnic incorporation - the formulation of separate Lappish values and the attempt to range the minority behind them. He also tried to show how this attempt produced a cleavage among Lapps; the reindeer herders, with their large store of distinctive symbols, elaborated by a small elite of intellectuals, separating from the mass of fishermen and peasants, to whom ethnic distinction still seemed a major obstruction to social mobility (1971).

Grønhaug (1979) dealt with the inter-ethnic discourse between Norwegians and third-world immigrants, analysing it as controlled by "rules", which conditioned the relative interactional competence of the parties. The majority's control of the rules provided the genesis for stigmatisation of the minority. But dominance would not be absolute, and the interactional competence that the minority could make relevant, would be a major element in determining its expression of minority status.

I was myself trying to integrate the cultural and political perspectives on ethnicity through my study of an Indian caste, the Patidars, in London (1973, 1980). Borrowing both from Cohen and Rex, I tried to determine the dialectics by which economically successful entrepreneurs defined, for other members of their community, how to be a real Patidar in the new context. I tried to show how patron-client relations underpinned their formulation of Patidarness, as real economic and social attractions were made available to those trying to conform to the ideal.

I then tried, following both Rex and Barth, to show how ethnic stereotypes, in their formulation of cultural distinction, combined answers both to the problem of grasping the complexity of society and to the need for a strategic organisation of individuals in competition with other groups (1976).

### **What ghetto males are like**

But, in all this work, there was perhaps a baby lost with the bath-water. This baby was the content of the ethnic identity itself; in fact, the very element which had, so consistently, produced such a number of attempts at characterisation, from the *Volksgeist* of Herder to the Ethos of Bateson (1958). In our attempts to forge a common framework for its study we were perhaps forgetting that one main reason for the persistence of ethnicity may well be, indeed, that no two ethnic identities are alike.

Another Nordic writer was, in fact, attacking the problem of ethnicity from just this point of view. Ulf Hannerz, in *Soulside* (1970a) tried to deal precisely with the content of Black American Culture, conceived through an analysis of roles and life styles. The book raised a good deal of conflict in the Swedish anthropological milieu, and made Hannerz, perhaps, the founder of modern Swedish anthropology.

It was alleged that his concentration on situations, on roles, on life-styles, was "impressionistic", "literary", and not truly scientific. In fact, his work bore the stamp of Goffman's influence, and thus paralleled some of the work done in Norway, notably by Eidheim.

But Hannerz had a very different focus. Through his description of situations, encounters, styles of role performance, he tried to answer another set of questions. "What ghetto males are like" - the title of one of his articles of this period (1970b)- may indicate how, through the minutiae of daily life, he tried to contextualise expressions of identity by painting the life-world - to use a recent term - of which they form a part. The ghetto male - to stay with him for a moment - is not just expressing identity through a set of values, but expressing his very self through divergent lifestyles which all answer to the contiguities of conditions in the ghetto, as a "mainstreamer" trying to realise, as far as possible, the ideals of the wider society; as a "swinger", negating these ideals with an alternative flamboyance; or as a "street corner man" sticking to the realisation of whatever is left to the unemployed and unencumbered, i.e. his virility and his minimal enjoyments such as drink. All these lifestyles, however, incarnate in some degree the common denominator of "soul", and we get quite close to that un-definable essence of a culture that the concept of "ethos" was wrought to define.

In a way, Hannerz's later work on the city (1981) and on the essence of "urbanity" brings us closer to what Rex tried to analyse, but again, it is not the groups or cultures as such, but the variety of

lifestyles provided by the city, that provides us with the building-blocks of Hannerz's image of complexity. This leads us, ultimately, to the question asked in his latest work (1991), whether this multiplicity of urban lifestyles, as they become, increasingly, a matter of individual choice rather than group ascription, will not lead to a dissolution of the ethnic group itself and of the boundaries that set it apart.

Before returning to this question, let me briefly consider another contribution to ethnic studies by Swedish scholars. Led, largely, by Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) Swedish socio-linguists have been investigating closely the links between language, identity and expression. The main trend of this work has been to stress the importance of the first language, the necessity to express oneself fully within this idiom before attempting to learn another. The practical value of this work, in helping to establish teaching for immigrant and minority children in their mother tongue, has been considerable. It seems relevant, here, to underline how this approach leads us, again, to the content of identity, to the inner life of the group, as opposed to a stress on the boundary and its maintenance. One may, indeed, see here a contrast between a "Swedish" and a "Norwegian" position with regard to ethnic studies, at least as they appeared in the seventies.

I have concentrated on a few Norwegian and Swedish contributions, to the exclusion of work done in Denmark or Finland. A large number of Nordic authors have dealt with ethnicity over the years. Many of them have followed the lines of inquiry indicated above, while others have taken their inspiration from abroad. The work mentioned, however, comes closest to defining "schools of thought" that can properly be said to be Nordic.

### **The recent past - and the present**

While there is a recent revival of interest in ethnicity among Nordic scholars, there is little doubt that, here as among anthropologists elsewhere, the eighties represented a relatively lean period after the intensive debates of the seventies.

Recent trends have tended toward a return to the question of cultural content in ethnic identity. This is, as far as I can see, an international phenomenon, and does not represent a phenomenon peculiar to the Nordic countries.

Rather than discussing specific contributions, then, I shall try to characterise the present in terms of the questions left open by the



past. Here, Hannerz's work on the "creolisation" of world culture (1989) - which has found an echo among other writers such as Hylland Eriksen (1993) - stands as a challenge to many of the assumptions on which ethnic studies, particularly those growing out of the work on *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* - have rested. In trying to make my way through the intricate questions raised by this challenge, I shall suggest some of the possible lines of study, as I see them.

While anthropological debate on ethnicity has been rather stale in the eighties, a lively debate, led by historians, has sprung up, regarding nationalism and the nation state (Gellner 1983, Hobsbawm 1990, etc.). An important contribution from the anthropologists has been that of Anderson (1983). Though the proponents themselves explicitly avoid the theme of ethnicity, this debate, as well as that on the social construction of "tradition" (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) needs to be closely considered by the recent revival of ethnic studies. This is even more so, as the recent revival of racism in Europe is so clearly related to one particular conception of the nation.

### **The cultural construction of imagined communities**

Nations are "imagined communities", says Anderson (1983). But so, surely, are ethnic groups. The quality of commonness, as soon as we leave the local face-to-face level, has certainly to be imagined; it is a cultural construction. This brings us back to the arbitrariness of boundary-making underlined by Barth and his colleagues. But are nations and ethnic communities imagined in the same way?

The answer of historians such as Hobsbawm (1990) is clear: they are not. For the nation, the state intervenes, or at least the elite group that is trying to create it. This leaves us, however, with a parallel question for the ethnic group - is it the creation of an ethnic elite?

Indeed, when "ethnicity" is read as "political ethnicity", as in the works of Cohen (1969), or of Glazer and Moynihan (1963,1975), such an elite is an important element in ethnic mobilisation. But if we accept that ethnicity may exist prior to mobilisation, that ethnicity is as much a cultural as a political phenomenon, do we then need the imagination of an elite? Or are members of ethnic groups able to conceive of their group-ness without recourse to elite formation?

If so, can we avoid falling back on ethnicity as an ascribed, pre-existing quality of culturally distinct populations?

Let us, here, keep in mind the distinction between ethnic categories and ethnic groups (Handelman 1977). We may, perhaps, accept that mobilisation - or what Eidheim calls incorporation - of ethnic groups calls for a degree of organisation which, only with difficulty, can be envisaged without some degree of elite leadership. The question of "spontaneous" mobilisation - notably in the face of a threat to the community - should be kept open, but most of us would probably agree that this is at best a borderline case. Such situations tend to produce leaders even where none existed previously.

With the formation of ethnic categories, however, we are clearly dealing with a different kind of process. While such categorisation may result from elite activity, one wonders whether this is a necessary condition. May an awareness of ethnic distinction not form at the individual level, grow through the interaction of people sharing a feeling of similarity, then only to be taken up by a cultural elite trying, say, through literary activity, to define more closely the content of ethnicity in the particular case?

Even if we reject, with Hobsbawm (1990), that "proto-nationalism" is synonymous with ethnic awareness, can we similarly reject a kind of "proto-ethnic" awareness prior to the establishment of clear-cut ethnic categories? Such awareness might include solidarity based on regional, religious or linguistic ties. Thus there is an amount of solidarity and pride, in the part of France where I live, in the Occitan language, whereas most people would refuse to align themselves according to an ethnic boundary between French and Occitan speakers.

This brings us back to the question of how ethnic categories are constructed. I would like, here, to remind you of two distinct procedures of categorisation identified by cognitive scientists. On the one hand we have structural categories, defined by contrast (Levi-Strauss 1968 etc.). Departing from contrast, boundary-making becomes fundamental, and, in reverse, it is tempting to assume that when the marking of a cultural boundary becomes of central concern, the ethnic categories formed will be structural in character (Tambs-Lyche 1991).

Alternatively, ethnicity may be constructed around proto-types (Rosch 1978). Among the London Patidars (Tambs-Lyche 1980), the successful entrepreneur, incorporating the essential qualities of the "real" Patidar, may be seen as such a prototype. In so far as others try to imitate the comportment of these entrepreneurs, we get a

gradation of "Patidarness": some are more Patidar than others. Borderline cases are those individuals who, for one reason or another, reject the entrepreneur model as a guideline for their own lifestyle, yet remain Patidar by descent.

When the ethnic imagery clusters around the prototype, boundary-making becomes of secondary importance, as the mode of ethnic incorporation allows of differences of degree (Tambs-Lyche 1991). In such a situation, the relevance of an absolute boundary line becomes less clear.

### **New wine in old bottles**

"Creolisation" of culture implies, if we accept the idea fully, that the absorption, of cultural elements by individual choice, leads to the gradual disappearance of the discontinuity that constitute ethnic boundaries (Hannerz 1991).

The simplest, and negative, answer to this proposition is that ethnic groups have, generally, been perfectly able to absorb new cultural elements without thereby losing their specificity. Driving cars, living in western housing, adopting western dress, and organising the household around the concept of the nuclear family may have made Indian immigrants in the West less "Indian"; it has not led them to merge with the surrounding populations. Indeed, if Italians and Irish remain distinct groups in the American situation, it cannot be because of a lack of common cultural traits. To many outsiders, they are not that easy to distinguish.

And yet, such criticism misses the point. Not because there exist families - and not a few - built on mixed marriages between the ethnic groups, resulting in a large number of Americans who are in a position to choose elements from both traditions for their own, personal, mix of cultures. They are, of course, the very stuff of which "creolisation" is made. However, the elements of the cultural menu remain, in themselves, ethnically tagged. Pizza and pasta may be universally present on the cultural scene; yet they remain Italian.

But, since such elements become universally available, they lose their potential as ethnic markers. Indians or Anglo-Americans may eat pizza and pasta without in any sense redefining their ethnic affiliation. Creolisation of culture, therefore, does not lead to a dissolution of ethnic boundaries. The central question is not whether a certain cultural trait is taken over, but how it enters into the construction of ethnic categories - as the debate on diffusion makes clear (e.g. Klausen et al., 1961).

Instead we must ask whether this ethnic neutralisation of cultural traits reduces the store of differences which can be used to mark boundaries. This, it seems to me, is the main question raised by the concept of creolisation.

### **Destruction and creation of cultural boundaries**

The universal sharing of cultural traits brings us back to the essential point of assimilation theory. Its main assumption is clear: As objective differences between groups diminish, the ethnic boundary fades in significance, ultimately to disappear. But this assumption, the very point attacked by Glazer and Moynihan (1963), leaves two questions unanswered.

The first one is the creation, as well as the disappearance, of markers of distinction. This is the process that Bourdieu has repeatedly treated, albeit in a perspective of class rather than ethnicity (1977, 1984). Yet similar processes are constantly met with in the formation of ethnic categories. The theory of creolisation would seem to imply, either that the production of new markers of ethnic difference has come to a halt, or that it is intrinsically slower than the diffusion of cultural traits. At this point, let me leave this question open.

The second is the process which forms the very foundation of Rex' thinking on ethnicity (1970, 1975), namely, that conflict and competition is constantly renewing the need for group formation, while the opaqueness of complex society similarly produces, and not only maintains, the need for categories to map out society around us.

It is not an a priori, however, that such categories and groups need to be ethnic in form. But this question leads us to review our concept of "ethnicity" as much as its possible disappearance.

Can we imagine a situation where subcultures - chosen individually rather than ascribed through group membership - become the chief constituents of complex society? Such a situation would be the logical conclusion to a process of cultural creolisation. It is also, let us note, a conclusion entirely in tune with traditional ideas of modernity.

In a synchronic perspective, such a situation would not seem to contradict, even, the assumptions made by Rex. Subcultural categories may be imagined as an alternative to ethnic ones in the cognitive mapping out of complex society, and, in the same, limited

perspective, we could imagine such subcultures forming the basis of interest groups.

But what conditions must be fulfilled if such a society is to maintain its openness over time? I think this question is crucial, and leads us on to a diachronic perspective. In effect, we have to ask: if interest groups, representing subcultural differences, are to persist over time, can they avoid crystallising into ethnic groups? Will they not, according to their divergent interest, form stereotypes of each other, and maintain themselves by endogamy? If artists or intellectuals, as well as other groups, do so, will they not become rather like castes? Alternatively, what factors will contribute to the constant regrouping that would seem necessary to avoid such crystallisation?

### **Caste and ethnicity**

One of the multi-cultural societies which provides us with the best foundation for testing such a perspective is India. We have noted the persistence of the caste system in the face of modernisation. Why does it persist? I would like to cite here one of the pioneers of Indian sociology, Thoothi, who wrote, in 1935:

“The historical sketch which follows is designed to give due emphasis to the events which conspired to place the folk of the region in a certain, namely defensive, position during several centuries. This state of affairs reacted very sternly on the life of the people; for they lived perpetually under the menace of violence. Therefore, their society, like the snail, drew itself up into its shell, and lived thus for a long time. In such circumstances a society, if it is to preserve itself, demands unquestioning obedience from its members, the powers of its “elders” increases without limits, and its structure becomes so unhealthy conservative that even the slightest necessary change is looked upon with intense suspicion and misgiving, much less contemplated..... Thus it happened in Gujarat.” (1935; 19).

The perspective offered here is simple, no doubt, but is it false? Thoothi offers us, here, the seeds of a theory of the “crystallisation” of society into castes, of the genesis as well as the maintenance of the process. What is more: the perspective offered is essentially similar to that of Rex (1970): crystallisation of society into distinct hereditary groups is a mechanism for defence in face of conflict and competition in society.

We should add, perhaps, that for Thoothi, political instability and a weak state contribute to the process. Indeed, some of the persis-

tence of castes can surely be attributed to the security caste offers in a society where the state has not, traditionally, been able to protect the individual directly, and where, moreover, the exercise of important aspects of law and order were often delegated to groups in the caste system (see also Pearson 1976).

Today, while lower castes may be seen to re-group - separate but similar communities joining to form a single unit, or separation occurring within units due to differential adaptations to modernity - it is among successful subcultural groupings, such as film stars or intellectuals, that we find the clearest examples of caste barriers breaking down. It seems that in the "defensive" position, to use Thoothi's term, caste remains functional. Only where individuals find themselves faced by new opportunities - an "offensive" position so to speak - do they break away from caste links. This is, however, hardly true of the business communities, where the "family firm" remains important and leads to an easy identification between business dynasties and caste categories (Timberg 1978, Tambs-Lyche 1992; 155-59, 161-63). Here, as among the Hausa of Nigeria (Cohen 1969) or the London Patidars (Tambs-Lyche 1980), the coherence and separateness of the ethnic group seem to strengthen its position in the competitive world of business.

But while India offers an example of the persistence of ethnic groups - if the term is accepted for castes - in the face of modernity, it also offers an example of diffusion of cultural traits. While Srinivas' concept of "sanskritisation" (1963, 1967) has been contested, nobody seems to deny the existence of a continuous diffusion of cultural traits from the higher castes to the lower. In adopting elements of high-caste culture, the members of lower castes claim a higher position for themselves in the overall hierarchy. Since, however, other castes do the same, the situation becomes one of constant cultural competition as well as overall cultural change.

While the process may affect group solidarity, in that part of a caste, having successfully adopted a series of higher-caste traits, may separate from the rest of the caste whose cultural mobility has been slower, these processes in no way affect the resistance of the institution of caste, as such, to change. There is, I think, a lesson here for studies of ethnic stratification elsewhere.

And this leads us to my final point in discussing the caste system; that it is, indeed, a system, which both on the cognitive and the organisational plane extends beyond a sum of ethnic groups. This is

not the place for the debate surrounding Louis Dumont's work on hierarchy in the Indian context (1970); let me just state here that whether one shares his views or not, some conception of the whole of caste society as a hierarchically ordered system seems to be a necessary feature of any understanding of India.

And this brings us to an important conclusion. To the extent that hierarchy permeates caste, the very conception of caste relevant in each case becomes a function of the position the group occupies in the overall hierarchy. This insight, which made earlier attempts at defining caste - as a general, analytic concept - seem inadequate, should make us ask whether the same is true for our conception of "ethnic group".

### **The social production of distinction**

A parallel to studies of sanskritisation is not lacking in the West. I have already mentioned the work of Bourdieu (1977, 1984); let me just stress that for him, as was also the case in the Indian situation, the diffusion of upper-class cultural traits downwards presupposes a continuous production of new traits at the top. Similarly, Anderson (1971) has stressed the importance of the aristocracy in creating a European culture. Cultural creativeness may not be an upper-class monopoly, but the marking of a cultural trait as coming from above surely furthers its acceptance by others.

This leads us to another problem, crucial in the study of ethnicity. It predisposes a critique both of the approach centring on ethnic boundaries, of the renewed stress on the content of ethnicity, and of the stress on competition and "political ethnicity".

While inter-ethnic situations may be structured around equality, or intrinsically mixed with a dimension of stratification, one would be hard put to find a multi-ethnic society which is not stratified. While, analytically, we have tended to keep ethnicity and stratification separate, our empirical observations usually find the two dimensions inextractably intermingled (cf. Shibutani and Kwan 1965).

Let me turn, here, to the concept of stigmatisation, as it applies to ethnic groups. Surely, not all ethnic groups are stigmatised. While all may be ascribed negative markers by others, I think we do well to reserve the term stigma for those cases where the negative dimension enters into the view that group members themselves project of their identity (cfr. Goffman 1964).

Thus, when Eidheim's Coastal Lapps (1969) use the Sami language among themselves only, changing to Norwegian whenever a member of the majority is present, this would seem to indicate an acceptance of the low evaluation of their own language. Similarly, when fishermen in Gujarat claim to be "originally" Rajputs - the high-status land-owning caste - but add that they lost their land and had to subsist as fishermen due to Muslim invasions, they implicitly accept that land-owning is superior to fishing as a basis for caste status (census of India, 1961).

In both cases we can hardly treat ethnic identity as separate from stratificational position. They have combined in the construction of a single identity. Sure, they might become separated, in which case I would read into this separation an effort precisely to free the ethnic identification from the stigma of class.

"Was heisst das in Franzosisch - die Überlegenheit der Deutschen Rasse?" (How do you say in French - the superiority of the German race?) asks a German soldier, during the occupation, of his French mistress. Clearly, there is no answer, in spite of the evident possibility of direct translation. The superiority in question is unthinkable, rather than ungrammatical, in French. It is less funny when a Brahmin tells you that only a Brahmin, regardless of scholarship, is able really to understand the Veda. And it is not so long ago that many white Americans doubted that the Blacks had, really, the same intellectual capacity as whites. Or let me cite my Patidar landlord in London: "We Indians are good businessmen. We know how to save.... If an Indian earns fifteen pounds, he spends twelve and saves three. If an English-man earns fifteen pounds, he spends eighteen".

Implications of ethnic superiority, then, are as common and as important as those of ethnic stigma. They, too, enter into the cultural construction of specific ethnic identities. Stigma and superiority may even be combined in the same cultural construction, as they relate respectively to those above and below the speaker.

As already noted, such stratificational aspects of group identities are particularly clear in the Indian context. But we surely find the same phenomenon elsewhere, as when Poles in Chicago range them-selves - geographically as well as in stratificational terms - between the Italians and the Blacks.



### **Prototypes and boundaries.**

As an example of ethnic identity constructed around a prototype, I noted the Patidars of London (Tambs-Lyche 1980). The prototype, there, of the successful entrepreneur is a positive one. Indeed, in so far as the prototype serves as an ideal, a standard against which other members of the community may be judged, it could hardly be otherwise. I would submit that prototypical structured ethnic constructions are of necessity positive.

I have tried to show, elsewhere (Tambs-Lyche 1991), that the causal explanation of such positive prototypes rest on ascription; the Patidar entrepreneur owes his success to the intrinsic qualities of the caste, whose members know not only how to save, but also how to invest, and to succeed in business. The attraction of the prototype lies precisely in this stress on qualities common to all members of the caste, which means not only that every Patidar has the same potential, but that its realisation amounts, in principle, to the realisation of ones self.

Ethnic stigmatisation implies just the opposite; it constitutes a barrier to self-realisation. As such, we understand why the stigma is explained by outside factors: were it not for the Muslim invasions, the Gujarat fishermen cited above would have remained Rajputs and land-owners. The explanation of stigma by outside factors constitute a defence of the self against social contingency; the explanation of the successful prototype, instead, offers an affirmation of the self. The content of an ethnic construction cannot be understood apart from its social function, and vice versa.

In the stigmatised situation, where identity takes on a defensive mode, boundary-making may not seem to be a central concern. For certain communities, however, it is; most low-caste communities in India are eager to distinguish themselves from those even lower down the scale. Conversely, as we have seen in the example of the fishermen, they are eager to construct bonds relating themselves to higher-caste communities. A similar distinction between the upper and the lower boundary of the group, termed by Pocock "inclusion" and "exclusion", (1957) may be observed throughout the caste system.

This permits another tentative generalisation about the construction of ethnic identity. Boundary-making is chiefly a question of distinguishing oneself from those below, not those above, oneself.

This is clearly a "defensive" mode of distinction. While, then, the prototypic construction of identity belongs to an expansive or

“offensive” mode, the defensive mode implies the structural operation of boundary-making. While prototypic categorisation opens for a graduated membership of the ethnic group, from central to peripheral, structural categorisation leads to a boundary that is, in principle, absolute. It would seem to me that this is exactly what is happening when indigenous populations, in the European countries, exclude “immigrants” from their ranks, in an insistence on reserving, say, work and accommodation, for the natives. This, of course, is roughly the character of the “new racism” in Europe.

And, with reference to Thoothi’s ideas on why society should close in on itself, we should note that the “new racism” has appeared in a time of crisis. But racism as a defensive strategy for the maintenance of one’s own identity is of course nothing new. In *Race, Community and Conflict* (1967), Rex and Moore showed how racism in Sparkbrook, Birmingham was closely related to the feeling of general decline in the area.

### **Creolisation and complexity.**

We may now return to the problem of creolisation, and oppose it to crystallisation; the former consisting in the breakdown, the second in the strengthening, of ethnic boundaries. Both these processes are clearly taking place in the modern world, and they may well coexist in the same society. To understand why some people break away from group ties, while others shield behind them and try to strengthen them, we must turn away from our previous focus on ethnic boundaries to the social wholes of which ethnic groups form a part.

This, of course, is what Hannerz has done in his recent work. But Hannerz may have repeated the weakness of Barth’s approach, in leaving aside the issue of stratification. I have argued that, once this dimension is taken into account, ethnic identities become heavily coloured by the place they occupy in the stratification context. But how does this consideration enter into the issue of creolisation?

First, the numerous cultural elements that flow across ethnic boundaries to produce creolisation cannot be completely neutral. Not only are they, quite often, ethnically tagged, like pizza or pasta; they also acquire tags in terms of stratification. Novelties of cuisine, tend to enter ethnic groups from the top. Before pizza and pasta became universal to the West, they were the monopoly of an internationally minded elite. In Norway, surely, such food was the mark of intellectual and of the widely travelled. Like items of sanskritisa-

tion in India, such new items simmer downwards in a process of imitation, of "inclusion" in Pocock's terms. International trends in clothing may be seen as a parallel example.

Thus, one element in "creolisation" is that it may form part of the production of distinction - in Bourdieu's terms - by the cultural elite. When such traits spread downwards, however, they become, for other groups, a matter of inclusion with that group. As such, they can only serve as boundary makers downwards, excluding those which have not yet adopted them. When they become, as some do, practically universal, they lose any relevance they may have had for marking boundaries.

Not all new elements, surely, enter at the top. In Norway, an important subculture centre on the twin phenomena of American cars and Country & Western music. While the groups in question may have money, they can hardly be termed an elite in the cultural sense. Rather, they form an alternative to the culture of the elite, where the cult of classical music and European cultural influence remain strong. Such subcultural opposition brings us close to the essence of creolisation.

But to understand the significance of what, in Norway, is known as the American Car Movement, we must see how it fits, semantically, with other cultural elements. Without prejudging the issue, as no full analysis of the question has been undertaken, I think it can be stated that, paradoxically, the American elements fit into a semantic construction of Norwegianness.

In this pattern, America is seen as closer to Norway than Europe. Of course, there is the background of sustained and considerable Norwegian emigration to America. In the popular view, these emigrants came from the people, not from the elite. When the successful emigrant returned to his village, he in fact showed the capacity of its folk to upstage the national elite, to become richer and more successful than them.

The American car is, I would venture, the very symbol, in Norway, of the successful self-made man. The Country & Western music, then, is the expression of the kind of life that got him there. It tells the story of the wilderness "out there" where the real man meets his challenges unbridled by the control and domination of the elite. Conversely, this elite, which originally was closely bound to the administration of the country under Danish dominance, has always been marked, especially through the rhetoric of the Neo-

Norwegian movement, as somehow "foreign" and "un-Norwegian".

Surely, the opposition between Amcar fans and the partisans of classic European culture constitutes no ethnic boundary. Rather, we are talking precisely in terms of the subcultures implied by the notion of creolisation. But, while buying an American car and joining the Club are clearly matters of individual choice, such choice is, as I have tried to show, heavily conditioned by social and cultural factors. In Norway, university lecturers don't drive American cars.

Such cultural elements, I would submit, never flow freely, are never independent of pre-existing patterns of meaning. They have to be fitted in, like new terms in the structure of a language.

This is clearly true, too, when new elements have to be fitted into the semantic construction of an ethnic identity. Sometimes, such new items are set apart as ethnically neutral - at least when they have lost their stratificational implications. But in other cases, they may serve to rearrange and strengthen an ethnic prototype. The Amcar-driving self-made man, then, becomes a direct extension of a prototype Norwegian otherwise represented by the Viking, the seaman and explorer, and by Ibsen's character "Peer Gynt" - who, by the way, seemed to enjoy conspicuous consumption. Is it wholly irrelevant to note that the Danish bourgeoisie seems to love classic Rovers and Jaguars?

The great merit of *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* was to deconstruct the complex of ethnicity, to break it up into components fit for analysis. Hannerz's contributions have served to stress that any expression of ethnicity is at one and the same time the expression of the individual. The critique I have provided here is intended to show how these contributions need to be tied more closely into the analysis of society as a system and of culture as a semantic structure. In doing so, I have tried to show that ethnicity cannot be analysed separately from stratification.

Competitive, complex society sometimes open up, offering new opportunities for self-expression which may take individuals away from ethnic ties. Conversely, in hard times, when opportunities are few, ethnic ties again become functional in defending individual interest. Creolisation and boundary maintenance, ultimately, should be seen as two sides of the same coin.

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