

DEFINITION AND DIMENSIONS OF ETHNICITY: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

by

Wsevolod W. Isajiw
University of Toronto

Paper presented at "Joint Canada-United States Conference on the Measurement of Ethnicity", Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, April 2, 1992. Published in *Challenges of Measuring an Ethnic World: Science, politics and reality: Proceedings of the Joint Canada-United States Conference on the Measurement of Ethnicity April 1-3, 1992*, Statistics Canada and U.S. Bureau of the Census, eds. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office; pp. 407-27, 1993

An Introductory Note: Methodological Assumptions

To research any phenomenon one has to find empirical indicators of it. If the research is to be thorough, the indicators must be such as to test as many aspects as possible of the phenomenon studied. This does not mean that maximum number of indicators is necessary for a full study of the phenomenon. On the contrary, it is usually desirable to have a minimum number of indicators. However, it is imperative that the minimum number of indicators be such that they do not exclude any of the essential aspects of the phenomenon. If one or a few indicators are unable to capture the nature of the phenomenon, then it is logically imperative that more indicators be used. Sometimes a battery of indicators may be necessary.

The exact number of indicators should not be chosen either arbitrarily or on purely theoretical grounds, but should be selected as a conclusion of a thorough empirical study. The study should include a great variety of indicators and reduce the number to the minimum only as a consequence of empirical testing (Lazarsfeld and Henry, 1968).

Ethnicity is a complex phenomenon. The task of the theoretician is to outline at least what can be said to be the essential dimensions of this phenomenon and to indicate the directions of their possible variations. If researchers choose to study in-depth only one or a few aspects of the phenomenon, it is logically incumbent upon them to point out how these selected aspects may relate to the other aspects of the phenomenon.

Definitions of Ethnicity in the Past Twenty Years

I will single out a number of approaches which have been offered in the past two decades and will attempt to critically evaluate them. But it should be remembered that there is a variation in the degree to which these approaches are distinct, and the extent to which they have been accepted by scholars. I do not claim to exhaust all possible approaches which one might find in the literature. I simply single out those which appear to me to be the most important approaches that have been discussed and used in research in the last twenty years.

We can distinguish four major approaches and a number of sub-approaches, some of which cut across the major ones. They are: (1) ethnicity conceived as a primordial phenomenon, (2) ethnicity conceived as an epiphenomenon, (3) ethnicity conceived as a situational phenomenon, (4) ethnicity conceived as a purely subjective phenomenon.

The primordialist approach is the oldest in sociological and anthropological literature. It argues that ethnicity is something given, ascribed at birth, deriving from the kin-and-clan-structure of human society, and hence something more or less fixed and permanent (Geertz, 1963; Isaacs, 1975; Stack, 1986).

The other three approaches emerged in confutation of the primordialist approach. The epiphenomenon approach is best represented by Michael Hechter's theory of internal colonialism and cultural division of labour, and, to a lesser extent, by Edna Bonacich (1972). Hechter (1978), divides the economic structure of society into two sectors, center and periphery. The periphery consists of marginal jobs where products are not unimportant to society, as for example agricultural work, but which offer little in the form of compensation as compared to the jobs in the centre. It is in this peripheral labour sector that immigrants concentrate, develop their own solidarity and maintain their culture. Ethnicity thus is something created and maintained by an uneven economy, or a product of economic exploitation (see also Nagel and Olzak, 1982).

It should be remembered that in the seventies one school of thought which was hostile to ethnic studies as an independent area and would reject any independent definition of ethnicity, especially one which emphasizes culture, were the American and Canadian traditional, sometimes called "crude", Marxists. Their position derived from their assumption that all culture was epiphenomenal to class.

Hechter's approach, however, met empirical criticism coming from a number of sources (Nielsen, 1980, Makabe, 1981); notably the ethnic enclave economy provided much disconfirming evidence (Wilson and Portes, 1980; Portes, 1984; Sanders and Nee, 1987).

The logic of the situational approach is based on rational choice theory. According to this approach, ethnicity is something which may be relevant in some situations but not in others. Individuals may choose to be regarded as members of an ethnic group if they find it to their advantage. Perhaps the best example of this approach is the work of Michael Banton (1983), Daniel Bell (1975) and Jeffrey Ross (1982). Banton sees it as a rational choice option of an individual in any circumstance. Bell and Ross emphasize the political advantage of ethnic membership choice. Thus, ethnicity is "a group option in which resources are mobilized for the purpose of pressuring the political system to allocate public goods for the benefit of the members of a self-differentiating collectivity" (Ross, 1982). In more general terms, it refers to the actor's pliant ascription of ethnic identity to organize the meaning of his social relationships within the requirements of variously structured social situations (Okamura, 1981; Nagata, 1974). This approach appears to have been more popular in the mid-seventies to mid-eighties period.

No doubt the situational theories point to an important function which ethnic identity and ethnic groups can serve, but in terms of basic conceptions of what ethnicity is, they confuse function, or use, of the phenomenon with its nature. To assert that something is what it does is to beg the question. Obviously, there are many cases where the adherence to an ethnic group cannot be explained by instrumental reasons alone. The subjective import of ethnic group membership does not lie just simply in one's pursuit of practical interest, but also and perhaps foremost in one's feelings and a complex conception of identity.

Perhaps the most interesting of these four approaches is the subjective approach which sees ethnicity as basically a social-psychological reality or a matter of perception of "us" and "them" in contradistinction to looking at it as something given, which exists objectively as it were "out there". This does not mean that all "subjectivists" reject all objective aspects of ethnicity. Some, in fact give them significant attention. But, they all tend to make it dependent on the socio-psychological experience.

There were two factors which stimulated the emergence of the subjectivist approach in the study of ethnicity in the past twenty years. First, Fredrik Barth's (1969) seminal work on ethnic group boundaries had a strong influence on both, anthropologists and

sociologists. Secondly, in American and Canadian sociology, the approach has been spurred by empirical studies of ethnic generations, particularly the third generation.

Barth himself took a rather extreme position. For practical purposes, he jettisoned culture from the concept of ethnicity. For him, ethnic boundaries were psychological boundaries; ethnic culture and its content was irrelevant. Ethnic group is hence a result of group relations in which the boundaries are established through mutual perceptions and not by means of any objectively distinct culture.

A less extreme position has been that of symbolic ethnicity approach as formulated by H. Gans (1979). The idea here is that ethnicity is not anymore what it used to be. It lost its practical everyday value but has remained purely on symbolic level on which it works to identify people who otherwise are acculturated and assimilated into a different, predominantly urban, American culture and society (see also Edwards and Doucette, 1987).

Another type of subjectivist approach to the study of ethnicity - one that appears to be connected with the post-modernist movement in contemporary thought - is constructionism. In the United States it represents W. Yancey's (1976) influence (Susan Smith, 1984; Hanna Herzog, 1984; and also to some extent J.Y. Okamura, 1981). In Canada it is best represented by Danielle Juteau's work (1991). Theoretically, this approach lies somewhere between Michel Foucault's (1967) emphasis on construction of the metaphor and Pierre Bourdieu's (1977; Bentley, 1987, Yelvington, 1991) notions of practice and habitus as the basic factors shaping the structure of all social phenomena. The basic notion in this approach is that ethnicity is something that is being negotiated and constructed in everyday living. Ethnicity is a process which continues to unfold. It has relatively little to do with Europe, Africa, Asia, etc., but much to do with the exigencies of everyday survival. It is constructed in the process of feeding, clothing, sending to school and conversing with children and others.

Ethnicity Defined

Some time ago, I published an article entitled "Definitions of Ethnicity" (1974) in which I tried to: (1) review the definitions of ethnicity existing at that time in sociological literature and (2) develop my own definition of the concept of ethnic group according to a number of logical criteria. I will base my discussion of the nature of ethnicity on this

previous work, but will modify or expand a number of its aspects in order to take into account the developments in the past twenty years.

First of all, the meaning of the concept of ethnicity depends on the meaning of several other concepts, particularly those of ethnic group and ethnic identity. The concept of ethnic group is the most basic, from which the others are derivative. It refers to ethnicity as the collective phenomenon. Ethnic identity refers to ethnicity as an individually experienced phenomenon. Ethnicity itself is an abstract concept which includes an implicit reference to both collective and individual aspects of the phenomenon.

There are several basic dimensions which ethnicity includes, on either the collective or individual level. If a researcher is to measure ethnicity fully he/she must find at least some indicators of each one of these dimensions. Thus, ethnicity can be said to have both an objective and a subjective dimension. Methodologically, the difference between the two consists in direct or indirect observability. Objective aspects are those which can be observed as facts in the existence of institutions, including that of kinship and descent and in overt behaviour patterns of individuals. The subjective dimensions refer to attitudes, values and preconceptions whose meaning has to be interpreted in the context of the process of communication.

Furthermore, notwithstanding some of the contemporary approaches, the point of departure for our understanding of the nature of ethnicity has to be the idea of distinct culture. Culture is conceived here partially in the traditional anthropological sense as involving a total way of life. The total way of life, however, does not necessarily mean simply a set of distinct everyday customs, although it may include these. Rather, it refers to a unique historical group experience. Culture is in essence a system of encoding such experience into a set of symbolic patterns. It does not matter how different the elements of one culture are from another culture. A distinct culture is a manifestation of a group's distinct historical experience. Its product is a sense of unique peoplehood.

The emphasis on culture as the point of departure for our understanding of the nature of ethnicity is not intended to mean that members of an ethnic group must always share one and the same culture to the exclusion of any other. Rather, it is intended to mean that persons who include themselves in an ethnicity would have a relation to a group who either now or at some point in the past has shared a unique culture.

Ethnic Group

Let us now define the concept of ethnic group as referring to a community-type group of people who share the same culture or to descendants of such people who may not share this culture but who identify themselves with this ancestral group.

The objective dimensions of ethnic groups include presence of at least some community institutions or organizations, the fact of having descendants and ancestors, as focus of cultural transmission and identity formation and the fact that there is a "script" for cultural behaviour, in the form of customs, rituals and preconceptions which provides the content to culture and its transmission and is manifested in overt behaviour patterns.

The subjective dimension of ethnic groups refers to what, since F. Barth's work, has been known as ethnic boundaries. These are social-psychological boundaries and refer to the fact of group-inclusion and exclusion. There are two types of ethnic boundaries, those from within the ethnic group (internal) and those from without the ethnic group (external). In many ways the dynamics of interethnic relations depends on the relationship between these two boundaries. The internal boundaries is the area of self-inclusion in the group. They overlap with the process of self-identity. They articulate with the feelings of sympathy and loyalty toward members of the same ethnic group. The external boundaries is the perimeter of exclusion of membership; it is the demarcation of the space of the outsiders. In a multiethnic society in which members of different ethnic groups interact and compete with one another, the existence of internal boundaries will inevitably produce external boundaries. Persons will be identified by others as belonging to one or another ethnic group even if they do not actively share anymore any cultural patterns with that ethnic group as long as a link to their ancestors can be made. Identification by others in turn usually stimulates self-identification and may condition new forms of social organization. Hence, ethnicity is a matter of a double boundary, a boundary from within, maintained by the socialization process, and a boundary from without established by the process of intergroup relations. It is in terms of the relationship between these two boundaries that the differences between ethnicity in Canada and in the U.S. can be most fruitfully compared. I would suggest that the basic difference lies in the external boundaries. It is not so much a matter of faster or slower assimilation, and non-assimilation. More significantly it is a matter of how the various ethnic groups are perceived and identified by others in the two societies, but especially how they are perceived and identified by the power-holding, policy-making and influence-exerting bodies of the two societies. Thus the external ethnic boundaries would

be reflected in the reasons and rationales behind specific immigration policies, cultural policies, and the like (Isajiw, 1974, p. 122).

The external ethnic boundaries are also the source of racial distinctions and of race as a group phenomenon. As a social phenomenon, race is a response to external categorization and exclusion and whatever internal dynamics race generates, it is always a response to external exclusion rather than to internal identity-generating forces. The latter are the forces of ethnicity formation. It is true that external boundaries would tend to activate or reinforce internal boundaries. But as the history of the American Black movement in the past half-century has shown, genuine internal boundaries among the American blacks have not formed until the movement reached for the roots of American Black culture in Africa and found its own cultural patterns and values in American history.

External boundaries, however, are an important source of political mobilization and the unity which this brings about. But this unity should not be confused with the one generated by the internal boundaries. Hence, rather than ethnicity, external boundaries are a significant source of pan-ethnicity, as can be seen in the case of Afro-Americans and the Caribbeans, the Hispanics in the United States, the Canadian Native Peoples in recent constitutional conflicts, and others.

The scope of ethnic internal boundaries will determine the difference between ethnic and regional groups, as for example, the difference between the Calabresi and the Italians. A regional group may have a way of life that can be seen as a culture. But to the extent that the identity of the regional group is perceived as one of a number of identities constituent of a larger group, to that extent this identity is a subidentity and subculture of a broader, ethnic identity and culture. Thus, to the extent the Calabresi see themselves as Italians alongside other regions, e.g. Friuland, Tuscany, etc., to that extent regional identity is a subidentity of the broader Italian ethnicity. There are, of course, groups that may otherwise be regions, but who refuse to see themselves as part of larger identities, as for example, the Basques of Spain. To the extent that they do so and in as much as they have a history of their own and their culture includes distinct elements, to that extent, they are a different ethnic group rather than simply a region.

Internal boundaries include also multiple ethnicities, as for example, deriving from ethnically mixed parentage. Ethnic identities are not necessarily exclusive of one another. But this is a matter of ethnicity as an individual phenomenon, to be discussed next.

Ethnic Identity

On the individual level, ethnicity is a social-psychological process which gives an individual a sense of belonging and identity. It is, of course, one of a number of social phenomena which produce a sense of identity. Ethnic identity can be defined as a manner in which persons, on account of their ethnic origin, locate themselves psychologically in relation to one or more social systems, and in which they perceive others as locating them in relation to those systems. By ethnic origin is meant either that a person has been socialized in an ethnic group or that his or her ancestors, real or symbolic, have been members of the group. The social systems may be one's ethnic community or society at large, or other ethnic communities and other societies or groups, or a combination of all these (Isajiw, 1990).

Locating oneself in relation to a community and society is not only a psychological phenomenon, but also a social phenomenon in the sense that the internal psychological states express themselves objectively in external behaviour patterns that come to be shared by others. Thus, individuals locate themselves in one or another community internally by states of mind and feelings, such as self-definitions or feelings of closeness, and externally by behaviour appropriate to these states of mind and feelings. Behaviour according to cultural patterns is thus an expression of identity and can be studied as an indication of its character.

We can thus distinguish external and internal aspects of ethnic identity. External aspects refer to observable behaviour, both cultural and social, such as (1) speaking an ethnic language, practising ethnic traditions, (2) participation in ethnic personal networks, such as family and friendships, (3) participation in ethnic institutional organizations, such as churches, schools, enterprises, media, (4) participation in ethnic voluntary associations, such as clubs, 'societies,' youth organizations and (5) participation in functions sponsored by ethnic organizations such as picnics, concerts, public lectures, rallies, dances.

The internal aspects of ethnic identity refer to images, ideas, attitudes, and feelings. These, of course, are interconnected with the external behaviour. But it should not be assumed that, empirically, the two types are always dependent upon each other. Rather, they may vary independently, as for example, a third-generation person may retain a higher degree of internal than of external aspects. We can distinguish at least three types of internal aspects of identity: (1) cognitive, (2) moral, and (3) affective.

The cognitive dimension of identity includes, first, self-images and images of one's group. These may be stereotypes of self or of the group and perceived stereotypes by others of oneself and one's group. It also includes knowledge of one's group's heritage and its historical past. This knowledge may not necessarily be extensive or objective. It may rather focus on selected aspects or events, or historical personalities that are highly symbolic of the group's experiences and which thus have become a legacy. Finally, the cognitive dimension includes knowledge of one's group's values, since these are part of the group's heritage.

The moral dimension of identity involves feelings of group obligations. In general, feelings of group obligations have to do with the importance a person attaches to his or her group and the implications the group has for the person's behaviour. Specifically, it would include such feelings of obligation as the importance of teaching the ethnic language to one's children, or marrying within the group, or of helping members of the group with finding a job. Feelings of obligation account for the commitment a person has to his group and for the group solidarity that ensues. They can be said to constitute the central dimension of subjective identity. So far, no theory of ethnic identity has conceptualized group obligations as constituting its core dimension. A number of researchers, such as Geismar (1954), have asked questions of their respondents about such obligations, without, however, conceptualizing them as a central notion of subjective ethnic identity.

The affective, or cathectic, dimension of identity refers to feelings of attachment to the group. Two types of such feelings can be distinguished: (1) feelings of security with, sympathy and associative preference for members of one's group as against members of other groups and (2) feelings of security and comfort with the cultural patterns of one's group as against the cultural patterns of other groups or societies.

Types of Ethnicity

Confusion as to the nature of ethnicity has often derived from a lack of an adequate typology of ethnic groups and ethnic identities. Significant criteria of classification of any phenomena can be those which refer to those characteristics of the phenomena which have an effective influence, in our case, on interethnic group relations and on the interaction process among individuals of various ethnic backgrounds.

Types of Ethnic Groups

What follows is not a complete classification of types of ethnic groups. It uses as criteria of classification locus of group organization, degree and nature of self-awareness in ethnic organization, structural location in interethnic relations and the generational factor. According to these criteria we can distinguish the following types of ethnic groups: primary and secondary ethnic groups, folk-community and nationality-community ethnic groups, dominant majority and subordinate minority ethnic groups, immigrant or "young" and established or "old" ethnic groups.

Primary and secondary ethnic groups

This distinction refers to the place of origin where the group's culture emerged as a distinct entity. Primary ethnic groups are those which exist in the same place in which historically they have been formed. They are indigenous groups. Examples are the French in France, Germans in Germany, etc., and also Native Indians in the Americas, Andalusians in Spain, etc. Secondary ethnic groups are those which have their origin in society different from the one in which they currently exist, as for example, the Italians, Germans, etc. in Canada or the United States. They are, as it were, transplanted groups which share their cultural and historical background with the society from which they emigrated, but which do not depend any more on the original society for their existence.

This does not preclude the possibility that the primary ethnic group at some time in history might have been itself a secondary ethnic group in relation to its own ancestors. In history, however, the shift from the secondary to primary ethnic groups has been rather infrequent. In the past, great migrations of peoples have taken place only in certain periods of history. Migrations of peoples who provided the bases for the European primary ethnic groups have taken place in prehistoric times and formation of most European ethnicities, the German, French, Italian, Polish, Ukrainian, Russian, etc. was a long historical process after the original migrations. Indeed, often it is forgotten that contemporary ethnic groups have important features which trace their origins to prehistoric times and which are still quite viable.

In modern times, in the Western world, American, Canadian and several Latin American ethnicities can be said to be in the process of formation as primary ethnic groups.

Development of secondary ethnic groups has been a much more common phenomenon in modern times, especially in the context of migration to the New World, and

it can be argued that the secondary ethnic groups will be even a more prevalent phenomenon in the future as international migration increases.

Folk-community and nationality-community ethnic groups

The distinction between the folk community and nationality as types of ethnic groups was originally drawn by Ihor Zielyk (1975). It can be incorporated here with some modifications. The basic principle of distinction here is cultural self-awareness. Nationality groups are those which are culturally highly self-aware. That is, their members share an image of themselves as a collectivity united by a distinct culture rather than by their kin or clan. An essential part of this image is a conception of history of the group as legacy. Organizational life of the ethnic community articulates this image in its normative systems. As Max Weber has pointed out, the significance of nationality is anchored in the conception of uniqueness, irreplaceability or superiority of cultural values that are seen as preservable or possible to develop only through the efforts of the group itself. This includes a certain sense of collective mission.

An ethnic group which is a folk community is one whose members are predominantly of peasant background. The community is little differentiated in social status. The character of social relationships among the members of the community is determined by kinship and close family friendships. The centre of social organization is the religious institution, the church, around which develop other organizations and which exerts a pervasive influence on the whole community.

Folk community groups lack a developed conception of the group's history as legacy. The folk community's culture is what Robert Redfield (1960) described as the "little tradition", embodied in custom, song, and transmitted in a proverbial manner.

Members of the nationality community are differentiated in social status. Many of them have experienced some form of social mobility into professional occupations. Likewise, organizationally, it is a differentiated community. But the manifest goals of the organizational life are not fulfillment of individual members' interests, but fulfillment of collective goals of the community to which individual interests are expected to be subordinated. There is also a tendency toward integration of organization into all-inclusive bodies.

The culture of the nationality community develops what Redfield called a "great tradition", including literary, artistic and intellectual achievements. The culture, however, tends to center around an ideology. An essential part of the ideology is a conception of the group's history as legacy. This may be an ideology of messianism referring to freedom from collective oppression or exploitation or an ideology of maintaining and fostering a "cultured" or a "civilized" way of life.

Modern and contemporary history is characterised by many previously folk-community-type groups transforming themselves into nationality-type groups. Nationalism has been a central factor in the process of this transformation. In this process, many groups focalize their ideology around a territory which they claim to be legitimately theirs. Examples can be Quebec, the Native peoples in Canada, Native peoples in Australia and other parts of the world. Hence a strong feature of the ideologies expounded by these groups is irredentism and the idea of sovereignty or self-determination. Many of these groups refer to themselves as nations. Sociologically, a nation can be defined as a nationality community that has its own independent state. A nation, thus, can be conceived as the outgrowth of a high degree of self-awareness of an occupationally differentiated ethnic group with a territorial claim.

Majority and minority ethnic groups

Sociologically, the concepts of majority and minority refer not to numbers but to power. Simply stated, the distinction is between those groups which have or have not power in society. Often the concept of ethnicity is confused with that of minority and all ethnic groups are seen as minorities. By this, the majority groups become ethnicityless and it becomes difficult to understand what culture of the "general" society is all about, or if it is there at all, and consequently the meaning of interethnic relations becomes confusing.

Majority ethnic groups are those who determine the character of the society's basic institutions, especially the main political, economic, and cultural institutions. They determine the character of the norms of society as a whole, including the legal system. Their culture becomes the culture of the total society into which the minority ethnic groups assimilate. The minority groups may preserve their institutions and culture in larger or smaller degree or they may influence the character of the dominant institutions in larger or smaller degrees, but usually, the framework for intergroup processes is provided by the institutions deriving from the culture of the majority groups.

The majority groups, because of their position of power, usually are at the top of the ethnic stratification system, and the status of other ethnic groups is assessed in relation to them. Much of the dynamics of interethnic relations derives from the structure of dominance and subordination involved in the majority-minority ethnic group relations. Majorities are the main definers of external ethnic boundaries and hence in a position to have the deciding voice regarding public policies and legislation regarding minorities.

"Young" and "old" ethnic groups

A common confusion in the discourse on ethnicity is that of ethnicity and immigration. Ethnicity often is erroneously identified with immigrants, but immigrants make up only one type of ethnic groups. We can distinguish between "young" groups, i.e., those made up predominantly of the first - the immigrant - generation, and whose second generation is either small in size or young in age. The "old" groups are those already established in the larger society, i.e. they have at least a high proportion of adult second and adult third or consecutive generations.

By this distinction, it is incorrect and misleading to speak of all ethnic groups as if they were immigrants. Members of the old, established ethnic groups usually do not like to be confused with immigrants. The issues which these two types of ethnic groups pose are different. The concerns of the young groups can be characterized as essentially the problems of adjustment to society at large, whereas those of the old groups, as interests of persistence.

Among the old ethnic groups in Canada one can include the British, French, German, Scandinavian groups, Dutch, Ukrainian, Russian, Polish, Jewish, Doukhobors, Mennonites, Indians, the Inuit, Blacks, except for those from the West Indies, Chinese, Japanese and others. Among the relatively young groups, one can include the Greeks, Portuguese, various Latin American groups, East Indians, except for the Sikhs, and others.

In classifying ethnic groups as young and old, one should take regions into account. Groups which are old, may be old in one region of the country but young in another. The Chinese, for example, are an old group in Western Canada, but a young group in the Toronto area.

The old ethnic groups can be subdivided further into those which add significantly to their population by means of a relatively continuous stream of new immigrants and those

who have no significant numbers of new immigration and hence can increase their population only by natural growth. Such groups as the French, Native Peoples and Doukhobors and others are examples of the latter. Groups with a continuous stream of new immigration face special problems of interrelationship between the old and the new sectors of the ethnic community. Among such problems are the questions as to what extent the ethnic institutions and organizations established by the old community are able to serve the needs of the new immigrants, to what extent status or class differences between the old community and the new immigrant create tensions or conflict between them, to what extent the demands exerted on society by the new immigrants differ from or contradict the demands placed on it by the old community, etc.

Forms of Ethnic Identity

Retention of ethnic identity from one generation to another does not necessarily mean retention of both its external and internal aspects, or all the components of each aspect in the same degree. Some components may be retained more than others; some may not be retained at all. A member of the third generation may subjectively identify with his ethnic group without having knowledge of the ethnic language or without practising ethnic traditions or participating in ethnic organizations. Or, inversely, he or she may practise some ethnic traditions without having strong feelings of attachment to the group. Furthermore, the same components of external identity may acquire different subjective meaning for different generations, ethnic groups, or other subgroups within the same ethnic group. Therefore, it should not be assumed that the ethnic identity retained by the third generation is of the same type or form of identity as that retained by the first or the second generation.

Furthermore, an ever increasing number of persons in North American societies acquire multiple ethnic identities. The relationship among these multiple identities can be varied, allowing for variation of types of identity complexes.

Variations in external and internal components of identity

The differential variation of the components of ethnic identity thus allows us to distinguish various forms of ethnic identity. For example, a high level of retention of the practice of ethnic traditions accompanied by a low level of such subjective components as feelings of group obligation may be one form of ethnic identity: say, a *ritualistic ethnic identity*. By contrast, a high intensity of feelings of group obligation accompanied by a low level of practice of traditions would be a completely different form of ethnic identity: say, an

ideological identity with different implications for the collective aspects of ethnic group behaviour. Negative images of one's own ethnic group, accompanied by a high degree of awareness of one's ethnic ancestry, may be still another form of ethnic identity, a *rebellious identity*, and positive images of one's ancestral group accompanied by a frequent practice of highly selected traditions, particularly by the third or a consecutive generation, may be still another form of ethnic identity, that of *ethnic rediscovery*. A few selected images of one's ancestral group without any feelings of obligation toward it and with only occasional, recreational practice of some traditions, may be still another form, say, *fringe identity*. This typology has an hypothetical character. It has to be empirically tested out. The study reported below indicates that there is empirical basis for at least some of these forms.

Single and multiple identities

A multiethnic society inevitably produces multiple ethnic identities. As a rule these identities correspond directly to the objective aspect of ethnicity, that of ancestry. Single identity is usually defined when both parents are claimed to be of the same ethnicity. In a multiethnic society, however, over the span of generations those who identify only with the general society as the primary ethnic group, e.g. Canadian or American, without any knowledge of ancestors other than those of the general society, can be said to have purely single identity. They, however, are most probably the exception rather than the rule (Lieberson and Waters, 1990). All others can be said to possess multiple identities. These can be of two types, the typical hyphenated identities, reflecting an individual's identification with both the society at large and his/her ancestral ethnicity or ethnicities and multiple identities of ancestral ethnicities themselves without direct reference to society at large. There is some empirical evidence, however, which indicates that individuals with multiple ancestral identities tend to choose one, the father's side identity, as more important to them (Breton, *et al.*, 1990, pp. 275-276). This indicates that individuals tend to organize their multiple identities in some meaningful, hierarchical order. Different hierarchical types, however, are possible. To ascertain this, more research than what is available is necessary.

Changing Ethnicity: Reconstruction and Deconstruction of Ethnic Identity *

The objective and the subjective aspects of ethnicity are dynamically interrelated. The objective aspects are often the subjective aspects made "visible" through the usual sociological process of objectification, and *vice-versa*, the subjective aspects are meaningful reactions to the objective facts. It is important to understand the dynamics of this relationship if we are to understand the phenomenon of deconstruction and reconstruction

of identity. In culturally pluralistic contexts, pressures are generated and exerted on the objective aspects of all ethnicities to become adaptable to each other. The

*This section derives from a paper presented at the 86th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, titled: "The Deconstruction and Reconstruction of Ethnicity in Culturally Diverse Societies."

process of deconstruction and reconstruction is the mechanism through which this is achieved. Deconstruction consists of some objective aspects of ethnic identity losing their meaning and use, while others lose their meaning without being completely dropped, or for others still, the meaning may become latent. Deconstruction may be accompanied by negative attitudes toward one's ethnic group, feelings of alienation, and the like. Although some objective patterns may be dropped and new patterns, acquired from different cultural sources, may become more meaningful, other patterns may continue to be meaningful and be retained. Similarly, at a certain point, one's ethnic background or group experience may acquire new meaning and be objectified into new visible ethnic patterns. It is more likely that over the generations selected old patterns would be revived but given new meaning. New collective experiences, in particular, often work to create new meanings for community-type groups. This is the process through which ethnic identity is reconstructed. Different types or forms of ethnic identity emerge given different ethnicities, social status groups, generational cohorts, and periods of time. It is important to note that this process does not necessarily mean a disappearance of ethnicity. Rather, it involves the emergence of a variety of new forms of ethnic identity which are more adaptable to the surrounding social and cultural structures. These forms represent a reconstruction of ethnicity viable in a pluralistic setting. A study of ethnic identity of three generations of four major ethnic groups in Metropolitan Toronto confirms this theory. The study was part of a larger study of nine ethnic groups in Metropolitan Toronto, which made use of a stratified, random sample of 2,338 respondents (Breton, *et al.*, 1990).

It should be remembered that the deconstruction and reconstruction of ethnicity is not only a phenomenon typical to North American ethnic groups, but rather, that it is a specific instance of a wider sociological process, one which has occurred behind many events in history. In North America, especially in the United States, it has taken on a specific form due particularly to two features of these societies: (1) large numbers and a great diversity of ethnicities and (2) a tendency to see one, "mainstream", socio-economic structure as the legitimate locus of aspirations for all groups, supported by strongly emphasized values of social mobility and achievement, and to view alternative socio-economic structures as marginal or deviant.

These conditions alone exert strong pressures to adapt one's identity in some way to that of others. As mentioned above, this may take the extreme form of consciously negating one's ethnic identity, or of taking over aspects of the general dominant culture while retaining some selected elements of ethnic identity difference. Which of these elements are typically selected, if at all, was the objective of the Toronto study. The study hypothesized that with each generation there will be a tendency to negotiate away the objective, external, aspects of ethnicity as well as those subjective, internal, aspects which may not be consonant with popular societal values and attitudes. The hypothesis was consistent with the symbolic ethnicity theory proposed in the seventies (Isajiw, 1975, 1977; Yancey, *et al.*, 1976; Gans, 1979; Crispino, 1980). The results of the study, however, did not support this hypothesis completely.

In the first place, it is often assumed that first generation immigrants bring over with them and retain for long their entire ethnic baggage, i.e., all of their objective and subjective ethnic patterns. The study, however, showed that this is not necessarily the case. It used 25 indicators of ethnic identity and applied them to three generations of four ethnic groups, German, Italian, Jewish, and Ukrainian, and two generations of English. If all of the indicators are averaged out for the four groups, then 60 percent of the first generation, 45 percent of the second, and 31 percent of the third, retain some combination of them (Breton, *et al.*, 1990: 84-85). This means that even though the first generation are very high retainers of their ethnic identities, the process of ethnic identity deconstruction already begins with them, and most probably well before they arrive in the country. The conception of an ethnicity that is complete, objective and non-symbolic upon arrival to North America, as some ethnicity theories seem to assume, is thus completely false. Ethnic groups in other parts of the world have been deconstructing and reconstructing their identities as a result of various pressures brought to bear on them from their very inception. Robert Redfield has pointed out that peasant societies over many years had to accommodate to urban pressures and influences to the point where their structure had become that of part-societies. Yet, their identity was modified in such a way as to become part of both worlds: they retained their own symbolic, "moral order" and adopted the technical order of the city (Redfield, 1953: 54-83; 1960: 23-39). Redfield clearly pointed to what I am here referring to as the process of the deconstruction and reconstruction of ethnicity.

The results of the Toronto study showed that there are certain indicators that can be considered to be foci of different forms of ethnic identity: (1) aspects of identity that are

little retained by the third generation,- in the range of 20 percent or less, (2) aspects of identity that are retained to a high degree by the third generation,- in the range of 50 percent or more, and (3) aspects that are partially retained by the third generation,- in the range between 20 and 50 percent. The first type can be considered as an indicator of deconstruction of ethnic identity, the second type, as an indicator of reconstruction, and the third type, as an indicator of either de- or reconstruction, depending on the ethnic group. It should be remembered that although they are based on the degree of retention of specific elements of ethnic identity, as construed here these are not to be understood as indicators of *retention* but of *deconstruction* and *reconstruction*. Thus, frequent use of one's mother tongue in the third generation, for example, is an indicator of deconstruction of identity and not one of its retention because overall the third generation retains it only in a very low degree. That is, only a small percentage of this generation still uses their ethnic language frequently, the rest have given it up, but have not necessarily given up all other aspects of their ethnic identity, as for example consumption of their ethnic food. They have thus deconstructed their ethnic identity. I will apply these indicators to both the subjective and the objective aspects of ethnic identity.

Among objective aspects, language can be an indicator of both de- and reconstruction of identity. Use of language as one's mother tongue is an indicator of deconstruction. On average, only about 4 percent of the third generation of all four ethnic groups studied considered ethnic language to be their mother tongue. Only 7 percent of the third generation of all ethnic groups on the average used ethnic language frequently on a daily basis, and 22 percent used it occasionally. However, for the 96 percent of the third generation who considered English to be their mother tongue, some knowledge of their ethnic language - such as phrases or single words - could be seen to be an indicator of reconstruction of their ethnicity. On average, 44 percent of the third generation of all four groups and 54 percent of three of these four groups, had some knowledge of their ethnic language. Thus, the results show that ethnic language, over the generations, drops its practical function yet remains nonetheless in a new, simplified form and acquires a symbolic function. This finding would support the symbolic ethnicity theory.

The single most significant indicator of ethnic identity reconstruction is the consumption of ethnic food. Two types of consumption were assessed in the study: consumption of ethnic food on holidays and special occasions, and consumption of ethnic food at times other than holidays and special occasions. The rationale behind these questions was to establish a difference between symbolic consumption and routine

consumption. On average, 70 percent of the third generation of all four ethnic groups consumed ethnic food on holiday occasions, and 78 percent consumed it on more frequent occasions. This seems to indicate that consumption of ethnic food has both a highly symbolic *and* a highly practical value, which would partially disprove and partially support the symbolic ethnicity theory.

The second most important indicator of identity reconstruction is the possession of ethnic art objects. An average of 61 percent of the third generation of all four ethnic groups studied possessed some objects of ethnic art in their homes. These objects carry high symbolic value. As in the case of ethnic food consumption, they are objective aspects of ethnic identity which allow maximum choice as to the type and number acquired. The high incidence of the possession of ethnic art objects amongst the third generation gives perhaps the most direct support to the symbolic ethnicity theory.

Two indexes of objective aspects of ethnic identity may serve as indicators of either its de- or reconstruction. These are having close friends of the same ethnicity, and the observance of ethnic customs. As regards ethnic friendships, a large number of close friends is an indicator of deconstruction, as was the case with language. Thus, on the average, only 17 percent of the third generation of all four groups studied had three or more close friends of the same ethnicity. The percentage more than doubles when the question relates to one or two close friends of the same ethnicity. Thus, 36 percent of the third generation of all groups, and 40 percent of three of the four groups, on average, had close friends of the same ethnicity. Since the percentages do not come out to 50, this is not a strong indicator of ethnic identity reconstruction. Nevertheless, it does seem to point to the fact that in terms of close ethnic friendships formed by the third generation, the identity reconstructed involves few rather than many close ethnic friends. The friendship indicator thus only partially supports the symbolic ethnicity theory since friendship is not a symbolic matter but refers to real, daily needs.

The observance of ethnic customs is also an in-between indicator. On average, 48 percent of the third generation observe some ethnic customs at one time or another. It is not clear to what extent this can be an indicator of de- or reconstruction, but since it falls almost in the 50 percent range, one may say that it does serve the function of reconstruction, although ethnic group variations may be a significant factor here. In other words, in the reconstructed forms of ethnicity the observance of some ethnic customs would be included, but not necessarily so.

Questions on attitudes and feelings of obligation towards one's ethnic group were asked to test the retention of subjective, internal aspects of ethnic identity. Of the questions asked, feelings of obligation to marry within the group stands out as an indicator of deconstruction. On the average, only 19 percent of the third generation of the four groups studied felt endogamous marriage to be an obligation. However, only 4 percent of the three groups felt this to be so. But for the remaining group, this index was a criterion for reconstruction, 66 percent of its third generation on average. Thus, for most groups, the reconstructed forms of ethnic identity exclude marriage within the group, and assume that ethnic identity can persist accompanied by intermarriage. All of the other attitudes and feelings of obligation can be considered to be in-between indicators. On the average, 46 percent of the third generation of all four groups studied felt that it is important to help members of their ethnic group to find a job if they were able to aid them. This is the only component of the subjective aspects of ethnic identity that comes close to the 50 percent range. The other components, i.e. feelings that it is important to support ethnic group causes and to teach children the ethnic language, average 36 percent and 34 percent respectively. These findings show that there are no strong indicators of subjective aspects of ethnic identity reconstruction. This does not mean that these subjective aspects may not play a role, since in terms of our definition these are intermediate indicators. Nevertheless, on the overall group level, they do not seem to have an outstanding role.

To sum up, the most outstanding indicators of ethnic identity deconstruction are low retention and little use of ethnic language as mother tongue, low incidence of numerous, close ethnic friendships, and the low incidence of feelings of obligation to marry within one's own ethnic group. The most outstanding indicators of ethnic identity reconstruction are a high incidence of ethnic food consumption, a high incidence of the possession of ethnic art objects, a high incidence of some knowledge of ethnic language expressions and words, and a high incidence of having only one or at best two close friends of the same ethnicity. There were, however, significant variations of identity retention among the four groups studied. The Jewish group showed the highest overall retention, the German group showed the lowest. This indicates variations in which ethnicity is deconstructed and reconstructed among different ethnic groups.

The indicators of reconstruction thus present a picture of the form that ethnic identity acquires as it accommodates itself to other identities and external pressures. This form may be the most relevant to the kind of social structure and technological culture

typifying our society. My original hypothesis in the study was that reconstructed ethnic identity would emphasize the subjective aspects more and exclude most objective aspects. However, this did not prove to be the case. The objective aspects mentioned here are much stronger indicators of reconstructed identity than are the subjective ones. These objective elements are relatively few in number yet they appear to have high symbolic value. To this extent, the study supports the symbolic ethnicity theory but does not support it to the extent that these objective items do play a practical role in the everyday life of individuals. In other words, changing ethnicity in North American societies may mean its erosion, but just as much it means a deconstruction of an old identity and a reconstruction of a new form of ethnic identity that is viable in face of the pressures and needs of a pluralistic, technological, stratified, mobility-oriented society (Isajiw, 1977).

Conclusion

This paper began with the assumption that any empirical research on ethnicity must derive its operational measures from a thorough theoretical understanding of what ethnicity is. To this effect the paper briefly reviewed the main approaches to ethnicity in the sociological literature in the past twenty years, then proceeded to define ethnicity, ethnic group and ethnic identity, to distinguish types of ethnic groups and forms of ethnic identity, and to examine ethnicity in the process of change. Results of an empirical study were used to obtain a more realistic picture of how ethnicity changes over the span of three generations. The findings of the empirical study are useful in drawing attention to variations in the character of ethnicity depending on ethnic group, generation, and other conditions. The scholar of ethnicity must be as much aware of the varying conditions of ethnicity and variations in the nature of ethnicity over time as of all the conceptual distinctions and theoretical possibilities regarding it. If empirical research, be it a census or other study, requires that a limited choice of operational indicators be made, it is essential that it be made with a full knowledge of how it will bear on all the aspects of ethnicity and how it will limit the scope to which one could relate the consequent findings. This is the value that theory has for any research. But for the study of ethnicity this is particularly important because the field has a tendency to be strongly affected by various popular preconceptions of the meaning of ethnicity, by strong feelings about it, or by biases. Theoretical discipline is essential if one is to maintain a scientific level.

References

- Banton, Michael
1983 *Racial and Ethnic Competition*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Barth, Fredrik
1969 *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Bell, Daniel
1975 "Ethnicity and Social Change" in *Ethnicity*, N. Glazer and D.P. Moynihan, eds., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975, pp. 141-174.
- Bentley, Carter G.
1987 "Ethnicity and Practice", *Comparative Studies in Society and History: An International Quarterly*, Vol. 29: 24-55.
- Bonacich, Edna
1972 "A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 37: 547-559.
- Bourdieu, Pierre
1977 *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Breton, Raymond, W.W. Isajiw, W.E. Kalbach and J.G. Reitz
1990 *Ethnic Identity and Equality: Varieties of Experience in a Canadian City*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Crispino, James A.
1980 *The Assimilation of Ethnic Groups: The Italian Case*. Staten Island, N.Y.: Center for Migration Studies.
- Edwards, John and L. Doucette
1987 "Ethnic Saliency, Identity and Symbolic Ethnicity", *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 19: 52-62.
- Foucault, Michel
1967 *Madness and Civilization*. London: Tavistock.
- Gans, Herbert
1979 "Symbolic Ethnicity: The Future of Ethnic Groups and Cultures in America", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 2: 1-20.
- Geertz, Clifford
1963 "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States" in *Old Societies and New States*, C. Geertz, ed., New York: Free Press, pp. 105-157.
- Geismar, Ludwig
1954 "A Scale for the Measurement of Ethnic Identification", *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 16: 33-60.
- Hechter, Michael
1978 "Group Formation and the Cultural Division of Labour", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 84: 293-318.
- Herzog, Hanna
1984 "Ethnicity as a Product of Political Negotiation: the Case of Israel", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 7: 517-533.

- Isaacs, Harold
1975 "Basic Group Identity: the Idols of the Tribe" in *Ethnicity: Theory and Experience*, N. Glazer and D.P. Moynihan, eds., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, pp. 29-52.
- Isajiw, Wsevolod W.
1974 "Definitions of Ethnicity" in *Ethnicity*, Vol. 1: 111-124.
- Isajiw, Wsevolod W.
1975 "The Process of Maintenance of Ethnic Identity: the Canadian Context" in *Sounds Canadian: Languages and Cultures in Multiethnic Society*, P. Migus, ed., Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, pp. 129-138.
- Isajiw, Wsevolod W.
1977 "Olga in Wonderland: Ethnicity in Technological Society", *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, Vol. 9: 77-85
- Isajiw, Wsevolod W.
1990 "Ethnic-Identity Retention" in *Ethnic Identity and Equality: Varieties of Experience in a Canadian City*, R. Breton, et al., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, pp. 35-38.
- Juteau, Danielle
1991 "The Production of Ethnicity: Material and Ideal Dimensions". Paper presented at the 86th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Cincinnati, Ohio, August 27.
- Lazarsfeld, Paul F. and N.W. Henry
1968 *Latent Structure Analysis*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Liebertson, Stanley and M.C. Waters
1990 *From Many Strands: Ethnic and Racial Groups in Contemporary America*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Makabe, Tomoko
1981 "The Theory of the Split Labor Market: A Comparison of the Japanese Experience in Brazil and Canada", *Social Forces*, Vol. 59: 786-809.
- Nagata, Judith
1974 "What is a Malay? Situational Selection of Ethnic Identity in a Plural Society", *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 1: 331-350.
- Nagel, Jane and S. Olzak
1982 "Ethnic Mobilization in New and Old States: An Extension of the Competitive Model", *Social Problems*, Vol. 30: 127-143.
- Nielsen, Francis
1980 "The Flemish Movement in Belgium After World War II: A Dynamic Analysis", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 45: 76-90.
- Okamura, Jonathan
1981 "Situational Ethnicity", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 4: 452-465.
- Portes, Alejandro
1984 "The Rise of Ethnicity: Determinants of Ethnic Perceptions Among Cuban Exiles in Miami", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 49: 383-397.
- Redfield, Robert
1953 *The Primitive World and Its Transformation*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.

- Redfield, Robert
1960 *The Little Community and Peasant Society and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ross, Jeffrey A.
1982 "Urban Development and the Politics of Ethnicity: A Conceptual Approach", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 5: 440-456.
- Sanders, Jimmy M. and V. Nee
1987 "Limits of Ethnic Solidarity in the Enclave Economy", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 52: 745-767.
- Smith, Susan
1984 "Negotiating Ethnicity in an Uncertain Environment", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 7: 360-373.
- Stack, John F., ed.
1986 *The Primordial Challenge*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Wilson, Kenneth L. and A. Portes
1980 "Immigrant Enclaves, and Analysis of the Labor Market Experience of Cubans in Miami", *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 86: 295-319.
- Yancey, William L., E.P. Erickson and R.N. Juliani
1976 "Emergent Ethnicity: A Review and Reformulation", *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 41: 391-403.
- Yelvington, A.
1991 "Ethnicity as Practice? A Comment on Bentley", *Comparative Studies in Society and History: An International Quarterly*, Vol. 33: 158-175.
- Zielyk, Ihor V.
1975 "Two Types of Ethnic Communities" in *Sounds Canadian: Languages and Cultures in Multi-Ethnic Society*, in P. Migus, ed., Toronto: Peter Martin Associates, pp. 147-157.