The Phenomenon of Ethnicity

Ethnic Change. Papers from a seminar, 1977. CHARLES F. KEYES, Ed. University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1981. xii, 336 pp. $20. Publications on Ethnicity and Nationality, School of International Studies, University of Washington, vol. 2.

Abner Cohen begins his contribution to this volume by saying that ethnicity is the subject of such an extensive literature that there can be hardly any new conceptual formulations about it. Yet by virtue of its focus on change this volume presents new ideas in the realms of both theory and method.

Why should change be the key to developing new theories and methods? Mutability is the most important single feature of ethnic identity. Ethnic boundaries are created and dissolved; ethnic groups lie dormant and then burst into activity; symbols of ethnic identity are constantly recreated; hierarchies of ethnic groups shift in response to system-wide changes. The ethnographic present in studies of ethnic identity, with its synchronic orientation, gives us no context in which to make sense of what we see.

A diachronic perspective allows one not simply to describe shifts in identification, use, and symbols but to identify factors that promote, constrain, or shape ethnic identity. As Ronald Cohen notes in his 1978 review of the field (in the *Annual Review of Anthropology*), much less attention has been paid to what factors evoke particular kinds of ethnic identities than to describing what ethnicity is.

One of those factors, immigration, is the focus of several papers in this volume. Immigration has been a prominent feature in many studies of ethnic identity because it brings groups into interaction where their distinctiveness and relative position must be appraised and negotiated. Commonly, immigration has been treated as having either-or consequences, either assimilation or ghettoization, acceptance or conflict. Some of the ways in which it is more complex are set out in this volume.

Focus of group and individual identification is a key theme in two papers. Banton suggests that the response of immigrants will vary depending on whether the group members are attracted more to the values of the receiving society or to those of the sending society. He emphasizes also that the response may change with time. Moreover, individuals and groups may assimilate in some aspects of values and behavior while they differentiate themselves in others. Tessler's study of Jews in Tunisia and Morocco and Arabs in Israel provides a different refinement of the concept of focus of identification. The dimensions of his model for change are individual community identification and internalism versus externalism in systemic identification—do group members feel more commitment to the host society or do they regard themselves as belonging to a social system external to that society?

This notion of focus has been applied only sporadically in the literature on ethnic identity. Where it has been used, in a study of immigrants from Iraq in Detroit or Portuguese immigrants in New England, for example, it has been a powerful explanatory device. What Banton and Tessler give us are models that can be applied widely and that are flexible enough to match the flexibility of ethnicity itself.

Ivan Light challenges old ideas about the immigration context in his paper on ethnic succession. His discussion of the alternative modes of action—displacement, leap-frogging, and situs enhancement—and their frequency indicates the inadequacy of the model of succession that posits newcomers occupying the low-ranking vacancies and then moving up as newer groups arrive. That model could not explain, for example, the experiences of the Irish immigrants to the United States. The Irish who emigrated in the last half of the 19th century and remained in the eastern cities eked out a living for many years doing menial labor and suffered contempt and exploitation. In contrast, the Irish who went as far as San Francisco quickly reached positions of high status and political power. Two reasons can be offered for their success: They had more resources initially than those who remained behind in the east, and they moved into a new city where there was no "establishment" already occupying all the prestigious positions.

Several of the papers in this volume redress another imbalance. Much of the previous work has tended to focus on the great 19th-century immigration. In addition, much of the sociological theory of immigration has been limited to immigrants to the United States. Bentley's paper on the Sulu in the Philippines is thus a welcome contribution both in its geographical focus and in its temporal dimension—using archeological and linguistic analysis Bentley covers a far longer period of time than we are used to seeing. Any shorter time depth would have obscured the processes of political centralization, historical reckoning and the attendant origin myths, and the change from class-status distinctions to ethnic cleavages as incoming groups used ethnic criteria to reinforce high status. A similar transition occurred in a far shorter time period in Burundi as the Tutsi and Hutu developed ethnic markers to signal their growing conflict.

Another topic represented in the volume is ethnic nationalism. More often than not, ethnic nationalism—an appeal for a separate ethnic identity within a given culture—occurs among indigenous groups who use their first-on-the-scene status as an ideological weapon as well as a claim to territory. This is certainly true in the case of American Indians, as we see in the papers by Trosper and Trottier. How advantageous this status is is demonstrated by Trottier's comparison of the panethnic movements among Asian-Americans and American Indians. The latter share the symbols of a common origin and the same relationship to the land. These can, under certain circumstances, overcome tribal differences. Asian-Americans, having come to the United States at different times and from different places, have as a rallying point only the fact that they are treated as if they were the same. This is essentially a negative attribute and not very satisfying as a foundation for a panethnic movement.

Much has been written both pro and con about the burgeoning ethnic nationalist movement, but little in the way of theory has emerged. The long comparative paper by Fox *et al.* links the increasing importance of the welfare state with the rise of ethnic nationalism. Fox *et al.* see the regularities in movements around the world as a function of ethnic elites organizing a political opposition. The increasing bureaucratization of the welfare state, including its intrusion into the lives of its citizens, and the decreasing salience of class as a means of political mobilization give these elites an opportunity to recruit supporters and gain power by using an identity that may formerly have been a liability. The authors suggest that this same process characterizes the colonial situation. Developing this theme, they conclude that, instead of following the industrialized world's pattern of development, the Third World pattern may have presaged recent events in the Western world. It is an intriguing notion bound to disturb those who cling to certain developmental schemes.

The theme of the cultural and social aspects of ethnic identity runs throughout this volume. In the literature there has been a duality between these and other dimensions of ethnicity. The treat-

ment of cultural content often has been little more than a laundry list of traits employed for easy identification of a group preparatory to discussion of its social behavior and organization. This tendency was identified earliest and best in 1969 in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, a collection of essays edited by Fredrik Barth that focused on the boundaries between groups rather than on their internal aspects. Barth had been reacting to the notion that groups could be defined by their content alone. Unfortunately, he was interpreted by many as saying that one could ignore content altogether.

In reality, one cannot understand ethnic behavior without reference to both content and boundary, symbol and behavior. This volume attempts to wrestle with both dimensions. Keyes gives the mandate in his introductory essay by proposing a theoretical approach that considers both the cultural interpretation and the social manipulation of ethnic identity. The rationale for such an approach is summed up by the last essay, by Abner Cohen, in which he argues that ethnicity is always two-dimensional, both cultural and organizational. In between we have two papers that treat both dimensions explicitly. Judith Nagata incorporates both in her definition of ethnic identity. More important, she speaks cogently to the difficulty of determining the relationship between ethnicity and culture, of deciding when and why a cultural attribute is a primordial attribute. These concepts and distinctions are not simply hypothetical but have developed out of her on-going analysis of Malay identity. Bentley demonstrates the dialectical relationship between origin myths and high prestige. Furthermore, he shows us the complex relationship between such organizational aspects of ethnicity as political centralization and mercantile control and symbol manipulation, the cultural dimension.

In the remaining papers, the political and economic dimension is emphasized. Emphasis on this dimension is not surprising, for it is less difficult to study behavior than values and attitudes. Yet we do have ethnic groups for whom the most important identifications lie in the realm of ideology. Again, the value of a diachronic approach becomes clear. The alternation of periods in which such groups manifest themselves in organization and action with periods of little or no visibility gives the investigator material for the analysis of group development and response to environmental influences. Cohen, taking off from Weber, provides concepts that help in this kind of analysis. He contrasts two kinds of organization, communal and associative. The former is diffuse, all-pervasive, and nonutilitarian, whereas the latter is purposive, rationally organized, and efficient. At certain points, ethnic groups need the latter kind of organization to advance, but at other times relative invisibility is the best strategy.

The variety of approaches and ethnographic areas represented in this volume match well the complex, sometimes chimerical nature of the phenomenon of ethnicity. An additional virtue of the volume is that the papers derive their insights out of concrete cases. Many of the most perplexing questions about ethnic identity are perplexing only in the abstract. They tend to resolve themselves when confronted with empirical examples. *Ethnic Change* suggests some answers; more important, it poses new questions and provides, at the same time, models and methods with which to attack them.

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The Neurobiology of Aging

Brain Neurotransmitters and Receptors in Aging and Age-Related Disorders. Papers from a symposium, Houston, Oct. 1980. S. J. ENNA, T. SAMORAJSKI, and BERNARD BEER, Eds. Raven, New York, 1981. xiv, 278 pp., illus. $32. Aging Series, vol. 17.

This volume resulting from a symposium is a good sampling of the subjects under study in a burgeoning branch of neurobiology. Particular emphasis is given to senile dementia (Alzheimer's disease). Until recently, age-correlated brain disorders were ascribed to neuronal loss, often through the use of B. D. Burns's 1958 estimate that humans lose 100,000 neurons a day. However, recent studies of humans and rodents show that many types of neurons are not decreased during aging. Major (more than 50 percent) neuronal loss exclusive of neurologic diseases may be exceptional and in most cases has unknown functional impact (discussed by Brizzee *et al.*, Coleman and Goldman, Diamond and Connor, Scheibel, and Rogers *et al.*, among others). Disease-related neuronal loss is exemplified in Parkinsonism, a disease of late mid-life, in which greater than 90 percent of the substantia nigra dopaminergic cells disappear by the time of death. The greater than 90 percent loss of cortical choline acetyltransferase activity in senile dementia also implies a major neuronal loss, but the localization and extent of cell loss is unclear. An incisive study by Coyle *et al.* shows cholinergic projections from the nucleus basalis to the cortex of the rodent, which may account for 70 percent of cholinergic activity in the frontoparietal cortex. Meanwhile, many are pursuing pharmacologic rectification of the putative cholinergic deficits in senile dementia, drawing from the precedent of treating the dopaminergic deficiencies of Parkinsonism with neurotransmitter precursors or receptor stimulants. Sadly, treatments with cholinergic precursors and agonists have not resulted in clear success in clinical trials, but some results are encouraging (discussed by Appel, R. C. Smith *et al.*, and Drachman). Pharmacologic models of cognitive dysfunctions are also described by Bartus and Dean and by Drachman. Transient memory impairments induced by the cholinergic blocker scopalamine in rats, primates, and humans resemble some aspects of aging and provide useful assays for potential therapies. The more precise biochemical and anatomic categorization of senile dementia will probably implicate other neurotransmitter changes to varying degrees: it would not be surprising for subtypes of senile dementia to be defined that have differing potentials for therapy. The responsiveness of the cortical dendrites of old rats to enriched environments suggests the plausibility of sociologic approaches to age- and disease-related neural deficits (Diamond and Connor).

The effects of age on neurotransmitter receptors include the experimentally robust 30 to 40 percent loss of striatal dopamine binding sites (Enna and Strong, Roth, Samorajski, and R. C. Smith *et al.*), a loss that may exceed the extent of neuronal loss in the striatum (Brizzee *et al.*). Because the dopamine agonist apomorphine induces smaller increases in the utilization of glucose by the nigro-striatal system in old than in young rats (C. B. Smith), dopamine receptor-limited functions may also change with age. However, the metabolism of cyclic nucleotides and neurotransmitter-related functions indicates a "remarkable stability during . . . aging," with major impairments detected only in cerebellum (Schmidt). Dramatic anatomic and electrophysiologic changes in the aging rat cerebellum are also described (Rogers *et al.*).

Hypothalamic age changes are dealt with, if briefly. The neuroendocrine hypothesis of aging that would link many