

Ethnic group

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An **ethnic group** is a group of human beings whose members identify with each other, usually on the basis of preferential endogamy and/or a presumed or real common ancestry.^{[1][2]} Ethnic identity is further marked by the recognition from others of a group's distinctiveness^[3] and the recognition of common cultural, linguistic, religious, behavioral or biological traits,^{[1][4]} real or presumed, as indicators of contrast to other groups.^[5]

Ethnicity is an increasingly important means by which states and scientists can identify (and categorise) people, and through which people can identify themselves. According to "Challenges of Measuring an Ethnic World: Science, politics, and reality", a conference organized by Statistics Canada and the United States Census Bureau (April 1-3, 1992), "Ethnicity is a fundamental factor in human life: it is a phenomenon inherent in human experience."^[6] However, many social scientists, like anthropologists Fredrik Barth and Eric Wolf, regard ethnicity more as a product of interaction, rather than reflecting essential qualities inherent to human groups.^[7] Processes that result in the emergence of such identification are called ethnogenesis. Members of an ethnic group, on the whole, claim cultural continuities over time, although historians and cultural anthropologists have documented that many of the values, practices, and norms that imply continuity with the past are of relatively recent invention.^[8]

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Definition

The sociologist Max Weber once remarked that "the whole conception of ethnic groups is so complex and so vague that it might be good to abandon it altogether."^[9]

In any case, Weber proposed a definition of ethnic group that became accepted by many sociologists:

[T]hose human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonization and migration; this belief must be important for group formation; furthermore it does not matter whether an objective blood relationship exists.^[9]

Anthropologist Ronald Cohen, in a review of anthropological and sociological studies of ethnic groups since Weber, claimed that the identification of "ethnic groups" by social scientists often reflected inaccurate labels more than indigenous realities:

... the named ethnic identities we accept, often unthinkingly, as basic givens in the literature are often arbitrarily, or even worse inaccurately, imposed.^[10]

Cohen also suggests that claims concerning "ethnic" identity (like earlier claims concerning "tribal" identity) are often colonialist practices and effects of the relations between colonized peoples and nation-states.^[10] Harold Isaacs has identified other *diacritics* (distinguishing markers) of ethnicity, among them physical appearance, name, language, history, and religion;^[11] this definition has entered some dictionaries.^[12] Social scientists have thus focused on how, when, and why different markers of ethnic identity become salient. Thus, anthropologist Joan Vincent observed that ethnic boundaries often have a mercurial character.^[13] Ronald Cohen concluded that ethnicity is "a series of nesting dichotomizations of inclusiveness and exclusiveness".^[10] He agrees with Joan Vincent's observation that (in Cohen's paraphrase) "Ethnicity ... can be narrowed or broadened in boundary terms in relation to the specific needs of political mobilization."^[10] This may be why descent is sometimes a marker of ethnicity, and sometimes not: which diacritic of ethnicity is salient depends on whether people are scaling ethnic boundaries up or down, and whether they are scaling them up or down depends generally on the political situation.

Ethnicity and race

Ethnicity and race are related concepts in that both are usually defined in terms of shared genealogy.^[14] Often, ethnicity also connotes shared cultural, linguistic, behavioural or religious traits. For example, to call oneself Jewish or Arab one immediately invokes a clutch of linguistic, religious, cultural and racial features that are held to be common within each ethnic category. Such broad ethnic categories have also been termed *macroethnicity*^[15] to distinguish them from smaller more subjective ethnic features, often termed *microethnicity*.^{[16][17]} Race, by contrast, refers to "some concentrations, as relative to frequency and distribution, of hereditary particles (genes) and physical characters, which appear, fluctuate, and often disappear in the course of time by reason of geographic and or cultural isolation." In 1950, the UNESCO statement *The Race Question*, signed by some of the internationally renowned scholars of the time (including Ashley Montagu, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Gunnar Myrdal, Julian Huxley, etc.), suggested that: "National, religious, geographic, linguistic and cultural groups do not necessarily coincide with racial groups: and the cultural traits of such groups have no demonstrated genetic connection with racial traits. Because serious errors of this kind are habitually committed when the term 'race' is used in popular parlance, it would be better when speaking of human races to drop the term 'race' altogether and speak of 'ethnic groups'."^[18]

In 1982, American cultural anthropologists, summing up forty years of ethnographic research, argued that racial and ethnic categories are symbolic markers for different ways that people from different parts of the world have been incorporated into a global economy. According to Wolf, races were incorporated during the period of European mercantile expansion, and ethnic groups during the period of capitalist expansion:

The opposing interests that divide the working classes are further reinforced through appeals to "racial" and "ethnic" distinctions. Such appeals serve to allocate different categories of workers to rungs on the scale of labor markets, relegating stigmatized populations to the lower levels and insulating the higher echelons from competition from below. Capitalism did not create all the distinctions of ethnicity and race that function to set off categories of workers from one another. It is, nevertheless, the process of labor mobilization under capitalism that imparts to these distinctions their effective values.

In this regard, distinctions of "race" have implications rather different from "ethnic" variations. Racial distinctions, such as "Indian" or "Negro," are the outcome of the subjugation of populations in the course of European mercantile expansion. The term *Indian* stands for the conquered populations of the New World, in disregard of any cultural or physical differences among Native Americans. *Negro* similarly serves as a cover term for the culturally and physically variable African populations that furnished slaves, as well as for the slaves themselves. Indians are conquered people who could be forced to labor or pay tribute; Negroes are "hewers of wood and drawers of water", obtained in violence and put to work under coercion. These two terms thus single out for primary attention the historic fact that these populations were made to labor in servitude to support a new class of overlords. Simultaneously, the terms disregard cultural and physical differences within each large category, denying any constituent group political, economic, or ideological identity of its own.

Racial terms mirror the political process by which populations of whole continents were turned into providers of coerced surplus labor. Under capitalism these terms did not lose their association with civil-disability. They continue to invoke supposed descent from such subjugated populations so as to deny their putative descendents access to upper segments of the labor market. "Indians" and "Negroes" are thus confined to the lower ranks of the industrial army or depressed into the industrial reserve. The function of racial categories within capitalism is exclusionary. They stigmatize groups in order to exclude them from more highly paid jobs and from access to the information needed for their execution. They insulate the more advantaged workers against competition from below, making it difficult for employers to use stigmatized populations as cheaper substitutes or as strikebreakers. Finally, they weaken the ability of such groups to mobilize politically on their own behalf by forcing them back into casual employment and thereby intensifying competition among them for scarce and shifting resources.

While the categories of race serve primarily to exclude people from all but the lower echelons of the industrial army, ethnic categories express the ways that particular populations came to relate themselves to given segments of the labor market. Such categories emerge from two sources, one external to the group in question, the other internal. As each cohort entered the industrial process, outsiders were able to categorize it in terms of putative provenance and supposed affinity to particular segments of the labor market. At the same time, members of the cohort itself came to value membership in the group thus defined, as a qualification for establishing economic and political claims. Such ethnicities rarely coincided with the initial self-identification of the industrial recruits, who thought of themselves as Hanoverians or Bavarians rather than as Germans, as members of their village or their parish (*okiloca*) rather than as Poles, as Tonga or Yao rather than "Nyasalanders." The more comprehensive categories emerged only as particular cohorts of workers gained access to different segments of the labor market and began to treat their access as a resource to be defended both socially and politically. Such ethnicities are therefore not "primordial" social relationships. They are historical products of labor market segmentation under the capitalist mode.^[19]

Ethnic stratification

In sociology and social theory, ethnicity can be viewed as a way of social stratification, meaning that ethnicity is the basis for a hierarchical arrangement of individuals. According to Donald Noel, a sociologist who developed a theory on the origin of ethnic stratification, ethnic stratification is a "system of stratification wherein some relatively fixed group membership (e.g.,

race, religion, or nationality) is utilized as a major criterion for assigning social positions".^[20] Ethnic stratification is one of many different types of social stratification, including stratification based on socio-economic status, race, or gender.

According to Donald Noel, ethnic stratification will emerge only when specific ethnic groups are brought into contact with one another, and only when those groups are characterized by a high degree of ethnocentrism, competition, and differential power. Ethnocentrism is the tendency to look at the world primarily from the perspective of one's own culture, and to downgrade all other groups outside one's own culture. Some sociologists, such as Lawrence Bobo and Vincent Hutchings, say the origin of ethnic stratification lies in individual dispositions of ethnic prejudice, which relates to the theory of ethnocentrism.^[21]

Continuing with Noel's theory, some degree of differential power must also be present for the emergence of ethnic stratification. In other words, an inequality of power among ethnic groups means "they are of such unequal power that one is able to impose its will upon another".^[20] In addition to differential power, a degree of competition structured along ethnic lines is a prerequisite to ethnic stratification as well. The different ethnic groups must be competing for some common goal, such as power or influence, or a material interest such as wealth or territory. Lawrence Bobo and Vincent Hutchings propose that competition is driven by self-interest and hostility, and results in inevitable stratification and conflict.^[21]

Ethnicity and nation

In some cases, especially involving transnational migration, or colonial expansion, ethnicity is linked to nationality. Many anthropologists and historians, following the work of Ernest Gellner^[22] and Benedict Anderson^[23] see nations and nationalism as developing with the rise of the modern state system in the seventeenth century, culminating in the rise of "nation-states" in which the presumptive boundaries of the nation coincided (or ideally coincided) with state boundaries. Thus, in the West, the notion of ethnicity, like race and nation, developed in the context of European colonial expansion, when mercantilism and capitalism were promoting global movements of populations at the same time that state boundaries were being more clearly and rigidly defined. In the nineteenth century, modern states generally sought legitimacy through their claim to represent "nations." Nation-states, however, invariably include populations that have been excluded from national life for one reason or another. Members of excluded groups, consequently, will either demand inclusion on the basis of equality, or seek autonomy, sometimes even to the extent of complete political separation in their own nation-state.^[24] Under these conditions - when people moved from one state to another,^[25] or one state conquered or colonized peoples beyond its national boundaries - ethnic groups were formed by people who identified with one nation, but lived in another state.

Ethno-national conflict

Sometimes ethnic groups are subject to prejudicial attitudes and actions by the state or its constituents. In the twentieth century, people began to argue that conflicts among ethnic groups or between members of an ethnic group and the state can and should be resolved in one of two ways. Some, like Jürgen Habermas and Bruce Barry, have argued that the legitimacy of modern states must be based on a notion of political rights of autonomous individual subjects. According to this view the state should not acknowledge ethnic, national or racial identity but rather instead enforce political and legal equality of all individuals. Others, like Charles Taylor and Will Kymlicka argue that the notion of the autonomous individual is itself a cultural construct. According to this view, states must recognize ethnic identity and develop processes through which the particular needs of ethnic groups can be accommodated within the boundaries of the nation-state.

The nineteenth century saw the development of the political ideology of ethnic nationalism, when the concept of race was tied to nationalism, first by German theorists including Johann Gottfried von Herder. Instances of societies focusing on ethnic ties arguably to the exclusion of history or historical context have resulted in the justification of nationalist goals. Two periods frequently cited as examples of this are the nineteenth century consolidation and expansion of the German Empire and the Third (Greater German) Reich, each promoted on the pan-ethnic idea that these governments were only acquiring lands that had always been ethnically German. The history of late-comers to the nation-state model, such as those arising in the Near East and south-eastern Europe out of the dissolution of the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires, as well as those arising out of the former USSR, is marked by inter-ethnic conflicts that usually occurs within multi-ethnic states, as opposed to between them, in other regions of the world; thus, those other conflicts are often misleadingly labelled and characterized as "civil war."

Ethnicity in specific countries

In the United States of America, collectives of related ethnic groups are typically denoted as "ethnic." Most prominently in the U.S., the various Latin American racial and ancestral groups are typically grouped as either "Hispanics" or "Latinos". The many previously designated 'Oriental' ethnic groups are designated as Asian ethnic groups and similarly linked together as "Asians." The terms "Black" and "African-American," while different, usually describe people whose ancestors were indigenous to Africa, and exclude the African descendants of European colonists.

The term White American generally describes people whose ancestry can be traced to Europe (including other European-settled countries such as Argentina, Australia, and Canada where people of European ethnic backgrounds form the bulk of the populations) who now live in the United States. "Middle Easterners" are peoples from the Middle-East, i.e. Southwest Asia and North Africa. These countries include Iran, Tunisia, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco. (The U.S. Census Bureau compiled a list of ethnic groups which may be seen at Ethnicity (United States Census)).

In the United Kingdom, different classifications, both formal and informal, are used. Perhaps the most accepted is the National Statistics classification, identical to that used in the 2001 *Census* in England and Wales (see Ethnicity (United Kingdom)). In general popular use in the United Kingdom and Europe, the terms *oriental* and *Asian* are widespread and without negative connotation, with the latter term usually reserved in the United Kingdom for people from the Indian subcontinent (see British Oriental and British Asian for more details).

China officially recognizes 56 ethnic groups, the largest of which is the Han Chinese. Many of the ethnic minorities maintain their own culture and language, although many are also becoming more like the Han Chinese. Han Chinese predominates most areas of China with the exception of Tibet and Xinjiang where the Han are still in the minority. The Han Chinese are the only ethnic group bound by the One-child policy. (For more details, see List of ethnic groups in China and Ethnic minorities in China.)

In France, no population census includes ethnic categories, and the government is prohibited from collecting, maintaining or using ethnic population statistics.^[26] The current French government, led by Nicolas Sarkozy and François Fillon, has begun a legislative process to repeal this prohibition.

See also

- Ancestry
- Clan
- Diaspora
- Ethnic autonomous regions
- Ethnic cleansing
- Ethnic minority
- Ethnic nationalism
- Ethnicity and health
- Ethnogenesis
- Ethnocentrism
- Genealogy
- Genetic genealogy
- Human Genome Diversity Project (HGDP)
- Identity politics
- Intersectionality
- Kinship and Descent
- List of ethnic groups
- List of indigenous peoples
- List of stateless ethnic groups
- Meta-ethnicity
- Multiculturalism
- Nation
- National minority
- National symbol
- Non-exclusive ethnic group
- Passing (ethnic group)
- Population genetics
- Race and ethnicity in the United States Census
- Race (classification of human beings)
- Stateless nation
- Tribe
- Y-DNA haplogroups by ethnic groups

Notes

1. [^] ^{*a*} ^{*b*} Smith 1987
2. [^] Marcus Banks, *Ethnicity: Anthropological Constructions* (1996), p. 151 "'ethnic groups' invariably stress common ancestry or endogamy".
3. [^] "Anthropology. The study of ethnicity, minority groups, and identity," *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2007.
4. [^] Statistics Canada Definition of Ethnicity
5. [^] T.H. Eriksen, *Small places, large issues. An introduction to social and cultural anthropology* (second edition, London 2001), 261 ff.
6. [^] Statistics Canada
7. [^] Fredrik Barth ed. 1969 *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference*; Eric Wolf 1982 *Europe and the People Without History* p. 381
8. [^] Friedlander 1975 *Being Indian in Hueyapan*, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983 *The Invention of Tradition*, Sider 1993 *Lumbee Indian Histories*.
9. [^] ^{*a*} ^{*b*} Max Weber [1922]1978 *Economy and Society* eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich, trans. Ephraim Fischhof, vol. 2 Berkeley: University of California Press, 389
10. [^] ^{*a*} ^{*b*} ^{*c*} ^{*d*} Ronald Cohen 1978 "Ethnicity: Problem and Focus in Anthropology" in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 7: 383 Palo Alto: Stanford University Press
11. [^] Isaacs, H. 1975 *Idols of the Tribe: Group Identity and Political Change* New York: Harper
12. [^] 2006 *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition* Boston:Houghton Mifflin
13. [^] Joan Vincent 1974 "The Structure of Ethnicity" in *Human Organization* 33(4): 375-379
14. [^] Abizadeh 2001
15. [^] Maria Rostworowski, *The Incas*
16. [^] http://216.239.59.104/search?q=cache:_V2dvVcvWIAJ:whp.uoregon.edu/Lockhart/Intro.pdf+microethnicity&hl=en&ct=clnk&cd=20&gl=uk James Lockhart, *Microethnicity in Philological ethnohistory*

17. ^ Christopher Larkosh, *Je me souviens...aussi: Microethnicity and the Fragility of Memory in French-Canadian New England*. In TOPIA: Journal for Canadian Cultural Studies, Issue 16 (Toronto, 2006), pp. 91-108
18. ^ A. Metraux (1950) "United nations Economic and Security Council Statement by Experts on Problems of Race" in *American Anthropologist* 53(1): 142-145)
19. ^ Eric Wolf, 1982, *Europe and the People Without History*, Berkeley: University of California Press. 380-381
20. ^ ^a ^b Noel, Donald L. (1968). "A Theory of the Origin of Ethnic Stratification". *Social Problems* **16** (2): 157–172. doi:10.1525/sp.1968.16.2.03a00030.
21. ^ ^a ^b Bobo, Lawrence; Hutchings, Vincent L. (1996). "Perceptions of Racial Group Competition: Extending Blumer's Theory of Group Position to a Multiracial Social Context". *American Sociological Review* **61** (6): 951–972. doi:10.2307/2096302.
22. ^ Gellner 2006 *Nations and Nationalism* Blackwell Publishing
23. ^ Anderson 2006 *Imagined Communities* Verson
24. ^ Walter Pohl, "Conceptions of Ethnicity in Early Medieval Studies" *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings*, ed. Lester K. Little and Barbara H. Rosenwein, (Blackwell), 1998, pp 13-24, notes that historians have projected the nineteenth-century conceptions of the nation-state backwards in time, employing biological metaphors of birth and growth: "that the peoples in the Migration Period had little to do with those heroic (or sometimes brutish) clichés is now generally accepted among historians," he remarked. Early medieval peoples were far less homogeneous than often thought, and Pohl follows Reinhard Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung*. (Cologne and Graz) 1961, whose researches into the "ethnogenesis" of the German peoples convinced him that the idea of common origin, as expressed by Isidore of Seville *Gens est multitudo ab uno principio orta* ("a people is a multitude stemming from one origin") which continues in the original *Etymologiae* IX.2.i) "*sive ab alia natione secundum propriam collectionem distincta*" ("or distinguished from another people by its proper ties") was a myth.
25. ^ Aihway Ong 1996 "Cultural Citizenship in the Making" in *Current Anthropology* 37(5)
26. ^ (French) *article 8 de la loi Informatique et libertés, 1978: "Il est interdit de collecter ou de traiter des données à caractère personnel qui font apparaître, directement ou indirectement, les origines raciales ou ethniques, les opinions politiques, philosophiques ou religieuses ou l'appartenance syndicale des personnes, ou qui sont relatives à la santé ou à la vie sexuelle de celles-ci."*

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