

Anthropological approaches to ethnicity and conflict in Europe and beyond

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Abstract. It is widely assumed that the spread of civil wars since the late 1980s has been due to ethnic loyalties resurfacing after the cold war. The paper argues that this is a misleading and misinformed point of view. The academic discipline which has been most important in developing the concept of ethnicity is anthropology. Few anthropologists understand ethnicity as something that explains conflict in itself, and most perceive it as an aspect of social interaction rather than a set of cultural characteristics associated with a particular group. Anthropologists reject the idea that ethnicity is given in nature, although they recognise that its power is linked to the fact that it can appear to be so. Various models and theories of ethnicity are discussed under the headings of essentialist, instrumentalist and relationalist approaches. The paper ends by discussing some of the specific issues raised by anthropological studies among populations in Europe and North America, and draws attention to the dangers of conflating ethnicity with biological conceptions of race.

Key words: ethnicity, race, anthropology, ethnic conflict, globalisation

Introduction

It would appear that in 1989 the world suddenly became more ethnic. Writing about that moment, the influential US Senator and former Harvard professor, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, remarked:

It seemed to me that the world was entering a period of ethnic conflict, following the relative stability of the cold war. This could be explained. As large formal structures broke up, and ideology lost its hold, people would revert to more primal identities. (Moynihan 1993: v)

At the turn of the 1990s, Moynihan's views ran against the tide of post-cold war optimism, with its proclamations of a New World Order (they also moved away from his own earlier, more instrumentalist conception of ethnicity, discussed below). But his pessimistic perspective about the spread of ethnic conflict is now widely shared.

Hardly a day goes by without some disturbing media report. Televised images of killing and suffering accompany commentaries which make reference to 'ethnicity', 'ethnic groups', 'ethnic violence', 'ethnic genocide', and 'ethnic cleansing', or which invoke associated 'isms': 'primordialist violence', 'racism', 'nationalism' and 'tribalism'. The book published to go with a major new BBC television series called *The Century of Warfare* asserts that 'African tribalism caused a bloody civil war in Liberia in 1989 and another in Rwanda in April 1994...' (emphasis added). The book also explains that 'Outside Africa tribalism is known as nationalism and ethnicity' and, like Moynihan above, it maintains that these have 'provided a trigger for conflict in the aftermath of the break-up of the Soviet empire' (Messenger 1995: 394 and 390).

This interpretation has also become the favoured explanation of many Western governments and international organisations. Britain's Foreign and Commonwealth Office has tended to view the collapse of communist rule in Yugoslavia as the catalyst which released pent-up ancient rivalries and allowed a 'Balkan mentality' a free rein (Duffield 1996: 176). In February 1993, the US Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, made the following remarks at a news conference:

The death of President Tito and the end of communist domination of the former Yugoslavia raised the lid on the cauldron of ancient hatreds. This is the land where at least three religions and half-dozen ethnic groups have vied across the centuries. It was the birthplace of World War I. It has long been a cradle of European conflict, and it remains so today. (US Department of State Dispatch, 4, page 81, quoted in Turton 1997: 89)

Such views have become so established that they are nowadays propounded as if they are facts with no need of elaboration. For example, a published report on a major conference organised by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development in 1994 observes, almost in passing, that: 'Longstanding ethnic, tribal and regional differences have resurfaced after being buried during the Cold War period (UNRISD 1994: 11)

In all these statements invoking 'ethnicity', the phenomenon is perceived as both a way of describing events and a way of explaining them. Ethnicity becomes almost interchangeable with a determinist conception of culture, one that assumes that there is a kind of shared psychological core which distinguishes one population group from another and which strongly influences or even dictates behaviour. Thus, certain groups of people behave violently because it is their culture to do so. It is normal for them to murder

those that they hate. It may be that many of those caught up in contemporary civil strife used to live amicably with their now hostile neighbours. It may be that opposed factions speak the same language, share similar customs, and have intermarried for generations. Nevertheless, according to the now prevalent hypothesis, there are fundamental traits which separate populations, and which make some mutually antagonistic. External authority is therefore required to maintain a peaceful social order. From the mid 1940s until the late 1980s this authority was provided in many parts of the world by relatively strong, centralised governments supported by Cold War alliances. The termination of these alliances, and the consequent weakening governments has removed the lid from the ethnic pressure cooker.

Anthropology and ethnicity

The academic discipline which is often supposed to offer the best insights into 'ethnicity' and 'other cultures' is anthropology. It is for this reason that anthropologists are nowadays asked to comment on events, or find their works quoted by others who do so. Some feel that it has become a professional duty to publicise their views (e.g. de Waal 1994a, 1994b; Allen, Hudson and Seaton 1996; Turton 1997: 89-91). However, what anthropologists tend to say and what is heard by many of those that listen is not always the same (see, for example, the discussion by Benthall and Knight 1993). This is both because anthropological explanations are not straightforward, and because they fundamentally question prevalent assumptions.

Anthropologists certainly do take ethnicity seriously, and can take much of the credit (or blame) for inventing the concept in its modern academic usage. But their analyses usually emphasise empirical investigation of social processes, rather than deep, psychological (or biological) motivations generating the values of particular group identities. Some anthropologists might accept that different populations have their own particular 'cultures of violence' (see the paper in this collection by Abrahamian), but almost all would flatly reject the idea that ethnicities are discrete cultural entities and that some of them are quintessentially and therefore inescapably destructive towards outsiders. Indeed, anthropologists are likely to view this as a form of multi-culturalism which borders on racism (a point made strongly by Duffield, 1996; see also the chapters by Shore and Ackermann in this collection – the latter being a discussion of the contradictions of multi-culturalism in Singapore).

The Forum Against Ethnic Violence

The papers presented here are all by anthropologists. They have been gathered together from a series of meetings organised by a network called the Forum Against Ethnic Violence. The Forum was formed by a group of mainly British anthropologists and sociologists in 1993, initially in response to the crisis in Bosnia. Its founders were concerned by the resurgence of primordialist conceptions of social difference among protagonists in former Yugoslavia, but also by the acceptance of these conceptions at face value by many journalists and political analysts. The Forum took the view that this primordialism was both a dangerously misleading interpretation in itself and also a way of cynically distancing events for political purposes. It enabled the governments of rich industrial states to absolve themselves of any responsibility for what was happening, and also helped them to adopt increasingly oppressive measures against refugees and immigrants.

The members of the Forum are not foolish enough to believe that their efforts will have a significant impact on the ways in which ethnic violence occurs. The aim is more modest: to make available alternative understandings of ethnicity which may assist concerned individuals and organisations in making assessments of what is happening. Members have sought to argue their position with journalists, non-governmental organisations, students and other academics through conferences, workshops, commissioned reports and publications. The papers presented here are an outcome of these activities. They were initially given at the 1994 Association of Social Anthropologists conference in Oxford, a special workshop organised by the Forum in London during February 1995, a conference on Feud, War and Genocide, held in Mainz, Germany during May 1996, and the European Association of Social Anthropologists conference, held in Barcelona during July 1996.

The papers have been selected on the grounds that they not only provide a rich ethnographic account of overt ethnic conflict, but also relate these local situations to wider processes. They do not put forward a single argument or theory of ethnicity, but they all assume perspectives which are opposed to the prevalent simplistic primordialism of most media coverage and political analysis. These perspectives are more implicit than explicit, reflecting the fact that the papers were originally presented at meetings at which anti-primordialist understandings of ethnicity could largely be taken for granted. It will therefore be useful to briefly review some of the main anthropological models of ethnicity in order to help place these case studies in a general theoretical context.

The concept of ethnicity

To understand how most anthropologists approach ethnicity, it is necessary to historicise the term. This is because ethnicity is one of those concepts which has to be explained by the way it is used. Simple definitions do not help much. For example, the Oxford English Dictionary raises more questions about the meaning of the term than it answers. It renders 'ethnicity' as: 'gentile, heathen; originating from a specified racial, linguistic, etc., group (usually a minority)'.

Although some scholars were using the term as an analytical category as early as the 1940s, it did not actually appear in the Oxford Dictionary until 1972, and only subsequently gained a wide currency in the social sciences. In 1975, Moynihan (whose recent views are quoted at the start of this paper) published an edited book on ethnicity together with Nathan Glazer. In the introduction they described ethnicity as 'a new term', and they suggested that it was 'still on the move', in that its meaning seemed to be shifting from its older associations with heathens towards 'the character or quality of an ethnic group' (Glazer and Moynihan 1975: 1). This has indeed become a common usage, but such a phrase begs a further question: what is an ethnic group?

Here too there has been a shift in meanings, one that largely explains the changing connotations and ambiguities of 'ethnicity'. 'Ethnic' is derived from the Greek words *ethnos* 'a people' and *ethnikos* 'a heathen', and from the mid fourteenth century 'ethnic' was used in English to refer to pagan populations. There is in fact a rare early usage of the term ethnicity in a manuscript dating from 1772, where it refers to 'heathen superstition' (Glazer and Moynihan 1975: 1; Banks 1996:5). By the mid-nineteenth century, 'ethnic' had taken on racial connotations, and by the 1940s was being used in the USA as a polite way of referring to 'Jews, Italians, Irish and other people considered inferior to the dominant group of largely British descent' (Eriksen 1993: 4). In 1942, informed by this usage of 'ethnic', Warner and Lunt could confidently assert that:

Ethnicity may be evaluated almost entirely upon a biological basis or upon purely social characteristics. Negroes tend to be at the first extreme, since they are most physically variant of all the groups in the community, and the Irish at the other extreme since they are most like the native white stock. (Warner and Lunt 1942: 73, quoted in Banks 1996: 40)

By the 1960s, the association between 'ethnic' and 'racial', and by extension 'ethnicity' and 'race', had become much more problematic for

those social scientists who used the terms. The idea that 'race' indicated biological differences between human populations had been questioned, and had been largely discredited. Liberal-minded academics asserted that race (in a biological sense) did not exist. What did exist was racism: a theory which might purport to have a scientific basis, but which was really a socially constructed ranking of people, usually linked to some observable physical characteristics, such as skin colour.

Some anthropologists engaged in the debates about racism in the USA and elsewhere (Davis et al. 1941; Banton 1955, 1959, 1977, 1983, 1987; Gluckman 1958[1940]; Harris 1964; Leacock 1969), but the issue of race increasingly became the preserve of a separate academic discipline, that of sociology. It was located within a wider examination of the issues of power, domination, and discrimination, and was primarily focussed on social relations within the industrialised countries. Anthropologists, in contrast, mainly studied 'other cultures' (usually in Latin America, Africa and Asia). They often ignored or down-played issues of race, and sometimes they euphemised the concept with reference to such notions as 'colour caste', 'plural society' or 'duality' (Sanjek 1996: 464).

Generally it was the internal logic of ostensibly exotic ways of life that fascinated anthropologists. They tended to focus 'on subjective perceptions of identity within the group studied and on the relations between the group and other similar groups', rather than 'on objective or external group characteristics and on the relations between the group and the political context in which it is located' (Banks, 1996: 49). Anthropologists increasingly used the term 'ethnic' to indicate the kinds of groups they studied, and it was 'ethnicity' rather than 'race' which 'captured more the anthropological imagination' (Sanjek 1996: 464).

However, it needs to be stressed that this anthropological usage of the expressions 'ethnic group' and 'ethnicity' differed from their application in the USA during the 1940s. They were not just a way of referring to minority, or marginalised, or supposedly inferior populations. Three main sets of approaches to ethnicity became established within anthropology. In all of them 'ethnic group' and 'ethnicity' were categories which, at least in theory, could embrace everyone.

In the anthropological literature on ethnicity, these approaches have sometimes been presented as being exclusive of each other. In practice most contemporary anthropologists draw upon more than one when analysing ethnicity in particular circumstances (including the authors of this collection), and some have explicitly sought to break down distinctions between them (Eriksen 1991; Williams 1989; Bentley 1987; Banks 1996: 39-48, 182-190). Nevertheless, the three sets of approaches retain a currency as paradigms,

and they may still be viewed as being in competition with each other when presented in their simple form (see, for example, Sokolovskii and Tishkov 1996; Banks 1996: 11-39). Employing rather ugly terminology, they may be roughly categorised as essentialist, instrumentalist, and relationalist (sometimes termed constructivist or situationalist).

Essentialist approaches

Essentialist approaches to ethnicity suggest that populations have collective identities which are unconscious as well as conscious. Ethnicity is conceived as an aspect of being human. At its most extreme, an essentialist approach can be primordialist, i.e. the view that an ethnic identity emanates from certain primary traits of a population.

As has been indicated, contemporary anthropologists generally reject such ideas. They might recognise that there is a universal human need 'to belong, to identify and hence also to exclude' (Gellner 1964: 149), but would maintain that this 'need' does not require the expression of ethnic discriminations (Turton 1997: 78). For the vast majority, ethnicity is something socially constructed, and is therefore a phenomenon which requires explanation. It is not something which exists in nature and is in itself an explanation.

Nevertheless, there are essentialist and sometimes even primordialist elements in many ethnographies, particularly in those written before the 1960s influenced by functionalist theories. A reason for this is that social and cultural anthropologists have commonly focussed on fairly small populations, which are likely to come from what is normally regarded to be a single ethnic group (e.g. the Uduk of Sudan, the Bosnian Moslems, the Greek Cypriots, the Mayan Indians of Mexico), and part of the anthropologists' academic project has been to explain what the world is like from the perspective of their informants. Subjective views of what an analyst would identify as 'ethnicity' tend to be primordial, often expressed in terms of deep and ineradicable differences between 'them' and 'us'. As a result, material is presented in ethnographic accounts which seems to indicate the ethnic uniqueness of the people studied. Sometimes this is simply because so much space is given to the complexities of the local world view, but it is also the case that many anthropologists have been prepared to accept the importance of essentialist aspects of ethnicity as a *social* reality. Much to their own embarrassment, this emphasis by many anthropologists on their informants' ways of seeing things has sometimes been interpreted as supporting the kind

of determinist view of ethnicity nowadays used to account for the spread of civil wars.

There has also been serious discussion about a possible primordial basis for ethnicity by individual anthropologists, notably by those influenced by ideas from psychology such as A.L. Epstein (1978), and primordialist theories continue to be debated among some biological anthropologists and by anthropologists working in eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Both these latter groups set their analyses within evolutionary frameworks, an approach which social and cultural anthropologists based in western Europe and north America tend (somewhat unthinkingly) either to reject or ignore. Partly for this reason their contributions have been marginal to the main body of anthropological work on ethnicity. However, they are important because they have informed perceptions of ethnicity outside of the academic discipline.

Sociobiology

Biological anthropologists interested in ethnicity and conflict draw on notions developed by sociobiologists, especially 'inclusive fitness theory', which maintains that genes will spread if their carriers act to increase not only their own fitness or reproductive success but also that of other individuals carrying copies of the same genes (Reynolds, Falger and Vine 1987; van der Dennen and Falger 1990). Some sociobiologists and biological anthropologists take the view that there is a genetic basis to group affiliation and the propensity for warfare (e.g. Shaw and Wong 1989). But, even if this is accepted, it is not an explanation for ethnic conflict. Sociobiology treats both aggression and altruism as genetic traits, not unchangeable instincts. In fact, its 'social message ... could be that if we only adjust the environment accordingly, we would be able to avoid aggressive behaviour altogether' (Segerstale 1990: 277).

However, this is not always the way that the message has been interpreted. As Marshall Sahlins pointed out in the late 1970s, 'vulgar sociobiology consists in explication of human social behaviour as the expression of the needs and drives of the human organism, such propensities having been constructed in human nature by biological evolution' (Sahlins 1977: 3). In this form, sociobiology has had a considerable impact on the popular imagination, which is one reason for the fierce antipathy of many social and cultural anthropologists to any biological interpretations of social action. In 1986, the American Anthropological Association went so far as to pass a formal statement on violence which claimed, amongst other things, that it is 'scientifically incorrect to say that war or any other violent

behaviour is genetically programmed into our human nature' (quoted in Tiger 1990: 100). The problem with this assertion is that there does not seem to be adequate scientific evidence one way or the other. The main objective of the statement appears to have been to try to stop members discussing the matter, and perhaps a shortcoming of a collection such as this one, is that all the papers implicitly assume that biology can (and should) be largely ignored.

Ethnos theory

An aversion to biological determinism and other overtly primordialist explanations of human behaviour has been significantly less marked in Russia and eastern Europe. Here essentialist approaches to ethnicity were developed by anthropologists in the former Soviet Union during the 1970s and 1980s, and have continued to affect subsequent debates. These approaches revolved around so called 'ethnos theory', a thesis which began to be promoted in the late 1960s by Yulian Bromley, the director of the Institute of Ethnography of the Soviet Academy of Science in Moscow. Bromley proposed that ethnicity has a stable core, for which he used the Greek word 'ethnos'. This is not an eternal thing, but persists through the various evolutionary stages of history (like other Soviet scholars, Bromley held a Marxist view of history in which societies evolved from primitive communism through slave-ownership, feudalism and capitalism to socialism). He defined the ethnos as 'a historically formed community of people characterized by common, relatively stable cultural features, certain distinctive cultural traits, and the consciousness of their unity as distinguished from other similar communities' (1974: 66; cited in Banks 1996: 19). From this starting point, the problem was to determine how the characteristics of ethnos manifested in overt cultural forms (such as language, costumes, and folklore) were integrated as a system. The theory was taken a stage further by some of Bromley's colleagues, who suggested that ethnos was at least in part a biological (not just an historical) phenomenon. L.N. Gumilev argued during the 1980s that ethnos was a 'biosocial organism', and depicted 'the rise to existence' of an ethnos as 'a combined effect of cosmic energies and landscape' (Sokolovskii and Tishkov 1996: 191).

Within the Soviet Union and its satellite countries, variations of the ethnos thesis had a considerable influence. On the one hand it provided an explanation of why cultural distinctiveness had failed to wither away in the face of rational socialist planning. On the other hand, ethnos theory did not contradict official views about 'ethnogenesis' based on the Leninist theory of the national question – in which the nation is defined as the highest type of ethnic community, and is treated as an archetype and major form of social

grouping, legitimising a state and its economy and culture (Tishkov 1996: 494). This latter point was important because discussion about the characteristics of the different Soviet populations had become highly regulated under Stalin, and remained sensitive in the 1970s and 1980s (Dragadze 1995: 2). Bromley's ideas in fact harked back to an earlier, more independent period in Soviet social research, particularly to the work of S.M. Shirokogorov in the 1920s, who had defined the *ethnos* in much the same way.

Until recently, Soviet *ethnos* theory, like sociobiology, has generally been overlooked by anthropologists based in the West. It was known about largely through some of the writings of Gellner (1983; 1988). As late as 1993, Eriksen in his excellent overview of anthropological perspectives on ethnicity and nationalism makes only a passing reference to the 'less known contributions by Soviet scholars' (Eriksen 1993: 37). This is now changing, partly due to the opening up of eastern Europe following the collapse of the Soviet Union, but also because of the upheavals occurring in the region. Soviet *ethnos* theory was shaped by, and has contributed towards ethno-nationalist ideologies. As elsewhere, protagonists in contemporary wars themselves offer ethnically essentialist explanations, and these have readily been picked up by Western journalists and political analysts. The phrase 'ethnic cleansing', for example, has been employed by all parties in the Bosnian conflict, and has rapidly progressed from being a shocking new term requiring a definition for a British audience to being an accepted fact (Banks 1996: 166-171). Sometimes such ideas have deliberately been given a conceptual sophistication and credibility by local academics.

Among eastern European anthropologists there is vigorous debate about these matters. There is a deep scepticism about the usefulness of overarching, and homogenising models of ethnicity as tools for understanding what is going on, particularly models closely linked to former Soviet ideology. Instrumentalist and relationalist approaches to ethnicity are having a growing influence (as the article by Podoba in this collection indicates). Nevertheless, it is common for eastern European anthropologists to adopt a more overtly essentialist view of ethnicity than most of their colleagues in the West, in that greater emphasis is placed on the motivational force of corporate psychologies (something which sets Levon Abrahamian's chapter apart from others in this collection).

Under Stalin, the arguments about the fallibilities of racism which took place in western Europe in the wake of the rise of Hitler and Nazism were stifled in the Soviet Union and its satellite states. Things are changing, but in Russia, for example, there continues to be discussion of:

... concepts long discredited elsewhere about the importance of 'genetic pools' or the 'genetic' history of given peoples to understand cultural behaviour in contemporary times. The Russian government itself ... discourages openly racist political parties, but itself devised ... the police practice of stopping 'for security reasons' anybody in the streets of Moscow whose physique resembles that of natives of the Caucasus region. (Dragadze 1995: 2; see also Abrahamian's discussion about the official use of the term 'persons of Caucasian nationality').

Even scholars who reject the analyses of the Soviet ethnos theorists and the former official line on nationalities, often do so by emphasising the importance of formerly peripheral and ignored identities, or by elaborating the supposedly essential elements of being an ethnic Russian. Some openly cooperate with activists in promoting ethno-nationalistic sentiments, both as a way of using ethnic studies as a resource for healing collective trauma and for political mobilisation (Tishkov 1996: 494).

Instrumentalist approaches

If primordialist essentialism lies at one extreme of anthropological approaches to ethnicity, the conception of ethnicity which lies at the other is materialist instrumentalism. This is the idea that ethnicity is expressed for specific practical purposes. It is promoted by individuals or groups to enhance the cohesion of a population in order to help achieve a common end, and is the result of conscious action. Several anthropologists have adopted such an approach, but it was initially developed by non-anthropologists, mainly political scientists and sociologists, who used it to explain the ethnic polarisations of north American cities. An important early contribution was Glazer and Moynihan's first book on ethnicity, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians and Irish of New York City* (1963, second edition [revised and expanded] 1970).

In *Beyond the Melting Pot* the authors try to explain why people in New York descended from immigrants continue to assert their separate ethnic identity, even though they do not live their lives in a way that is similar to that of their African, Puerto Rican or European ancestors. Essentially they argue that this is because people recognise that asserting an ethnic identity is a means of obtaining jobs and resources. They maintain that 'the ethnic group in American society became not a survival from the age of mass immigration but a new social form' (1970: 16). The members of an ethnic group are connected by ties of family and friendship, but they are also

interest groups, and this is 'perhaps the single most important fact about ethnic groups in New York City'(1970:17). Thus the idea that ethnicity is some kind of constant, essential core which binds together a population over the generations is rejected. Ethnicity is a phenomenon which has emerged out of living in modern America.

In the introduction to their later edited book on ethnicity, Glazer and Moynihan generalise their argument and make their main point even more explicit:

One of the striking characteristics of the present situation is indeed the extent to which we find the ethnic group defined in terms of interest, *as* an ethnic group. Thus, whereas in the past a religious conflict, such as that which is tearing Northern Ireland apart, was based on such issues as the free public practice of a religion, today it is based on which group shall gain benefits or hold power of a wholly secular sort. (1975: 7)

Several anthropologists were strongly influenced by these ideas, notably some of those who had become interested in processes of social change in Africa. Max Gluckman and his colleagues had long been researching among urban Africans, and had found that new kinds of 'tribal' identities were forged in the towns which had little to do with the 'tribal' relations of rural areas (e.g. Gluckman 1958 [1940]; Mitchell 1956). This research demonstrated the inadequacies of analysing African populations as if they belonged to separate, relatively static tribal groups. From the 1960s, Africanist anthropologists increasingly abandoned the term 'tribe' altogether and, drawing on work being carried out in the US, replaced it with the term 'ethnic group'. Towards the end of the decade, a corresponding substitution was made between 'tribalism' and 'ethnicity'. Not all those adopting this new terminology accepted the position of Glazer and Moynihan, but instrumentalism was an appealing approach in that it offered a powerful counter-argument to the primordialist view of African 'tribes' which had been promoted under European colonial rule.

Abner Cohen, for example, in *Custom and Politics in Urban Africa* (1969) argued that Hausa traders in the Nigerian city of Ibadan used what he termed 'political ethnicity' to control the market in cola nuts and cattle. In later works he developed this position into a general theoretical analysis, arguing that ethnicity must have a practical function in order to be viable. For him, ethnicity is a particular form of informal political organisation which invokes cultural values for essentially material reasons. He even went so far as to suggest that London stockbrokers may be said to constitute an ethnic

group in that they tend to marry into their own class and have a shared identity (Cohen 1974).

Limitations of instrumentalism

Instrumental approaches have retained a currency among anthropologists. Detailed, local level ethnographic research has commonly demonstrated that ethnicity becomes sociologically important at times of social change, particularly when this involves urbanisation or migration, and that its expression by a corporate group relates to utilitarian objectives. However, a critic might ask why certain ethnic configurations are possible, while others are not (Eriksen 1993: 55).

If ethnicity is only instrumental, then a wide range of identities should be possible. Why does a Maasai not become a Kikuyu if it is expedient to do so? African ethnic identities are far more negotiable than is often supposed and people do sometimes switch from one 'tribe' to another (Schlee 1989; Allen 1994). Successful groups may increase in size as some opt in, and oppressed groups may reduce in size as some opt out. Many Ugandans became Nubians under Idi Amin, for example, but there are few who are nowadays willing to accept the label. Nevertheless this is clearly not the norm in the majority of cases. Most Maasai did not change their ethnicity when Jomo Kenyatta was president, even though there could be advantages in being Kikuyu.

An instrumentalist would respond by pointing out that any corporate group requires members to have certain shared characteristics. Not everyone can become a London stockbroker, and not everyone can become British, Kenyan or Kikuyu. Potentially a Maasai could take on any of these identities, either as an alternative to being Maasai or as a different ethnicity for use in particular circumstances. However, in practice, only a Kenyan identity is likely to be a readily available option. To become Kikuyu would require fluency in the Kikuyu language, and a network of Kikuyu friends and relatives who are willing to accept the individual as a Kikuyu, and to maintain that he or she is a 'real' Kikuyu in interaction with other Kikuyus. To become British and/or a stockbroker would involve obtaining skills and qualifications which are completely out of reach.

This is a strong line of argument. In every case in which ethnicity is expressed, a utilitarian motivation can be found, if not among the people encapsulated by an ethnic category, then by others who choose to designate them in a particular way, such as a hostile neighbouring group or elite factions who manipulate ethnicity in pragmatic pursuit of their own interests. Instrumentalism continues to influence anthropologists and has been the

dominant approach among historians and political scientists (an important exception being the work of Anthony Smith [1986], which in certain respects is very similar to Soviet ethnos theory). A basically instrumentalist analysis can be subtle and insightful, particularly if it incorporates some of the insights from other approaches (see, for example, Mahmood Mamdani's recent discussion of tribalism as both a form of power and as a form of resistance [1996: 183-217]).

Yet, confronted with the horrific events which have occurred in Bosnia and Rwanda, and the alarming proliferation of overtly ethnicised civil conflicts in various parts of the world during the 1990s, a straightforward instrumentalism has become a more difficult position to sustain. This has led to a disturbing shift among some political analysts away from instrumentalism towards a deterministic primordialism (or an ill-conceived mixture of the two). Moynihan's *Pandaemonium: Ethnicity in international politics* is a case in point (1993). Anthropologists have perhaps been more aware of the trap and have tried to avoid it. They have also been able to draw on a third set of approaches to ethnicity, which are less ambitious than the other two in that they have a limited capacity to offer explanations for ethnic violence, but can be highly effective in describing and clarifying what is going on.

Relationalist approaches

In fact, for most anthropologists, pure instrumentalism has never been entirely convincing. It may be an adequate way of understanding some manifestations of 'political ethnicity', but the underlying assumption that the motivation of individuals and groups is practical, rational and ultimately aimed at political and economic betterment does not fully accord with anthropological understandings of human behaviour. Ethnicity is most commonly interpreted by anthropologists as a phenomenon which may have utilitarian aspects, but is contingent, emotive, symbolic and by no means entirely the product of conscious thought. It is neither an essentialist 'given' nor an instrumentalist 'tool', but an aspect of social relations linked to the maintenance of boundaries. This position, which may be termed relationalist, is commonly traced back to a book edited by Frederik Barth and published at the end of the 1960s (Barth 1969), although many of the arguments had in fact previously been put forward in less explicit and succinct ways by other scholars, including Max Gluckman (1958 [1940]), E.R. Leach (1954) and Mary Douglas (1966).

Barth's introduction to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* is one of the most frequently cited of all anthropological texts on ethnicity. According to the Social Science Citation Index, which covers only a limited range of journals, over 350 articles in the last ten years alone have referred to it (Banks 1996: 47). It is often invoked without criticism, as the starting point of analysis (see, for example, the article by Lehmann in this collection).

The crux of Barth's argument was that ethnic groups and cultural units are not the same thing, and that the study of ethnicity should primarily focus on the way in which ethnic boundaries are constructed and maintained. He emphasised the danger of linking ethnicity with what are assumed to be essential (or primordial) characteristics of a particular population. Such an approach 'allows us to assume that boundary maintenance is unproblematic and follows from the isolation which the itemized characteristics imply: racial difference, cultural difference, social separation and language barriers, spontaneous and organized enmity' (Barth 1969: 11). But this is not how ethnicity works. Sometimes people claiming a certain ethnicity have marked differences in overt behaviour, and sometimes people having very similar ways of life vigorously assert different ethnic identities.

Barth does not overlook the internal aspects of an ethnic group. He classifies them according to diacritic markers (e.g. dances, language, dress) and 'value orientations' (e.g. morality). But he argues that it is a mistake to try to understand ethnicity by typologising groups according to lists of characteristics. It misses the point, because the crucial issue is the ethnic boundary. People belong to ethnic group A because they say they do by contrasting their identity with ethnic group B, and they continue to draw this contrast even in situations where there is a flow of personnel and ideas across such boundaries (for example, between the Pathan and Baluch in north-western Pakistan, and between the Fur and Baggara in western Sudan). Ethnic groups do not exist independently, they are made in relation to one another. The apparent cultural uniqueness of many groups is best analysed as something that emerges out of long term social process, and which is continuously being re-made in relation to perceived qualities of other groups.

Various reservations have been raised about Barth's thesis. Abner Cohen, for example, has argued that his position lends itself to the primordialism he purports to reject (1974a, 1978). Barth describes ethnic groups as 'organisational vessels that may be given varying amounts and forms of content in different sociocultural systems' (Barth 69:14). Here, and in some other passages, Barth seems to be suggesting that, although particular ethnic boundaries may not be significant at a specific point in time, they are nevertheless available to be activated when the need arises. But how can this be the case unless members of a group share deep, psychological qualities?

Other critics have pointed out that the emphasis on 'social agency' in Barth's analysis (and for that matter in the instrumentalism of Abner Cohen), ignores power relations and other constraints on behaviour. As Peter Worsley has put it, the individual is '... taken as the jumping-off point in the analysis, and choice is assumed to be the crucial social fact. Life, it would seem, is a market, or a cafeteria' (Worsley 1984: 246).

Nevertheless, Barth's point about ethnicity not existing in isolation and needing to be understood in relation to boundaries has been widely accepted. What this insight is understood to imply may vary considerably (as the chapters in this collection indicate), but most anthropologists would prefer not to define ethnicity as 'the character or quality of an ethnic group', the phrase used by Glazer and Moynihan (1975: 1). Instead they view it as 'essentially an aspect of a relationship' (Eriksen 1993: 12). Thus, in a recent article on ethnicity and war, David Turton makes the following points:

Ethnicity will not serve as a causal explanation of war because it is not a thing in itself, even though its power to influence behaviour is largely the result of it being seen as a 'natural' property of a group. It is, rather, a relational concept: it refers to the way cultural differences are communicated and it is therefore created and maintained by contact, not by isolation. (Turton 1997: 78)

Thomas Eriksen uses the approach to comment on the civil war in Yugoslavia in 1991. He points out that although Serbs and Croats use different alphabets and practice (or at one time practised) different forms of Christianity, they have much in common. They speak the same language, the rate of intermarriage between them has been high, and they lived together in peace for more than forty years. Yet, it was repeatedly stressed, following the outbreak of war in June 1991, that the groups were irreconcilable and culturally incompatible.

Ethnic boundaries, dormant for decades, were activated; presumed cultural differences which had been irrelevant for two generations were suddenly 'remembered' and invoked as proof that it was impossible for the two groups to live side by side. It is only when they *make a difference* in interaction that cultural differences are important in the creation of ethnic boundaries. (Eriksen, 1993: 39)

Refining relationalism

Anthropologists influenced by *Ethnic groups and boundaries*, have extended and refined the arguments about ethnicity as a relationship, going well beyond Barth's own position (at least as it was expressed in 1969), and taking into account the kind of criticisms made by Cohen, Worsley and others. Worsley has himself contributed to this literature by discussing how ethnicity may reinforce class divisions, or segment them, or cut across them (Worsley, 1984: 240). Numerous anthropologists have looked at how different forms of ethnicity are expressed by individuals and groups in different social contexts, as alternative identities, or as overlapping identities, or as incorporating identities, and at how identification by others relates to self identification (e.g. Parkin 1974; Handelman 1977; Wallman 1979; Schlee 1989; Ardener 1989, Cohen 1982, 1986, 1994).

Attempts have also been made to trace the history of particular ethnic categories, not just by elaborating the historical myths of informants from one ethnic group, but by critically interrogating current perceptions of the past and using a variety of sources to show how the social boundaries designated by ethnic labels are differently constructed over time. For example, anthropologists (and historians influenced by anthropology) working in Africa have been able to demonstrate that 'tribal' identities are in most cases recent inventions, which emerged out of colonial policies and developed as an aspect of state formation and other modern processes.

Along these lines Richard Fardon has argued that the Chamba of the Nigeria-Cameroon border 'did not exist in the nineteenth century, not just because Chamba describes people whose origins, languages and cultures are diverse ... but because ethnic entities which have the form of the modern Chamba ethnicity are modern inventions' (Fardon 1987: 182). Similarly, Allen has argued that the Ugandan 'tribal' identities known as Madi and Acholi are largely colonial introductions which have subsequently been profoundly influenced by a wide range of social processes, taking on different forms in different circumstances and by no means superceding alternative non-'tribal' kinds of ethnicity (Allen 1991, 1994).

Others have explored the changing characteristics of eastern European ethnic labels. S. Troebst, for example, has provided an alternative relationalist interpretation of the current wars of the region to that of Eriksen (although one which is not necessarily incompatible). He points out that the common assumption that the Balkan wars are the result of primal identities resurfacing after the Cold War is just bad history. Far from being 'frozen' under communism, identities of various kinds were transformed by urbanisation, industrialisation and secularisation, and played a major part in

the deliberations and calculations of the political elite. The break-up of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia on ethnic lines was in fact a product of the federal political system adopted by Lenin, Stalin and Tito (Troebst, 1997; discussed in Turton 1997: 80).

Relationalism and subjectivity

Of course an instrumentalist might take a similar view of the newness of many ethnic categories, particularly those which have obviously been manipulated by political leaders to mobilise mass support in their pursuit of power. But relationalists make an additional point. While recognising that particular ethnic labels may be invented or changed, that ethnicity may be employed for utilitarian purposes, that ethnic boundaries are not static or necessarily impermeable, they also accept that ethnicity relates to unconscious as well as conscious motivations. This is why Abner Cohen accused Barth of slipping into primordialism. For Cohen, the satisfaction of psychological needs for belongingness and meaning is important, but ethnic organisation must simultaneously serve political ends (Cohen 1974a, 1974b; Eriksen 1993: 56).

However, the relationalist view is not that ethnicity is objectively primordial, rather it is that ethnicity's 'very effectiveness as a means of advancing group interests, depends on it being seen as "primordial" by those who make claims in its name' (Turton 1997: 82). Newly introduced African 'tribal' labels or eastern European ethno-nationalist labels are recursive in that they are appropriated by people so designated and gain local resonances. Many Ugandan Madis and Acholis genuinely believe that their 'tribes' have a long and rich pre-colonial history, and many contemporary Serbs genuinely believe that their 'nationality' enjoys a biological continuity dating back to medieval times. Ethnicity may take on qualities which make it seem essential, and it may be experienced as if it is essential, because it becomes part of the texture of thinking.

Thus, in certain circumstances it may act as a motivating force. For a relationalist, the horrors of the Rwandan genocide or the so-called 'ethnic cleansing' of Bosnia cannot be properly understood without recognising that ethnicity can be imbued with powerful subjective meanings and associations which intersected and interacted with other processes. In her article in this collection, Anna-Maria Brandstetter notes that peasants in regions overrun by RPF soldiers were reportedly astonished that the Tutsi did not have horns or tails and eyes that shone in the dark. Political and economic explanations for what happened in the country are important, but alone do not suffice. They must be emphasised but, Brandstetter concludes, to underestimate the

ethnic interpretations which local actors find convincing is 'an inadmissible simplification'.

This subjective aspect of ethnicity is an issue that relationalists continue to debate. As Cris Shore puts it in his article in this collection:

While anthropologists often agree on how social boundaries are articulated and maintained, explaining how they are *generated* is usually far more problematic.

Some prefer not to theorise about it, but to concentrate on describing how and in what circumstances it is expressed. Others have sought ways of conceptualising the unconscious motivations of their informants which avoid deterministic essentialism. Wendy James, for example, adapts ideas from Michel Foucault and uses the notion of a cultural archive, by which she refers to the core of thought, revealed as much in the repertoire of habitual ritual action as in language, which constitute the foundations of a moral world (1988: 6). In a somewhat similar manner, G. Carter Bentley, has drawn inspiration from Pierre Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus', the changing complex of unconscious habitual action and behaviour which 'possesses agents ... more than they possess it' (Bourdieu 1977: 18; Bentley 1987). But these kinds of approaches have been criticised by other anthropologists for being vague and for relying on ill-defined notions of psychological motivation (Yelvington 1991: 158; Banks 1996: 46-47; Toren 1996: 459).

Part of the problem is that contemporary social and cultural anthropologists have reacted against earlier anthropological theories about 'collective consciousness' and 'primitive mentality' and, until quite recently, have also been generally resistant or antagonistic to approaches employed by psychoanalysts and psychologists (Heald & Deluz 1994; Bloch 1996; Toren 1996; Spencer 1996). For example, anthropologists have made little use of theories about crowd psychology or about collective pathologies of mass slaughter (see Pick 1989 and 1993, for an historian's perspective on such ideas).

Globalisation

Shore's own response is to move away from the field of immediate empirical observation to 'wider historical, economic and political processes that anthropologists are not always comfortable with'. It might have lead him into a conventional instrumentalism, but he avoids it by relating his arguments to theories about globalisation. This does not so much resolve the problem of

unconscious collective motivation, as reformulate the context in which the issue might be investigated.

The rapidly growing literature on globalisation has attracted many other anthropologists too. There are several aspects to its appeal, including the fact that it allows anthropologists to locate their detailed local-level research in a theoretical context which breaks down the local/global dichotomy, and thereby makes their analyses more widely applicable. With respect to ethnicity and conflict, it has two advantages. First, it provides a much more sophisticated and insightful perspective on the spread of civil wars than the primordialist, 'pressure-cooker' hypothesis, notably with respect to 'the political viability and moral legitimacy of the nation-state' (Turton 1997: 87). Second, it helps elaborate the key relationalist point about boundaries.

According to Harvey, a key element of globalisation is a 'shrinkage of space' (Harvey 1989), that forges new kinds of relationships between populations in different parts of the world and brings diverse communities into competition with each other. If ethnic identities are seen as a product of contact rather than isolation, 'it is easy to see that the proliferation of sub-national ethnic differences and separatist movements is another symptom of this "shrinkage of space"' (Turton 1997: 87). Moreover, if manifestations of ethnicity are best understood by examining boundaries, then globalisation theory reveals that these boundaries are not only a product of geographically local social interaction, but also of spatially diverse influences. Attention is directed towards the ways in which flows of people, information, images and capital operate across ethnic and national boundaries, and at the dynamic interplay of complex social processes, which belie simplistic models of cultural homogenisation (see, for example, Eade 1996).

This latter line of argument remains somewhat controversial among anthropologists, inevitably so given their commitment to fieldwork-based, empirical study among spatially concentrated informants. However, it is receiving increasingly serious consideration, as evidenced by chapters of *Beyond Boundaries: Understanding translation and anthropological discourse*, edited by Palsson (1993), and by those in the five edited books on global and local relations, which emerged from the Fourth Decennial Conference of the association of Social Anthropologists of the Commonwealth, held in 1993 (Fardon 1995; Miller 1995; James 1995; Moore 1995; Strathern 1995).

Arjun Appadurai, for example, draws our attention to 'virtual neighbourhoods' which are 'no longer bounded by territory, passports, taxes, elections and other conventional political diacritics' (Appadurai 1995: 219). While largely confined to a transnational intelligentsia these neighbourhoods can link up with and influence 'lived neighbourhoods' in specific places.

Appadurai supports his claims with a brief description of conflict in India which involved the relationship between South Asian intellectuals in North America and Britain as well as their country of origin. His example is perhaps an extreme illustration of a general process – the emergence of ‘new patriotisms’ which ‘involve rather puzzling new forms of linkage between diasporic nationalisms, delocalized political communities and revitalized political commitments at both ends of the diasporic process’ (Appadurai 1995: 220. See also the paper in this collection by Guzman-Flores and Martin, which discusses the use of the Internet by Mayan rebels in Mexico).

Anthropology and ethnicity in industrialised countries

As indicated by many of the examples quoted above and many of the references cited, the separation between the subject matter of anthropologists and sociologists has increasingly broken down in recent years. Race, class and nationalism in industrial countries have all become issues of interest for anthropologists. However, the manner in which anthropologists have approached the study of people in Europe and North America has been influenced by the traditions of their discipline.

As several of the articles presented here indicate, most anthropologists have continued to base their insights on detailed empirical investigation (see, for example, the contributions of Rosemary Harris, Rosa Lehmann, Marco Martiniello, Yiannis Papadakis, Hermann Tertilt, and Shalva Weil). Moreover, their analytical categories and theoretical perspectives often remain different to those of other social researchers, even where ideas have been borrowed from outside of the discipline. In this latter respect, it is interesting to note that one of the most influential texts on nationalism for anthropologists is Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1991 [1983]). Anderson himself is a professor of ‘international studies’ and is not an anthropologist. Nevertheless his book appeals to many anthropologists because it discusses nationalism in much the same way as some anthropologists have discussed ethnicity (Banks 1996: 126). In this collection, for example, Dominic Bryan draws on Anderson’s thesis in his discussion of Protestant rituals in Northern Ireland.

As far as specific studies of ethnicity (or sub-national ethno-nationalism) in industrialised countries are concerned, anthropologists have tended either to focus on the construction of identities within rural communities (Cohen 1982; 1986) or on characteristics of ethnic minorities (Saifullah Khan 1979; Jeffrey 1976; Wallman 1979; Bhachu 1975; Werbner 1990). In both cases, considerable emphasis is usually placed on the informants’ own way of

describing things, and analysis normally draws on a mixture of the approaches which have been categorised above as instrumentalist and relationalist (both Anthony Cohen and Sandra Wallman, for example, explicitly build on Barth's ideas). Of the two areas of study, it is the second, on ethnic minorities, that has generated the most controversy both within anthropology and outside of the discipline. This has occurred for three main reasons.

First, attention to ethnic minorities can suggest a shifting away from the basic anthropological idea that everyone, at least potentially, has ethnicity, towards the older notion of ethnic groups as being non-white populations. Many anthropologists working on minorities have tried to counter this implication, either by examining white ethnicity or by arguing that non-minority ethnicity is subsumed, or appears to be subsumed, into a dominant and over-arching national identity (see the discussion in Banks 1996: 156-160). But the notion that 'we' do not have ethnicity but 'they' do is a view that has become (or remains) firmly established in popular perceptions. References to an ethnic riot in a newspaper, for example, is understood as a riot in which non-white people predominate. Perhaps anthropologists have not done enough to counter this assumption.

Second, because anthropologists researching in industrialised countries have emphasised the social reality of essentialist ideas and values among minorities (just as they have among the groups they have studied in other parts of the world), there has been a perception that anthropologists' own explanations for ethnicity are essentialist. This has been a common critique by sociologists. The Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies, for instance, dismissed anthropological work on Asian ethnicity as presenting 'culture' as 'an autonomous realm which merely "interacts" with other social processes' and producing thereby 'a static and idealized vision of Asian cultures which cannot help us to understand how or why those "cultures" have changed over time' (CCCS 1982: 113). As we have seen, such a dismissal reflects a common misunderstanding of what anthropologists have tried to do. Nevertheless, certain anthropologists have also expressed concerns about the essentialist connotations of some anthropological writings on minorities (see the debate involving Benson, Eade and Werbner in Ranger, Samad and Stuart 1996). Certainly there is a fine line between trying to describe the value systems of minorities (or any ethnicity) and suggesting that those values determine identity.

Anthropological discussions of the subjective experience of ethnicity among minorities have also been criticised from another perspective: some activists have asserted that no one can understand (or has the right to write about) a group to which they do not belong. Anthropologists have had some

difficulty in countering this line of argument (see, for example, the exchange between Gell 1996 and Werbner 1996). An aspect of the dilemma for anthropologists is that they have often taken on a role as advocates for the people they have lived with, and have not always reflected very seriously on the implications of doing so in terms of power relations. Needless to say, whatever the political reasons for adopting the position that only a member of an ethnic minority can present that minority's point of view, it is a basis for highly primordialist interpretations of ethnicity.

A third point of controversy about anthropological work on minorities relates to the ways in which 'race' and 'racism' are conceptualised. The division between anthropologists and sociologists over this issue has sometimes been marked by apparently fundamental disagreements. Sociologists have criticised anthropologists for ignoring issues of structural inequality and power relations (CCCS 1982; Anthias 1992), while anthropologists have argued that many sociologists (as well as many political scientists and geographers) ignore the salience of cultural processes and human agency (Ballard 1992). However, it is possible to discern a certain closure in this divide, at least in Britain (see, for example, Werbner and Anwar 1991).

Within anthropology, part of the problem has been that race has often been characterised in its old biological sense, not in its modern sociological usage as a socially constructed way of ranking people within the context of nation states. Thus race and ethnicity have tended to be elided together. This is the case, for example, with almost all the chapters in John Rex and David Mason's edited book *Theories of Racial and Ethnic Relations* (1986) (the contribution by Richard Jenkins being a notable exception). More recently, Malcolm Chapman has claimed that "ethnicity" is "race" after an attempt to take the biology out' (Chapman 1993: 21; see also the interesting discussion in Banks 1996: 49-120). But a growing number of anthropologists find this setting aside of race to be inadequate (including some of the contributors to this collection). It may be that racism can be categorised as a form of ethnicity, just as nationalism can be categorised as a form of ethnicity. Nevertheless, racism and nationalism have particular qualities which make them different from other kinds of ethnicity. These qualities also make them enormously important in modern nation states, and perhaps even more important as the sovereignty of states is being eroded by processes associated with 'globalisation' (Sanjek 1996). Furthermore, several anthropologists have raised awkward questions about the effects of racism and its institutionalisation within their own discipline. This is partly a matter of recognising that some anthropologists have leant support to ideas of scientific racism (de Waal 1994a, 1994b). It also involves consideration of

the fact, for example, that in 1989 some 93 per cent of US anthropologists in full-time academic positions were white (Sanjek 1996).

Meanwhile, within sociology, hostility towards anthropological approaches to ethnicity have become less marked, largely because they have been appropriated as part of the sociological discussion of globalisation. In British sociology, for example, there has been a growing appreciation of so-called 'new ethnicities' which have emerged through the hybrid cultural activities of young black British citizens. These hybrid ethnicities oppose the 'ethnicisation' of British nationalist discourses which construct a national identity where 'black' and 'Asian' residents have no place. A new politics of representation has emerged which establishes transnational connections between black and Asian settlers and the wider world (i.e. the Caribbean, Africa and the Indian sub-continent) and disrupts absolutist assertions of a white, homogeneous and exclusive culture. The hybrid new ethnicities explored, for example, by Hall (1992) and Gilroy (1993) emphasise that 'ethnicity' and 'race' are categories which refer not to ahistorical fixed essences but to changing processes of social, cultural and political construction where there is 'no simple "return" or "recovery" of the ancestral past which is not experienced through the categories of the present' (Hall 1992: 258).

Conclusion

Anthropological approaches to ethnicity are not homogeneous, and are in a process of change. Nonetheless characteristics can be discerned which still often make anthropological writings on ethnicity distinctive, notwithstanding the current erosion of boundaries with sociology and other disciplines.

Anthropologists remain fascinated by the variety of ways in which different people see and experience the world, and their models or theories of ethnicity have usually been aimed at helping to analyse the often complex modes of expressing corporate identity among their informants. Anthropologists recognise that such identities are commonly expressed as if they are given in nature. Ethnic categories are sometimes believed to exist by people in much the same way as many people believe a spirit world exists. The anthropological project is to try to understand the content of such beliefs. However, anthropologists do not view corporate identities as springing from primordial motivations, but rather as a product of social interaction, embedded in particular historical, political and economic contexts.

Although anthropologists may sometimes be open to the criticism that they have not fully understood the significance of racism, anthropological

approaches to 'ethnicity' and sociological approaches to 'race' share the idea that these are socially constructed phenomena. It is grounds for concern that this is not a perspective that is shared by all political analysts.

In the public sphere, it is now widely accepted that there is no biological basis to racial distinctions. Yet racism persists. It has become 'politically incorrect' to use overtly racist language, but other terms can suffice to make the same point. In Britain, it is not acceptable for reporters to refer to a war between the Serb, Croatian and Muslim 'races'. But it is acceptable to provide the same kind of analysis with reference to ethnic groups. As Marcus Banks has put it:

... 'ethnicity' seems to have become fatally conflated with 'race' in the popular or journalistic mind. And not 'race' as a contemporary sociological category and tool of analysis, but 'race' as a nineteenth-century category of spurious biological worth'. (Banks, 1996: 165)

This is the context, therefore, in which we as engaged anthropologists want to challenge misunderstandings and misappropriations of the concept of ethnicity. The term ethnicity has escaped from academic discourse, and it is unlikely that it can be recaptured. It has already taken on a life of its own. Nevertheless, through publications such as this one we can contest reductive and dangerous simplifications, and offer alternative understandings.

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