Ideational Origins of Modern Theories of Ethnicity: Individual Freedom vs. Organizational Growth*

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It is argued that sociological theories of ethnicity can be subsumed under two basic paradigms. One assumes modernity means increasing individual freedom (an assumption derived from classical liberalism) and then emphasizes the effect of that freedom on ethnicity. The other equates modernity with organizational growth, and emphasizes the effect of that growth on ethnicity in modern society. A discussion of assimilationism, pluralism, ethnic conflict theory, and ethnic mobilization theory is provided in this context.

Twentieth-century sociology of ethnicity consists of four major theories: assimilationism, pluralism, ethnic conflict theory, and ethnic mobilization theory (cf., Hraba, 1979; Metzger, 1971; Newman, 1973; Ragin, 1979; Simpson and Yinger, 1972; Vander Zanden, 1972). These theories can be reduced, however, to two overarching paradigms. Assimilationism and pluralism share a single paradigm, namely, liberal individualism. Ethnic conflict theory acts as a transition to ethnic mobilization theory and a second paradigm, which is derived from the romantic-conservative reaction to historic liberalism (cf., Zeitlin, 1968).

Theories and Paradigms

A "paradigm is a concrete 'picture' of something, A, which is used analogically to describe a concrete something else, B" (Masterman, 1970:77). It is an exemplar (Kuhn, 1962, 1970), and its function is to see one thing from the perspective of another thing. In the sociological theory of ethnicity, the A term is typically an image of modern society, and the B term is an analogous image of ethnicity in that society. The image of modern society evoked in the liberal sociology of ethnicity derives from historic liberalism: ". . . which put its full emphasis on the free individual, finding in man's liberation from political and military bonds, even those of religion and local community . . . the essence of progress . . . Individual autonomy is the transcending goal of historic liberalism" (Nisbet, 1975:47). In this reading of history, the primary consequence of modernization is individual freedom and individuality, due to the expansion of opportunity and increasing complexity of society (cf., Smith, 1776, 1896; Durkheim, 1893, 1947). This has been a popular and pervasive image of American society, as once observed by C. Wright Mills (1951:12): "With no feudal tradition and no bureaucratic state, the absolute individualist was exceptionally placed in this liberal society . . . Individual free-

dom seemed the principle of the social order . . . A free man, not a man exploited, an independent man, not a man bound by tradition, here confronted a continent . . ."

Individual freedom is identified with the absence of social constraint on thought and action. In liberal thought (e.g., John Stuart Mill, 1859/1956), this conception is commonly called liberty. Adam Smith (1776, 1896) argued that for the market economy to function properly, it must be left alone and natural liberty granted to its participants. Individual freedom was deemed necessary for meeting demand with supply. Another sense of freedom found in liberalism is the existence of ". . . opportunities to make important choices among real alternatives . . ." (Moore, 1970:434). Specialization and a complex division of labor increase these choices and alternatives (cf., Durkheim, 1893/1947). Societal modernization decreases social constraint and simultaneously increases real choices for individuals. This constitutes the A term in the liberal sociology of ethnicity.

If modernity means freedom and individuality for people in general, then it does so for members of ethnic and racial groups specifically. This is the B term in the liberal paradigm on ethnicity. Members of ethnic groups find opportunity in a complex society, so the groups become ever more diversified and ultimately decompose sociologically into a mass of individuals. This is the common denominator to conceptions of ethnicity found in assimilationism and pluralism, in the so-called "old" and "new" ethnicity.

Although ethnic conflict theory is a counterpoint to liberal sociology in many ways, its primary concern is likewise with individual freedom, or, more precisely, the lack of it for minority group members. The debate here is over the distribution of modern opportunity and, thus, individual freedom across ethnic and racial groups. Ethnic conflict theory posits that members of minority groups do not experience the same individual freedom as members of the majority. Thus, for the majority, ethnicity is voluntary in the modern era, while for the minority, it can be involuntary. These issues posed by conflict theory suggest a second paradigm on ethnicity in modern society.

The historic-conservative reaction to liberal individualism has been that groups are more real than individuals, to put it simply, and that groups do and indeed should limit individual freedom. The groups cited as significant vary with history, from the landed aristocracy to a present economic, political, and technical elite. These groups also appear to be at different levels of abstraction—from tribes, classes, and political parties (subnational units), to the entire commonwealth, or even an international elite. This is the basis for a second paradigm on modernity, one that today focuses on organizational growth and the concentration of wealth and power at the corporate core of modern society.

According to this paradigm, the product of modernization is the creation of societal megastractures, not the liberal model's reduction of social structure to a condition of mass individualism. Taken as an A term, this offers a new way to look at ethnicity in the modern world. The research issues concern the ways ethnic groups have related to the growing corporate core of society, not the freedom experienced by individual members of these groups. This imagery appears in recent theory on ethnic mobilization. This second paradigm complements liberalism and can extend the comprehensiveness of the sociological theory on ethnicity.

Liberal Sociology and Ethnicity

In liberalism, modern society is characterized by expanding opportunity, complexity, and, thus, increased freedom for individuals to choose from among real alternatives. In liberal sociology, racial and ethnic groups are seen as former folk groups caught up in this societal process. Individual freedom is experienced by members of these groups, and these groups are transformed as a consequence. On this both assimilationists and pluralists agree. Their disagreement is over the ultimate outcome of this transformation.

Assimilationism and the Old Ethnicity

Robert Park wrote: "In the relations of races there is a cycle of events which tends everywhere to repeat itself . . . The race relations cycle which takes the form, to state it abstractly, of contact, competition, accommodation and eventual assimilation, is apparently progressive and irreversible. Customs regulations, immigration restrictions and racial barriers may slacken the tempo of the movement; may perhaps halt it altogether for a time; but cannot at any rate reverse it" (Park, 1950:150).

This argument begins with European expansion in past centuries and the resulting frontier contact with ethnically diverse people. As ethnic groups later moved off the land and into industrial cities, they came into further contact with one another, competed with each other for a time, eventually reached an accommodation, and ultimately assimilated. In other words, individuals found opportunity outside the ghetto, broke away from the folk past, transplanted for a time in urban ghettos, and relocated to other areas of the city. There, in the suburbs, members of different ethnic groups became intimate and finally assimilated. Assimilation results from the occupational and educational diversification of ethnic groups and the individuality of their members.

The forces behind the race-relations cycle are basic ideas of 18th- and 19th-century liberalism. The market economy erodes the basis of folk society, and this is thought to be inevitable: "Every device which facilitates trade and industry prepares the way for a further division of labor and so tends to specialize the tasks in which men find their vocations . . . The outcome of this process is to break down or modify the older organization of society, which was based on family ties, local associations, on culture, caste, and status, and to substitute for it an organization based on vocational interest" (Park, 1915:586). Moreover, ". . . the individual man finds in . . . city life the opportunity to choose his own vocation and develop his peculiar individual talents" (Park, 1915:584–85). In other words, individual freedom increases with societal change. To this Park added that human sympathy and intimacy would bring ultimate assimilation.

It should be added that, in other writings, Park held out the possibility of alternative outcomes to assimilation. In outlining three possible configurations in the stabilization of race relations, Park concluded that, in addition to assimilation, a caste system or a permanent unassimilated racial minority within a national state could also be outcomes of the race-relations cycle (Park, 1950:194–95). It is argued here, however, that the theme stressing assimilation is the dominant one in assessing Park's impact on the sociology of race and ethnicity.

Louis Wirth (1928/1956) applied Park's race-relations cycle to the assimilation of Jews in Chicago. Reference was made to the same natural history by which accommodation and, ultimately, assimilation succeed initial competition and segregation. Underlying the cycle was the premise that the opportunity structure of modern society meant freedom of choice for individuals. This freedom for Jews meant their assimilation.

Blacks and other racial minorities represented anomalies for the assimilationist model. They came from a folk past, too, but did not appear to assimilate. Beginning with suggestions by Park (1913, 1937) and elaborations by Warner and his associates (Davis, Gardner and Gardner, 1941; Warner, 1959; Warner and Associates, 1949; Warner and Law, 1947; Warner and Lunt, 1941, 1942; Warner and Srole, 1945), there was evidence of a color barrier to assimilation. Blacks did not exercise the same (1) freedom of residential choice, (2) freedom to marry outside one's group, (3) occupational freedom, (4) freedom of participation in the host community, or (5) level of vertical mobility permitted in the host community (Warner and Srole, 1945:288–89). These researchers likened race relations in the South to the seemingly perpetual caste system in India.

One solution to this anomaly was provided by Gunnar Myrdal, who argued that the American dilemma would be resolved and blacks would eventually assimilate: "The main trend in history is the gradual realization of the American Creed, which is carried by high institutional structure, particularly education, which puts a constant pressure on race prejudice, counteracting the natural tendency for it to spread and become more intense (1944:80). Only the rates of assimilation differ between the races. Moreover, the assumed cause of this delay is not society, but a dilemma internal to individual Americans. There is apparently a lag between modern society and the mentality of some of its members. Psychological explanations of racism subsequently became popular in the social sciences, forming the prejudice-discrimination axis (Blumer, 1958). The emphasis on the individual as the cause of modern racism protects the liberal version of modern society, the A term of liberal theory on race and ethnicity in the modern era. This represents a tinkering with the liberal paradigm.

Intimacy had been considered by early assimilationists to be the link between accommodation and assimilation. Equalization of status and the sharing of vocational interests among members of different groups was seen to lead ultimately to their intimacy and possible intermarriage. Frazier (1947:268–69) noted that the sociological theories of Park in regard to race relations were developed originally in close association with W. I. Thomas, "who as early as 1904 argued that race prejudice could be dissipated through human association." This has come to be known as the contact hypothesis, and it is one contemporary expression of assimilationism.

Zeul and Humphrey (1971:464) explained: "According to this proposition, increased interaction between whites and any minority group, such as Negroes, makes for favorable attitudes on the part of whites, greater acceptance of the blacks, and integration of the racial groups." Zeul and Humphrey concluded that it is not contact itself that brings acceptance; rather, it is the degree to which whites are cosmopolitan before contact. It is how modern individuals are in outlook and status that brings on racial assimilation.

Assimilationism views race and ethnicity through a paradigm provided by liberal

individualism. Societal opportunity and complexity translate into individual free-dom, and this undermines ethnic bonds, resulting in assimilation. Societal moderni-zation and its products "push us toward the creation of ourselves as separate and distinct individual beings" (Patterson, 1977:13). The disappearance of the ghetto is equated with the complete disappearance of ethnicity itself in this "old" con-ception of ethnicity. There was the anomaly of racial minorities still in ghettos, but this was explained through reference to the psychology of prejudiced individuals. The implication is that the individual is both a result of modernization and, if prejudiced, a cause for a distortion or delay in this natural history. Assimilation-ism is a normal science development that followed from the liberal paradigm.

Pluralism and the New Ethnicity

According to pluralism, modern American society is characterized by ethnic, as well as racial, diversity. Ethnicity for whites does not disappear with the ghetto, but, rather, is transformed into a new ethnicity once outside the ghetto. Does plur-alism stand in sharp contrast to assimilationism, and, thus, lie ouside the liberal paradigm? We argue that it does not and that the "new ethnicity," a variation of pluralism, extends the liberal individualism behind the "old ethnicity."

Ghettos disappear and ethnic associations and subcultures change as members move into the larger society. According to pluralism, however, ethnicity evolves into new forms and expressions with these changes (Gans, 1951; Glazer and Moynihan, 1970, 1975; Gordon, 1964; Herberg, 1955, 1964; Kennedy, 1944, 1952; Novak, 1971, 1977). That is, individual members carry their ethnicity with them into the larger society.

Ethnicity is portable, according to the "new ethnicity," because it is fundamen-tally a state of mind. The "new ethnicity" is a psychological state, no longer the property of a group, and, thus, is subject to individual control. The individual freedom characterizing modern society transforms ethnic identity into an expres-sion of that freedom and individuality, according to new ethnicity. Simply put, ethnicity becomes more voluntary with modernity.

To illustrate, Bennett (1975:3) wrote that this new ethnicity refers to "the proclivity of people to seize on traditional cultural symbols as a definition of their own identity . . . to assert the Self over and above the impersonal State . . ." In the words of DeVos (1975:16), "Ethnic identity of a group of people consists of their subjective symbolic or emblematic use of any aspect of culture, in order to differentiate themselves from other groups." Despres (1975:190–91) phrased it this way: "Ethnic groups are formed to the extent that actors use ethnic identities to categorize themselves and others for purposes of interaction."

This "new ethnicity" is an internal attitude which predisposes, but does not make compulsory, the display of ethnic identity in interaction. When it facilitates self-interest, ethnic identity will be made evident; it is left latent when it would hin-der (cf., Barth, 1969). The new ethnicity serves as a mechanism for pursuing self-interest. It is a strategy "for acquiring the resources one needs to survive and to consume at the desired level" (Bennett, 1975:4). Ethnicity is revealed for both expressive and instrumental purposes. It can be used in the manipulation of oth-ers, in the presentation of self, and, at a deeper level, it can provide "a feeling of continuity with the past, a feeling that is maintained as an essential part of one's

self-definition"; it is "a sense of personal survival in the historical continuity of the group" (DeVos, 1975:17). Ethnic identity helps resolve a modern identity crisis, ". . . the unavailability of a simple 'American' identity" (Glazer and Moynihan, 1970:xxxiii).

Only involuntary ethnicity in modern life would dissent from the liberal paradigm. This is not the case, however, with pluralism and the new ethnicity. Ethnicity endures for white Americans, to be sure, but it does so in a way consistent with liberal individualism. The A term of the liberal paradigm is as much accepted in pluralism as it is in assimilationism. Structural opportunity and individual freedom are assumed in both theories, and the debate is restricted to how ethnicity is transformed in a society characterized by those terms. It is ethnic conflict theory that clearly raises the issue that not all enjoy the individual freedom that supposedly comes with modernization.

Ethnic Conflict Theory: a Transition

Ethnic conflict theory follows from a larger conflict analysis of modern industrial society. This larger theory characterizes modern society as an arena for the struggle between its subgroups (Dahrendorf, 1959; Horton, 1966; Lenski, 1966). As opportunity expands and the occupational structure grows broader, groups will compete and oppress one another in the struggle for wealth, power, and privilege. Inequality is a likely result.

This struggle and stratification among ethnic and racial groups has been documented by ethnic conflict theorists. Historically, it occurred on the land during the agrarian phase of American history and in industrial cities, and it continues in postindustrial America, with respect to white-collar work (Allen, 1970; Bonacich, 1972, 1973, 1976; Cox, 1948; Broom and Glenn, 1965; Lieberson and Fuguitt, 1967; Levitan et al., 1975; Mills, 1963; Newcomer, 1955; Schmid and Nobbe, 1965; Taussig and Joslyn, 1932; Van den Berghe, 1967; Wilhelm, 1971; Wilson, 1973, 1978; Woodward, 1955). According to this view, there has been unequal access among these groups to societal opportunity.

The implication is that individual freedom cannot be assumed for all in modern society, at least not for members of oppressed groups. There is virtual consensus in conflict theory on the persistence of inequality in the modernization process. Debate occurs, however, over exactly whose interests are served by oppression, and the degree to which all classes within a minority group are affected by it.

New metaphors emerged from conflict theory. For example, the colonialism model posited that minorities can be seen as colonial subjects in their own country. Blauner (1969) made the distinction between colonialism as a system and colonialism as a process. It is in the latter sense that blacks are equated with the colonized peoples of the 19th century. In both historical instances, the distinct values and cultures of the colonized groups are assumed to be destroyed. Furthermore, the colonized groups are seen as being administered to by representatives of the colonial power—the police, in the case of black Americans. Moore (1970) argued that the colonial model describes the experiences of Mexican Americans even without the need of an analogy.

Geschwender (1978) proposed an internal colonial-class model of black

Americans, which utilizes elements from both the colonial metaphor and the larger conflict analysis of industrial society. He argued that black Americans were a submerged nation in the "Black Belt" up to World War I. The class model describes better, however, the subsequent entry of black Americans into the industrial order during this century. He concluded that the concept of nation-class is a good characterization of black Americans, one that borrows from both the colonial and class models. He tied the stratification of black Americans to the changing labor needs of the American economy, as did Hraba (1979) and Wilson (1978).

According to ethnic conflict theory, the powerful ethnic groups exclude the weak ones from the expanded wealth, power, and privilege which come with modernization. De Gre (1964) argued that the degree of freedom that an individual enjoys in society is a function of the power of the group(s) to which he/she belongs. This means unequal life chances and the relative absence of freedom for individual members of minority groups. Moreover, conflict theory locates the dynamics behind the unequal distribution of individual freedom in intergroup relations, at a level above the individual and individualism.

By the same token, ethnic conflict theory seems to share with assimilationism and pluralism much of the liberal paradigm. Growth in opportunity and resultant individuality are both assumed, and only their distribution is in question. The basic assertion and moral tone of ethnic conflict theory are that members of minority groups face restricted opportunity and limited individual freedom, implying, of course, that others enjoy both. Members of the majority fall within the liberal paradigm, and so liberal conceptions of ethnicity apply to them. They have either assimilated or evolved toward the new and increasingly voluntary ethnicity. Individual freedom and voluntary ethnicity are precisely what distinguish the majority from the minority. The minority group is the only instance of involuntary ethnicity in the modern era.

Consideration of a Second Paradigm

Ethnic conflict theory stresses the competition in and the resulting stratification of the modern opportunity structure. On one hand, this makes a statement about individual freedom but, on the other, poses a question that leads to the consideration of a second paradigm. How is it possible that some ethnic groups are able to oppress others in modern society? How does the majority restrict the opportunity and, thus, individual freedom of the minority? The answer cannot be truly found in the liberal paradigm that equates modernity with individual freedom.

The conventional answer given in conflict theory is that the power of one ethnic group to oppress another is based on its relative size, its control of other power resources, and its capacity to mobilize these resources (cf., Blalock, 1967). With respect to power resources and their mobilization, most writers in this tradition emphasize a group's control over wealth, the means of production, political authority, and military force (e.g., Geschewender, 1978; Hraba, 1979; Lenski, 1966; Wilson, 1973, 1978). These are the resources used in oppression.

These resources are not, strictly speaking, the possessions of ethnic and racial groups. In the modernization process, control over wealth and power has become concentrated in the corporate economy and/or state. Moreover, the corporate

economy and state are modern structures, and not carryovers from an older folk society. The use of power resources by ethnic groups has become increasingly difficult without their involvement in the corporate core of modern society.

The observations from ethnic conflict theory thereby suggest a second paradigm on ethnicity in modern society. This paradigm equates modernity with organizational growth and the formation of a corporate core that increasingly controls societal resources. This is the A term. The impact of modern megastructures on ethnic groups and their relations constitutes the B term in this second paradigm. This paradigm is expressed through the ethnic mobilization theory and is ultimately derived from the historic-conservative reaction to classical liberalism. Through history, groups continue to be more real than individuals, according to this paradigm.

An image of corporate America is evolving in the social sciences (cf., Burt, 1980; Coleman, 1974; Galbraith, 1971; James, 1981; Starr, 1982). This image is often communicated in the language of core-periphery (cf., Shils, 1975; Wallerstein, 1979). Shils wrote: "But every society, seen macrosociologically, may be interpreted as a center and periphery. The center consists of those institutions (and roles) which exercise authority—whether it be economically, governmental, political, military—and of those which create and diffuse cultural symbols . . . The periphery consists of those strata or sectors of the society which are recipients of commands and of beliefs which they do not themselves create . . . and of those who are lower in the distribution or allocation of rewards, dignities, facilities, etc." (1975:39). This paradigm, which equates modernity with the growing power of a societal core and the increasing powerlessness of the periphery, is adopted in ethnic mobilization theory (e.g., Hannan, 1979; Hechter, 1974, 1975; Ragin, 1979).

Hannan (1979) stressed the breakdown of local economic niches and the incorporation of labor and capital into larger networks controlled at the core. He believed that ethnic identities will become broader as a consequence. Others identified the shaping of contemporary ethnicity with nation building and state administration (e.g., Hechter, 1975; Nagel, 1982). Theory and research on ethnic mobilization represent normal science following from this second paradigm. So far, the power of the core to manipulate and shape ethnic groups is emphasized in ethnic mobilization theory. The other side of the coin is, of course, how some ethnic groups have used the societal core and its resources against their rivals.

The upper classes of white ethnic groups have dominated the American economy. With the consequent resource advantage, they have excluded other ethnic groups from powerful and wealthy positions at the economic core. Apparently, ethnic groups can extract concessions from the modern core in exchange for their labor and capital. What ethnic groups give and get in their exchange with corporations at the core is the larger issue. The result appears to be a cultural division of labor.

Minority groups in America have turned toward the state in their rivalry with the white majority. Civil rights and affirmative action can be seen in this light. That is, rivalry between ethnic groups can be mirrored in the rivalry between modern megastructures—big government and business, in this case. The current national debate over big government and its reduction in size and power reflects the use of government by minority groups. A changing relationship between government and the private economy at the societal core will necessarily change eth-

nic relations at the periphery. All of this suggests the involvement of ethnic groups with the core of modern society.

The contextual analysis of ethnicity expands with the second paradigm. As previously discussed, ethnicity has been tied primarily to the occupational structure and mode of production, as well as to the psychology of prejudice and discrimination. Ethnicity is also put into a political context in the second paradigm, with its emphasis on the interaction between nation building, state administration, and ethnic mobilization. The meaning of ethnicity will likely enlarge to include its political connotations, as a consequence. The second paradigm also appears consistent with a recent call in general sociology to bring the state back in.

When ethnic groups relate to the corporate core, they tend to take on the organizational forms found in that core. To better deal with bureaucracy in the economy and state, agencies of ethnic groups become bureaucratized, with paid managerial staffs and boards of directors. One can observe this among black organizations during the civil rights era and among American Indians in exchange with energy corporations (cf., Jorgensen, Davis, and Mathews, 1978). Ethnic organizations also became agencies for socialization into American values required in white-collar work at the core (Treudley, 1949). Groups in exchange often converge in organizational form and function. Thus, modernity can make for organizational growth and change in ethnic groups, according to mobilization theory, as much as it can reduce ethnicity to an expression of individuality.

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