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RACE AND RACE THEORY

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■ **Abstract** Race has always been a significant sociological theme, from the founding of the field and the formulation of classical theoretical statements to the present. Since the nineteenth century, sociological perspectives on race have developed and changed, always reflecting shifts in large-scale political processes. In the classical period, colonialism and biologistic racism held sway. As the twentieth century dawned, sociology came to be dominated by US-based figures. DuBois and the Chicago School presented the first notable challenges to the field's racist assumptions. In the aftermath of World War II, with the destruction of European colonialism, the rise of the civil rights movement, and the surge in migration on a world scale, the sociology of race became a central topic. The field moved toward a more critical, more egalitarian awareness of race, focused particularly on the overcoming of prejudice and discrimination. Although the recognition of these problems increased and political reforms made some headway in combatting them, racial injustice and inequality were not surmounted. As the global and domestic politics of race entered a new period of crisis and uncertainty, so too has the field of sociology. To tackle the themes of race and racism once again in the new millennium, sociology must develop more effective racial theory. Racial formation approaches can offer a starting point here. The key tasks will be the formulation of a more adequate comparative historical sociology of race, the development of a deeper understanding of the micro-macro linkages that shape racial issues, and the recognition of the pervasiveness of racial politics in contemporary society. This is a challenging but also exciting agenda. The field must not shrink from addressing it.

INTRODUCTION

As the world lurches forward into the twenty-first century, widespread confusion and anxiety exist about the political significance and even the meaning, of race. This uncertain situation extends into the field of sociology, which has since its founding devoted great attention to racial themes.

The extent of the literature on the race concept alone, not to mention the mountains of empirical studies that focus on racial issues, presents difficulties for any attempt at theoretical overview and synthesis. A wide range of concepts from both the classical and modern traditions can readily be applied to racial matters.

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Variations among national and cultural understandings of the meaning of race cry out for comparative appproaches. World history has, arguably, been racialized at least since the rise of the modern world system; racial hierarchy remains global even in the postcolonial present; and popular concepts of race, however variegated, remain in general everyday use almost everywhere. Thus, any effective sociological theory of race seems to require, at a minimum, comparative historical and political components, some sort of sociology of culture or knowledge, and an adequate microsociological account.

Over the past few decades, interest in racial matters, and the pace at which racial dynamics have been changing worldwide, have both increased dramatically. Controversy over the meaning and significance of race was greatly heightened after World War II. The war itself had significant racial dimensions and left a legacy of revulsion at racism and genocide. The social movements and revolutionary upsurges that succeeded the war and brought the colonial era to an end also raised the problematic of race to a new level of prominence. The civil rights movement in the United States and the anti-apartheid mobilization in South Africa are but the most prominent examples of this. As it gained its independence, the postcolonial world was quickly embroiled in the competition of the Cold War, a situation that placed not only the legacy of imperial rule but also the racial policies of the superpowers (especially those of the United States) under additional scrutiny. Another consequence of the war was enormous migratory flows from the world's rural South to its metropolitan North; in these demographic shifts the empire struck back, pluralizing the former mother countries (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies 1982). All these developments raised significant questions about the meaning of race.

SOCIOLOGY'S RACIAL ODYSSEY

In this article I survey the theoretical dimensions of race as the new century (and new millennium) commences. I begin with an account of the *origins of the race concept.* Here I consider how the theme of race, though prefigured in earlier ages, only took on its present range of meanings with the rise of modernity. The deep interconnection between the development of the modern world system—of capitalism, seaborne empire, and slavery—and the exfoliation of a worldwide process of racialization is not in doubt.

Next I examine how sociological theory has addressed the linkage between modernity and race. I argue that, not surprisingly, *the sociological study of race has been shaped by large-scale political processes.* The founding statements of sociological theory, the so-called classics, were above all concerned to explain the emergence of modernity in Europe. Whether they understood this to mean the dawn of capitalism, the advent of "disenchanted" forms of social organization, or the generation of complex dynamics of social integration and solidarity, they could hardly escape some reckoning with the problem of the Other, however s/he was

defined: as plundered and exploited laborer, as "primitive" or "uncivilized," or as "traditional" or mechanically solidaristic.

After sociology's center of gravity migrated across the Atlantic, racial themes became more central. Dealing with social problems such as crime, poverty, and disease; addressing urbanization, stratification, and underdevelopment; and confronting social psychological issues as well, analysts again and again had recourse to racial themes.

Contemporary approaches to the race concept have by and large parted with the biologism of the past, although some vestigial viewpoints of this type can still be detected (such as those of *The Bell Curve* authors). The sociology of race was vastly stimulated by the political, cultural, and demographic shifts that took shape in the postwar decades.

But as we begin the twenty-first century, sociological theory is confronted with the obsolescence of the Big Political Processes, such as decolonization and civil rights, that drove the theoretical vehicle forward from the war's end. So now, racial theory finds itself in a new quandary. Empires have been ended and Jim Crow and *apartheid* abolished (at least officially). How then is continuing racial inequality and bias to be explained? Some would argue that since racial injustice is at least tendentially diminishing, the race concept is finally being obviated: In the globalized twenty-first century, world society and transnational culture will finally attain a state of colorblindness and racial (or better, ethnic) pluralism. Others note that this new situation—of multiculturalism or diversification—provides a much prettier fig leaf for policies of *laissez-faire* vis-a-vis continuing racial exclusion and inequality than any intransigent white supremacy could ever have offered. But whatever political disagreements underlie the ongoing difficulties of racial theory, there can be little doubt that these difficulties persist.

In the final section of this paper, I offer some *notes toward a new racial theory.* Any such account must take seriously the reformed present situation: postcolonial, postsegregationist (or at least post–official segregation), and racially heterogeneous (if not "integrated"). It must also note the continuing presence of racial signification and racial identity, as well as the ongoing social structural salience of race. Racial theory must now demonstrate comparative and historical capabilities, as well as addressing the formidable problem of the micro-macro linkage that inheres in racial dynamics. As this already suggests, such a theory would also incorporate elements (let us call them revisionist elements) of recent political sociology: process models of politics, new social movement theory, and constitution theories of society. Over the past two decades, racial formation theory has made the most serious attempt to fulfill this mission.

This is obviously no small assignment; only the contours of such a new theoretical approach to race can be outlined here. But I am confident that these notes, however elliptical, will facilitate access to a substantial body of work already underway, not only on race, but on the great multitude of issues, both substantive and conceptual, that it intersects. After all, the theme of race is situated where meaning meets social structure, where identity frames inequality.

ORIGINS OF THE RACE CONCEPT

Can any subject be more central or more controversial in sociological thought than that of race? The concept is essentially a modern one, although prefigured in various ways by ethnocentrism, and taking preliminary form in ancient concepts of civilization and barbarity (Snowden 1983), citizen (or *zoon politikon*) and outsider/slave (Hannaford 1996, Finley 1983). Yes, the Crusades and the Inquisition and the Mediterranean slave trade were important rehearsals for modern systems of racial differentiation, but in terms of scale and inexorability the race concept only began to attain its familiar meanings at the end of the middle ages.

At this point it would be useful to say what I mean by "race." At its most basic level, race can be defined as a *concept that signifies and symbolizes sociopolitical conflicts and interests in reference to different types of human bodies.* Although the concept of race appeals to biologically based human characteristics (phenotypes), selection of these particular human features for purposes of racial signification is always and necessarily a social and historical process. There is no biological basis for distinguishing human groups along the lines of race, and the sociohistorical categories employed to differentiate among these groups reveal themselves, upon serious examination, to be imprecise if not completely arbitrary (Omi & Winant 1994).

The idea of race began to take shape with the rise of a world political economy. The onset of global economic integration, the dawn of seaborne empire, the conquest of the Americas, and the rise of the Atlantic slave trade were all key elements in the genealogy of race. The concept emerged over time as a kind of world-historical *bricolage*, an accretive process that was in part theoretical,[1] but much more centrally practical. Though intimated throughout the world in innumerable ways, racial categorization of human beings was a European invention. It was an outcome of the same world-historical processes that created European nation-states and empires, built the dark satanic mills of Britain (and the even more dark and satanic sugar mills of the Brazilian Reconcavo and the Caribbean), and explained it all by means of Enlightenment rationality.

But this is not to say that the European attainment of imperial and world-encompassing power gave rise to race. Indeed it is just as easy to argue the opposite: that the modern concept of race gave rise to, or at least facilitated the creation of, an integrated sociopolitical world, a modern authoritarian state, the structures of an international economy, and the emergence over time of a global culture. We must recognize all these issues as deeply racialized matters.

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[1] Religious, philosophical, literary/artistic, political, and scientific discourses all were directed in a never ending flood of ink and image to the themes of "the Other"; variations in human nature; and the corporeal, mental, spiritual, sexual, and "natural historical" differences among "men." To the extent that this discussion addressed itself to the problem of patterns of human difference/identity and human variability, it may be fairly characterized as about race. To cite some valuable texts among a virtual infinity: Hannaford 1996, Gossett 1965, Todorov 1985, 1993, Kiernan 1969, Montagu 1997 [1942], Banton 1987.

THE SOCIOLOGICAL STUDY OF RACE HAS BEEN SHAPED BY LARGE-SCALE POLITICAL PROCESSES

The "Classics"

When we look at the treatment of racial matters in sociological theory, we find the concept present from the beginning, though often in an inchoate, undertheorized, or taken-for-granted form. Herbert Spencer, the usual example cited as the *ur*-sociologist, reads as a biological determinist today, preoccupied as he is with human evolution and the ranking of groups according to their "natural" characteristics.[2]

Marx's orientation to themes we would now consider racial was complex. His denunciation in *Capital* of the depredation, despoliation, and plunder of the non-European world in pursuit of primitive accumulation,[3] and his ferocious opposition to slavery, both commend him. But his insistence that the colonized pre-capitalist societies would ultimately benefit from their enmeshment in the brutal clutches of the European powers hints to present-day readers that he was not entirely immune to the hierarchization of the world that characterized the imperial Europe of his day.

Weber's treatment of the concept of *ethnie* under the rubric of "status" (a relational category based on "honor") presages a social constructionist approach to race; but in Weber's voluminous output there is no serious consideration of the modern imperial phenomenon, there are numerous instances of European chauvinism,[4] and there is an occasional indulgence in—let us call it—racialist meditation.[5] Durkheim too ranks the world eurocentrically, distinguishing rather absolutely

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[2]Early treatments of the race concept in Europe and the United States combined supposedly biologistic or natural history–based conceptions of race with a high degree of arbitrariness, if not outright incoherence, in their application. Numerous groups qualified as "races": national origin (the Irish) and religion (Jews) as well as the more familiar criteria of color were frequently invoked as signs of racial otherness. Although this fungibility has been somewhat reduced and regularized over recent decades, it still remains in effect and indeed can never be supplanted by "objective" criteria. See the discussion of racial formation below.

[3]"The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement, and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of blackskins, signalized the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief momenta of primitive accumulation. On their heels treads the commercial war of the European nations with the globe for a theater. It begins with the revolt of the Netherlands from Spain, assumes giant dimensions in England's AntiJacobin War, and is still going on in the opium wars with China, etc." (Marx 1967:351).

[4]Especially during the World War I years, when Weber was seriously afflicted with German nationalism.

[5]In fairness, Weber also recognizes racism, notably anti-black racism in the United States. See his remarks on U.S. racial attitudes in Gerth & Mills 1958:405–6. Weber's sensitivity to U.S. racial matters may be attributed, at least in part, to the orientation provided him by Du Bois. See Lewis 1993:225, 277.

between "primitive" and "civilized" peoples based on the limited ethnology available to him; he also muses somewhat racialistically.[6]

It is not my purpose to chide these masters. Far from it: They acquit themselves well when compared to the rank-and-file pundits and even the *bien philosophes* who were their contemporaries. They can hardly be expected to have remained totally immune from the racial ideology of their times. But that is precisely the point: Sociological thought arose in an imperialist, eurocentric, and indeed racist era, both in Europe and in the United States. In its classical early statements, it was racially marked by the time and place of its birth.

Across the Atlantic

It was largely in the United States that the early sociology of race first forsook the library for the streets, partaking in the great empirical effloresence that marked the field's establishment in that country. There was an inescapable association between the discipline's development in this period (the early twentieth century), and the rise of pragmatism in US philosophy and progressivism in US politics during the same epoch. Nor is it hard to understand why race was promoted to a more central sociological concern as the discipline acquired its foothold—indeed its headquarters—in the United States. This was, after all, a country where African slavery was still an artifact of living memory, where the frontier had only recently been declared closed, where immigration was a flood stage, and where debates over the propriety of imperial activity (in the Phillipines, for example) were still current.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a nearly comprehensive view of the race concept still located it at the biological level. On this account, races were "natural": their characteristics were essential and given, immutable. Over the centuries such approaches had accomplished a wide range of explanatory work. Both the defense of slavery and its critique (abolitionism) had appealed to "natural" criteria in support of their views. In a similar vein the holocaust visited upon indigenous peoples, as well as the absorption of large numbers of former Mexican, Spanish, and Asian subjects through war and coercive immigration policies, had been justified as "natural," inevitable forms of human progress.[7] Even after emancipation and the "closing of the frontier" in the United States, scientific arguments still summoned "natural causes" to the defense of hierarchical concepts of race. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the impact of social Darwinism was

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[6]Racial categories are employed as "social types" in *Suicide*, for example. See Fenton 1980.

[7]The Chicago theorists, particularly Park, proposed a deterministic version of this argument in the form of a "race relations cycle" through which macrosocial encounters between "peoples" were argued to pass. The four stages of the "cycle" were held to succeed each other more or less inevitably: first contact, then conflict, succeeded by accommodation, and finally assimilation. Residues of the "natural history" logic of race can be detected here, to be sure, but there is also something of a social constructionism at work. For example, Park suggests that alternative power dynamics among racially defined groups are possible at each of the cycle's phases.

enormous (not merely on Herbert Spencer), and the arguments of eugenics also acquired great support.

But the world racial system underwent significant shifts in the early twentieth century. As labor demands grew more complex and the agenda of democratization gradually assumed greater importance, biologistic racial theories became increasingly obsolete. The resurgence of anticolonial movements in Africa and Asia (a century after the success of such movements in the Americas), the spreading of democratic demands to countries considered "backward" and "uncivilized," and the increased mobility (both geographic and economic) of ex-slaves and former peasants during and after World War I, all motivated the gradual but inexorable development of a more sophisticated social scientific approach to race.

The two early twentieth century examples of pathbreaking racial theorizing that require mention here are the pioneering study by W.E.B. Du Bois of black life in Philadelphia (Du Bois 1998 [1899]), and the extensive body of work on racial matters that formed a crucial component of the Chicago School of sociology. Both these pioneers were oriented by the pragmatism that was the most original, and remains the most important, contribution of North American sociological theory.

Du Bois's *The Philadelphia Negro*[8] sought both to make a significant advance over previous knowledge (overwhelmingly ignorant and stereotyped) about black life and US racial dynamics; and to build, upon a solid base of empirical data, a powerful and strategic argument for the democratization of race relations in turn-of-the-century America. Though slightly marred by concessions demanded of Du Bois by his patrons (or perhaps imagined necessary by him) the work still stands, an entire century later, as a magisterial survey of the unique racial dementia of the United States: the country's foundational involvement with African enslavement and the permanent consequences of that involvement. In addition to his pathbreaking approach to racial theory, particularly evident in his concept of "the veil" and his understanding of racial dualism (Du Bois 1989 [1903]), Du Bois's early work is notable for its relentless empirical commitments and independent application of pragmatist philosophy (West 1989) to the sociological enterprise, both theoretical and practical. As Elijah Anderson points out in his introduction to the centennial reissue of *The Philadelphia Negro* (1996 [1899]), the tendency

[8]One should cite much more of Du Bois's contributions to the foundations of US sociology, and indeed to democratic theory and practice in respect to race: the Atlanta studies, the historical sociology (most notably *Black Reconstruction in America* (1977 [1935]), and an astounding wealth of other work (see Lewis 1995 for a good selection of materials). While Du Bois was not entirely ignored by the "mainstream" of the field, he was hardly given his due recognition either. As noted, Du Bois was associated with Weber, whom he had come to know in Berlin. The complex set of influences shaping Du Bois's intellectual and political development has been much explored in recent scholarship: He combined a high German philosophical, historical, and social scientific training with solid roots in American pragmatism (notably his work with William James), and a deep engagement with the popular African-American traditions he first met as a college student in the South (see Du Bois 1989 [1903]), Du Bois 1991 [1940]), Lewis 1993, West 1989, Marable 1986).

to attribute these innovations to more "mainstream" sociologists for many years banished Du Bois from his rightful place in the disciplinary canon.

The large body of work on race produced by the researchers of the Chicago School also demonstrates the influence of pragmatism and progressivism. Oriented by a social problems approach and consciously viewing the city of Chicago as a sociological laboratory, the Chicago sociologists authored a group of studies focusing on crime, poverty, "slums," etc., all problems that were frequently seen racially. The approaches that developed in Chicago were notable for their attentiveness to their empirical subjects, and for their intrinsically democratic orientation. Moving from the preliminary work of Burgess, through the great creativity and comprehensiveness of Thomas & Znaniecki's massive study,[9] the Chicago engagement with the problematic of race culminated in the work of Robert E. Park on the macro-dimensions of race (Park 1950).[10] There was also an important micro-side of the Chicago tradition, which proceeded from Mead and deeply informed Blumer's work on the symbolic dimensions of race (Blumer 1958). Perhaps most important, the work of the Chicago sociologists broke definitively with the racial biologism that had characterized earlier treatments, asserting with increasing clarity the position that race was a socially constructed, not naturally given, phenomenon.[11] The influence of this view on crucial later treatments of race throughout the social sciences—for example, Myrdal's *An American Dilemma* (1944) or Drake & Cayton's magisterial work (Drake & Cayton 1993 [1945])—was enormous. The Myrdal study would not even have come into being, much less exercised the tremendous political influence it did (Southern 1987, Jackson 1990), without vast assistance from Chicago-trained scholars.

CONTEMPORARY APPROACHES TO THE RACE CONCEPT

The same dynamics that prompted the Americanization of sociology and sparked the shift from classical theorizing to empirical research were also at work in the development of contemporary approaches to race. Once again, pressing sociopolitical issues drove the theoretical vehicle forward.

Sociological argument could only properly challenge biologistic positions after the race concept had been fully reinterpreted sociohistorically. Given the onrushing

[9] *The Polish Peasant* prefigured the entire contemporary field of migration studies (Thomas & Znaniecki 1994 [1923]). Thomas & Znaniecki's book on what would now be considered a white ethnic group could easily be seen as a racial work at the time of its original appearance.

[10] For a good overview, see Bulmer 1984.

[11] In this developing analysis, Chicago sociology not only led the field, but established the beginning of an interdisciplinary social scientific consensus. In cultural anthropology, the early contributions of Franz Boas—whom Du Bois invited to speak in Atlanta in 1911—were crucial here as well.

European disaster of facism, the task of elaborating a democratic and inclusionist theory of race fell largely to US scholars from the 1930s onward.[12] Here the sociological work carried out by the Chicago scholars and their successors, and the continuously powerful voice of Du Bois, combined with the insights and research of a growing number of progressive racial observers. To name but a few other important influences: the Boasian shift in anthropology, which refocused that discipline from physical to cultural preoccupations and had widespread effects in popular culture, was certainly significant. The association of fascism with eugenics—a movement that had developed strong bases both in Britain and the United States as well as in Germany—forced choices upon democratically and progressively inclined publics, both intellectual and political. The "retreat of scientific racism" was the result of these unsavory connections (Barkan 1992). Marxist accounts of race became more prominent in function of the upsurge of communism (a leading, though not unproblematic, antiracist influence, especially in the 1930s and 1940s). The growth of important black movements, both political and cultural,[13] also strongly affected the racial public sphere in the interwar period. And the liberal democratic ethos, strongly invoked in the United States by the wartime work of Myrdal, exercised tremendous influence (Myrdal 1944).

The Post–World War II Challenge

In the post–World War II period, the concept of race was more comprehensively challenged than ever before in modern history. Decolonization spread through the world's South, sometimes achieving its emancipatory aims by peaceful, or at least largely political, means and sometimes requiring prolonged warfare to dislodge the occupying northern (aka "white") power. Migration and urbanization of previously impoverished ex-colonials and former peasants—largely people of color—landed millions of dark faces in the world's metropoles. These newly urbanized groups soon mobilized and pressed for their political and social rights, contesting entrenched customs and institutionalized patterns of white supremacy and racism in numerous countries. Especially in the United States, the hegemonic postwar nation, these racially based movements took the political center-stage.

These new demands for inclusion, in turn, induced serious crises in national political systems. As racial regimes steeped in discriminatory or exclusionist

[12]Not exclusively of course. Resistance to nazism also bred important works, as did anticolonial struggle and cultural anthropology. A few examples: the Jewish and homosexual activist Magnus Hirschfeld first used (as far as I can tell) the term "racism" in a book he published with that title in 1935, whose topic was (logically) antisemitism. The pan-Africanist movement, which owed a lot to Du Bois, was well underway by this time, generating important works by such scholar-activists (and marxists) as George Padmore, C.L.R. James, and others. Boas's students such as Gilberto Freyre and Ruth Benedict were producing important studies on race in Brazil, as was exiled anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss.

[13]Notably the Garvey movement, the Harlem Renaissance, and the development of successful (though still effectively segregated) black media: music, film and theater, newspapers, etc.

traditions were pressured to innovate and reform, sociological approaches to race were also transformed. A great (although quite belated) interest in patterns of discrimination and prejudice developed.[14] Interest in patterns of racial inequality grew at the international level. Not only the mainstream sociology, but also the radical sociology of race advanced, spurred on by the new movements as well as by dissatisfaction with the pace and scope of reform (Blauner 1972; Ladner, ed. 1973).

While an obvious advance over earlier views, postwar racial theory was subject to numerous limitations, in both its moderate and its radical versions. Most problematic was the tendency toward *reductionism*: The three main theoretical tendencies all subordinated the race concept to some supposedly more objective or "real" social structure. *Ethnicity*-based theories were generally the most mainstream or moderate. They saw race as a culturally grounded framework of collective identity. *Class*-based theories understood race in terms of group-based stratification and economic competition. *Nation*-based theories perceived race in the geopolitical terms largely given by the decolonization process so prominent in the postwar era. They focused attention on issues of peoplehood and race unity, rootedness, citizenship, and irredentism.[15]

As the twentieth century (whose "problem is the color-line," as Du Bois had famously written) drew toward its end, these approaches to the race concept also neared their limits. They were informed by and oriented to the pressing sociopolitical problems of their time: notably racial prejudice and discrimination (especially state-sponsored discrimination). After these grievances had been forcefully raised in many countries by antiracist movements, they were generally at least ameliorated by democratic and inclusionist efforts at reform. Although hardly eliminated by shifts in state racial policy, racial injustice became less visible as a result of these reforms, and overt racism was generally stigmatized. In such a situation the racial theory that sought to explain such phenomena slowly became obsolete. Thus are we left at century's end with a range of unanticipated, or at least theoretically unresolved, racial dilemmas.

The Limits of Contemporary Racial Theory

The inadequacy of the range of theoretical approaches to race available in sociology at the turn of the twenty-first century is quite striking. Consistent with the argument presented in this essay, this theoretical crisis can be seen as reflecting the continuing sociopolitical crisis of race. In particular, the *persistence of racially based distinctions*, distinctions that state-based racial reforms were supposed to overcome, poses major problems for racial theories inherited from the earlier post–World War II years.

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[14] A valuable survey of "mainstream" sociological approaches to race in the United States over the entire twentieth century is Pettigrew 1980. For a more critical perspective, see McKee 1993.

[15] For a more extensive critical review of the reductionism of 1960s racial theorizing in the United States, see Michael Omi & Howard Winant 1994).

Ethnicity-oriented theories of race had suggested that the suppression of prejudiced attitudes could be achieved through contact, integration, and assimilation; and that discrimination could be ended by laws and regulations that made jobs, education, housing, and so on equally accessible to all. But the endurance of obstacles to integration severely undermined ethnicity-based approaches to race,[16] while assimilation into white cultural norms was hardly desirable to most racially defined minorities. Faced with these impasses in the United States today, ethnicity theories of race have devolved into neoconservatism, which can do no better than reprove racially defined minorities for their continuing race-consciousness and supposed failure to take advantage of civil rights reforms (Thernstrom & Thernstrom 1997). In Western Europe, these theories take the form of differentialism, which repudiates the racist cultural hierarchies of the past, but affirms the exclusionist commitments of (French, German, British etc.) "national culture," thus upholding barriers to immigration and racial pluralism, not to mention integration (Taguieff 1988, Wieviorka 1995, Balibar & Wallerstein 1991).

Class-based theories of race had argued that racial conflict was the mode in which class conflict was lived out or expressed (Hall et al 1978). This suggested that racial stratification and intergroup competition were fairly well-defined in the postwar world (Bonacich 1972, 1976, Gordon et al 1982, Reich 1981). If the inequality among racially defined groups was to be overcome, then this would require not only interracial solidarity, but also race-conscious programs designed to remedy the *effects* of discrimination. Such programs, put into place in many countries and under various names, have come to be known under the rubric of "affirmative action." But two factors have undermined the plausibility of this account. First, a growing inequality *within* racially defined minority groups weakens group cohesion both politically and culturally; this undermines the case for affirmative action. Second, enduring white commitments to racial privilege—that is, persistent racism—largely trump interracial working-class solidarity, defeating whatever potential for economic redistribution such programs as affirmative action may have offered. Thus, class-based theories of race have in practice been vitiated by the failure of the socialist (or social democratic, or New Deal) vision in the present epoch.[17]

Nation-oriented accounts of race have been called into question by the combined weight of international and intra-national heterogeneity. In a postcolonial era

[16]At a deeper level, governments often enacted racial reforms that were more symbolic than substantive, and enforced those they had managed to enact indifferently if at all. See Lipsitz 1998, Massey & Denton 1993 for U.S. examples.

[17]Perhaps the greatest effort to argue for a class-based contemporary racial theory in sociology has been that of William Julius Wilson. For more than two decades now Wilson has sought to present racial progress as dependent on generalized full-employment policies and politics. In recent work he has striven to revive well-used left arguments about the indispensability of interracial solidarity (Wilson 1996). But for all that is valuable in this approach, his dismissal of the continuing effects of racism, and of the experience of racial distinctions, is crippling. The sociocultural and organizational obstacles to interracial solidarity remain far more formidable than Wilson acknowledges.

that has witnessed tremendous migration, that offers unprecedented ease of movement, and that boasts of communicative powers (mass media, particularly music and film, but also telephonic and computer-based resources) unimaginable even a few years ago, the nation-based dimensions of racial solidarity have atrophied. Trans- (or perhaps post-) national forms of racial correspondence persist, but now take the form of *diasporic* identities of various kinds (Kilson & Rotberg, eds., 1976, Appadurai 1996, Lemelle & Kelley, eds., 1994). At this point, however, transnational racial solidarity generally lacks the kind of political commitment and organization once displayed under the banners of pan-Africanism or the "non-aligned" movements. In this situation, nation-based theories of race have devolved into crude and retro forms of cultural nationalism, informed more by mysticism than by social analysis.[18]

NOTES TOWARD A NEW RACIAL THEORY

If the strength of earlier theoretical accounts has atrophied and a new approach is needed, what would be its outlines? As a new century begins, a convincing racial theory must address the persistence of racial classification and stratification in an era officially committed to racial equality and multiculturalism. The present moment is one of increasing globalization and postcoloniality. It is a time when most national societies, and the world as a whole, are acknowledged to be racially multipolar, and when hybridity is frequently recognized as a key feature of racial identity. Today, in marked distinction to the situation that obtained before World War II, most states and members of state elites claim to oppose discrimination, deny their continuing adherence to racialized views of their populations, and may even claim to be colorblind or differentialist. How and why do racial distinctions endure in such changed circumstances?

Any minimally adequate theoretical response to this question must include recognition of the *comparative/historical dimension of race*. The mere fact that we are discussing race here and now (in a post-civil rights, post-cold war, post-colonial

[18]"Cultural nationalism" as politics and racial theory in the United States, Brazil, or South Africa may have entered a *cul-de-sac*, but it is essentially benign. The same cannot be said of the devolutionist nationalisms of the Balkans, Rwanda, or parts of South Asia, which have reintroduced the quasi-racist program of ethnic cleansing in forlorn and bloody attempts to achieve the utopian congruence of state and nation. Quite apart from the resemblance of such policies to genocides ancient and recent, they testify once again to the near-total hybridity of the human population and the impossibility of achieving any societal homogeneity, especially in the present. Such policies also reveal the flexibility of racialization, which has time and again been applied to exacerbate human distinctions not easily recognized (at least from "outside") as corporeal or phenotypic. Consider in this regard not only Hutu v. Tutsi or Bosnian Serb v. Bosnian Muslim, but also such cases of racialized conflict as: German "Aryan" v. German Jew, Palestinian Arab v. Israeli Jew, or British v. Irish.

period) itself imposes significant theoretical constraints and opportunities. As I argued earlier, earlier racial theories too were products of their times and places. We remain in a similar situation today.

A second dimension in which any successful theory must operate is the ability to range over, and hopefully to link, *the micro- and macro-aspects of racial signification and racialized social structure.* Such a multileveled and interconnected account is a general obligation of social theory in the present.[19] It is an obligation incurred by any attempt to conceptualize the continuing significance of race. A notable and intriguing feature of race is its ubiquity, its presence in both the smallest and the largest features of social relationships, institutions, and identities.

A third theoretical dimension will involve recognition of the *newly pervasive forms of politics* in recent times. This may be alternatively regarded as a racially conscious conception of action or agency. In the United States, much of the impetus behind the reconceptualization of politics that has occurred in recent decades was derived from racially based and indeed anti-racist social movements. The democratizing challenge posed after World War II to normal systems of domination and power, accepted divisions of labor, and rational-legal means of legitimation, all had inescapable racial dimensions. Racially based movements, then, and the second wave feminism that followed and was inspired by them, problematized the public-private distinction basic to an older generation of political theory and political sociology.[20] This has been recognized in new approaches to political sociology, such as political process models (McAdam 1982, Morris & Mueller, eds., 1992), It also appears in the revival of interest in pragmatist sociology, in symbolic interactionism, in constitution theories of society (Joas 1996, Giddens 1984), and in the belated revival of interest in the work of W.E.B. Du Bois (West 1989, Lewis 1993, Winant 1997).

For the past few decades these themes have been developed in a body of theoretical work that goes under the general heading of *racial formation theory.* As one of the founders of this approach, I must stipulate from the beginning to the lack of consensus, as well as the overall incompleteness, of this theoretical current. Still, I submit that racial formation theory at least begins to meet the requirements for a sociological account of race, one capable of addressing the *fin-de-siecle* conditions adumbrated here.[21]

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[19] See Huber 1991, Giddens 1984, Collins 1987, Alexander et al, eds., 1987.

[20] In non-U.S. settings, the new social movement phenomenon has not always been so clearly recognized as racially structured. This is particularly notable in Europe where its study was prompted by the vicissitudes of the new left, the resurgence of feminism, the rise of green politics, and the upsurge of terrorism in the 1970s (Melucci 1989). But in the third world the rethinking of political theory and political sociology in terms of issues of subjectivity and of identity often took on a racial dimension. Consider the legacy of Fanon for example.

[21] Numerous writers now employ racial formation perspectives, both within sociology and in other social scientific (as well as in cultural studies, legal studies, etc.). See for example Gilroy 1991, Crenshaw et al 1995, Davis and Lowe 1997, Almaguer 1994, Espiritu 1992).

To summarize the racial formation approach: (*a*) It views the meaning of race and the content of racial identities as unstable and politically contested; (*b*) It understands racial formation as the intersection/conflict of racial "projects" that combine representational/discursive elements with structural/institutional ones; (*c*) It sees these intersections as iterative sequences of interpretations (articulations) of the meaning of race that are open to many types of agency, from the individual to the organizational, from the local to the global.

If we are to understand the changing significance of race at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we must develop a more effective theory of race. The racial formation perspective at least suggests some directions in which such a theory should be pursued. As in the past, racial theory today is shaped by the large-scale sociopolitical processes it is called upon to explain. Employing a racial formation perspective, it is possible to glimpse a pattern in present global racial dynamics.

That pattern looks something like the following: In the period during and after World War II an enormous challenge was posed to established systems of rule by racially defined social movements around the world. Although these movement challenges achieved some great gains and precipitated important reforms in state racial policy, neither the movements nor the reforms could be consolidated. At the end of the century the world as a whole, and various national societies as well, are far from overcoming the tenacious legacies of colonial rule, apartheid, and segregation. All still experience continuing confusion, anxiety, and contention about race. Yet the legacies of epochal struggles for freedom, democracy, and human rights persist as well.

Despite the enormous vicissitudes that demarcate and distinguish national conditions, historical developments, roles in the international market, political tendencies, and cultural norms, racial differences often operate as they did in centuries past: as a way of restricting the political influence, not just of racially subordinated groups, but of all those at the bottom end of the system of social stratification. In the contemporary era, racial beliefs and practices have become far more contradictory and complex. The old world racial order has not disappeared, but it has been seriously disrupted and changed. The legacy of democratic, racially oriented movements[22] and anticolonialist initiatives throughout the world's South, remains a force to be reckoned with. But the incorporative (or if one prefers this term, hegemonic) effects of decades of reform-oriented state racial policies have had a profound effect as well: They have removed much of the motivation for sustained, anti-racist mobilization.

In this unresolved situation, it is unlikely that attempts to address worldwide dilemmas of race and racism by ignoring or transcending these themes, for example by adopting so-called colorblind or differentialist policies, will have much effect. In the past the centrality of race deeply determined the economic, political, and cultural configuration of the modern world. Although recent decades have seen a

[22]For example, the US civil rights movement, anti-apartheid struggles, *SOS-Racisme* in France, the *Movimento Negro Unificado* in Brazil.

tremendous efflorescence of movements for racial equality and justice, the legacies of centuries of racial oppression have not been overcome. Nor is a vision of racial justice fully worked out. Certainly the idea that such justice has already been largely achieved—as seen in the "colorblind" paradigm in the United States, the "non-racialist" rhetoric of the South African Freedom Charter, the Brazilian rhetoric of "racial democracy," or the emerging "racial differentialism" of the European Union—remains problematic.

Will race ever be transcended? Will the world ever get beyond race? Probably not. But the entire world still has a chance of overcoming the stratification, the hierarchy, the taken-for-granted injustice and inhumanity that so often accompanies the race concept. Like religion or language, race can be accepted as part of the spectrum of the human condition, while it is simultaneously and categorically resisted as a means of stratifying national or global societies. Nothing is more essential in the effort to reinforce democratic commitments, not to mention global survival and prosperity, as we enter a new millennium.

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The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory[1]

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Primordialist and constructivist authors have debated the nature of ethnicity "as such" and therefore failed to explain why its characteristics vary so dramatically across cases, displaying different degrees of social closure, political salience, cultural distinctiveness, and historical stability. The author introduces a multilevel process theory to understand how these characteristics are generated and transformed over time. The theory assumes that ethnic boundaries are the outcome of the classificatory struggles and negotiations between actors situated in a social field. Three characteristics of a field—the institutional order, distribution of power, and political networks—determine which actors will adopt which strategy of ethnic boundary making. The author then discusses the conditions under which these negotiations will lead to a shared understanding of the location and meaning of boundaries. The nature of this consensus explains the particular characteristics of an ethnic boundary. A final section identifies endogenous and exogenous mechanisms of change.

TOWARD A COMPARATIVE SOCIOLOGY OF ETHNIC BOUNDARIES

Beyond Constructivism

The comparative study of ethnicity rests firmly on the ground established by Fredrik Barth (1969*b*) in his well-known introduction to a collection

[1] Various versions of this article were presented at UCLA's Department of Sociology, the Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Studies of the University of Osnabrück, Harvard's Center for European Studies, the Center for Comparative Research of Yale University, the Association for the Study of Ethnicity at the London School of Economics, the Center for Ethnicity and Citizenship of the University of Bristol, the Department of Political Science and International Relations of University College Dublin, and the Department of Sociology of the University of Göttingen. For helpful comments and challenging critiques, I should like to thank Klaus Bade, Fredrik Barth, Michael Bommes, John Breuilly, Rogers Brubaker, Marian Cadogan, Hartmut Esser, Jon Fox, Matteo Fumigalli, Nazgol Ghandnoosh, Philip Gorski, Wesley Hiers, John Hutchinson, Eric Kaufmann, Matthias König, Sinisa Malesevic, Tariq Modood,

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of ethnographic case studies. Barth broke away from the Herderian canon in anthropology, according to which each ethnic group represented a historically grown, uniquely shaped flower in the garden of human cultures.[2] Instead of studying each of these cultures in a separate ethnography, Barth and his collaborators observed how the boundaries between two ethnic groups are maintained, even though their cultures might be indistinguishable and even though individuals and groups might switch from one side of the boundary to the other. Barth's approach to ethnicity thus no longer resembled an exercise in Linnean taxonomy but in social ecology.

Barth pioneered what later became known as "constructivism": the claim that ethnicity is the product of a social process rather than a cultural given, made and remade rather than taken for granted, chosen depending on circumstances rather than ascribed through birth. In the following two decades, prolonged battles emerged between devotees of this constructivist perspective and adherents to older views that were more in line with Herderian notions of the binding power of ethnicity and culture. This debate has often been framed in dichotomous terms: "primordialism," which underlined that ethnic membership was acquired through birth and thus represented a "given" characteristic of the social world, was pitted against "instrumentalism," which maintained that individuals choose between various identities according to self-interest. "Essentialism" was opposed to "situationalism," the former privileging the transcontextual stability provided by ethnic cultures while the latter showed how individuals identify with different ethnic categories depending on the logic of the situation. "Modernists" attributed the salience of ethnicity to the rise of the modern nation-state, while "perennialists" insisted that ethnicity represented one of the most stable principles of social organization in human history. Scholars who insisted on the subjectively felt reality and deeply rooted character of ethnic "identity" argued against those for whom ethnic distinctions were primarily driven by the changing "interests" of individual or collective actors.[3]

Orlando Patterson, Abigail Saguy, Peter Stamatov, Paul Statham, Art Stinchcombe, Ivan Szelenyi, Yasuko Takezawa, Eddie Telles, Jennifer Todd, Sarah Zingg, and Lynne Zucker. Special thanks go to Michèle Lamont, whose invitation to a conference provided the initial stimulus for writing this article and who continued to support the project through its various phases. All errors of fact and thought unfortunately remain my sole responsibility. Direct correspondence to Andreas Wimmer, Department of Sociology, 264 Haines Hall, University of California, Los Angeles, California, 90095. E-mail: awimmer@soc.ucla.edu

[2] See Herder ([1784] 1968). On Herder's influence on the contemporary study of ethnicity see Wimmer (in press).

[3] These binary oppositions appeared in various constellations and combinations. In the eyes of some, they aligned along a grand battle line separating constructivist-instrumentalist-circumstantialist-interest approaches from the essentialist-primordial-

This article attempts to transcend these debates.[4] I argue that the empirical and analytical questions that they raise cannot be solved by definitional ontology—by trying to find out what ethnicity "really is." The past decades have produced an impressive variety of case studies in which we find examples that fit—and contradict—any of the positions summarized above, as will be shown in the following section. The definitional debates may have diverted our efforts away from understanding why ethnicity appears in such variable forms. While there is a substantial body of work illustrating the contrasting properties of ethnic, national, or racial boundaries across usually two or three examples, little has been done to explain the entire range of empirically documented variation through comparative theory building and research. This article is certainly not a successful execution of this task; rather, it is intended as a substantial beginning and as an invitation to other scholars to further advance this agenda.

The article makes a twofold contribution to this project. First, it offers a systematic description of the wide variety of ethnic constellations that empirical research has brought to light and shows that none of the existing comparative hypotheses suffices to make sense of these differences. Four principal dimensions of variation are identified: different degrees of political salience of ethnic boundaries, of social closure and exclusion along ethnic lines, of cultural differentiation between groups, and of stability over time.

Second, I outline an analytically more sophisticated and empirically more promising theory designed to explain why the process of ethnic group formation produces such different outcomes. The model leads from the macrostructural level to the agency of individuals and aggregates their actions back to the macrostructural level. It thus represents a dynamic

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ist-perennialist-identity position. However, some debates crisscrossed this divide. For example, constructivists who emphasized individual choice and economic interests argued with other constructivists who conceived identity formation as a collective process.

[4] During the 1980s, various attempts were made at reconciling these positions and arriving at a theoretical synthesis (McKay 1982; Bentley 1987; Keyes 1981; G. Scott 1990; Nagata 1981). The mainstream debate, however, continued to oscillate between the various pairs of oppositions. By the end of the 1990s, constructivism had gained the upper hand over essentialism, instrumentalism over primordialism, and circumstantialism over perennialism. Contrary positions are still expressed today and with much more sophistication than in decades before (see Roosens 1994; Hirschfeld 1996; Gil-White 1999, 2001) but seem to be no longer in control of mainstream discourse. Routine references to the "constructed," "changing," and "power-driven" character of ethnicity that one finds in today's literature illustrate the contemporary hegemony of constructivism. Primordialism, essentialism, and perennialism have, however, survived in unacknowledged form in some ethnic studies departments and in migration studies (Wimmer, 2007) as well as in conflict research (Brubaker 2004).

process theory focused on how social forms are generated and transformed over time. In a nutshell, the model explains the varying features of ethnic boundaries as the result of the negotiations between actors whose strategies are shaped by the characteristics of the social field. It proceeds through four steps, each corresponding to a separate section.

In a preliminary step, I provide an inventory of possible strategies of ethnic boundary making that individual and collective actors might pursue. In a second step, I discuss three characteristics of social fields that explain which actors will pursue which strategies (the macrostructural level): (1) the institutional framework determines which types of boundaries—ethnic, social class, gender, villages, or others—can be drawn in a meaningful and acceptable way in a particular social field; (2) the position in a hierarchy of power defines the interests according to which actors choose between different possible levels of ethnic differentiation; (3) who exactly will be included in the actor's own ethnic category depends on the structure of her political alliances. In the third step, I explain how the ensuing classificatory and political struggles between actors advocating different ethnic categories may lead to a more or less encompassing consensus over the topography, character, and rightful consequences of boundaries (the agency level). Finally, it is shown that the nature of this consensus explains the characteristics of ethnic boundaries: their varying degrees of political salience, social closure, cultural differentiation, and historical stability (leading back to the structural level).

This multilevel process model of ethnic boundary making represents, to the best of my knowledge, the first attempt at systematically explaining the varying character and consequences of ethnic boundaries. It thus goes beyond the dominant approaches in comparative ethnicity that either try to get at the nature of the ethnic phenomenon "as such," develop static typologies of different ethnic configurations, or outline in broad strokes the world historical forces that have given ethnic, racial, or national divisions their current significance.

Defining the Field

Following the tradition established by Max Weber ([1922] 1985, p. 237), I define ethnicity as a subjectively felt sense of belonging based on the belief in shared culture and common ancestry. This believe refers to cultural practices perceived as "typical" for the community, to myths of a common historical origin, or to phenotypical similarities (see Weber 1978, pp. 385–98; Schermerhorn 1970; Erikson 1993; Jenkins 1997; Cornell and Hartman 1998). In this broad understanding of ethnicity, "race" is treated

as a subtype of ethnicity,[5] as is nationhood: if phenotypical features are used as indicators of group membership, we speak of ethnosomatic groups; if members of an ethnic community have developed nationalist aspirations and demand (or control) a state of their own, we describe such categories and groups as nations (Jenkins 1997, chap. 6; Weber 1978, pp. 921–26; Smith 1986). Further subtypes of ethnicity can be distinguished depending on the type of markers that are used to substantiate the belief in shared culture and ancestry, most importantly ethnoreligious, ethnoregional, and ethnolinguistic categories and groups.

Subsuming "race" under "ethnicity" runs against the folk use of these terms in the United States. "Race" is associated with African-Americans, while "ethnicity" commonly refers to the less consequential distinctions among the dominant "white" group based on different European countries of origin. From W. Lloyd Warner's "Yankee City" studies onward (Sollors 1986, pp. 21–23), mainstream American sociology treated "race" and "ethnicity" as phenomena of a different order (see van den Berghe 1991; Feagin and Feagin 1993; Omi and Winant 1994; Bonilla-Silva 1999; Cornell and Hartman 1998), reflecting the dramatically different fate that the descendents of African slaves and European immigrants experienced over the past two centuries. While using a terminology that contradicts domestic common sense is inconvenient, adopting this common sense for comparative purposes would be even more problematic (see Loveman 1997; Kivisto 2003).

First, treating race as fundamentally different from ethnicity overlooks the fact that one and the same group of individuals might be treated as a race at one point in history and as another type of ethnic category at another: in the 16th and 17th centuries, African slaves in the United States were primarily defined as pagans, and their English masters as Christians. Only after about 1680 was this ethnoreligious distinction gradually replaced by the ethnosomatic differentiation between "white" and "Negro" (Jordan 1968). Second, phenotypical differences are often evoked as one among *other* markers of ethnic distinction, as the racialization of ethnicity in Rwanda and Burundi and many other contexts with a history of ethnic violence shows. Third, distinguishing between race as fixed, imposed, and exclusionary, on the one hand, and ethnicity as fluid, self-ascribed, and voluntary, on the other hand, would not do justice to constellations (such as among Serbs in Kosovo, Albanians in Serbia) where ethnic groups experience degrees of forced segregation, exclusion, and domination usually associated with race. Thus, there is no clear-cut line between eth-

[5] The list of authors who define race as a special case of ethnicity includes Gordon (1964); Wallman (1986, p. 229); Sollors (1991, chap. 1); Anthias (1992); Loveman (1997); Patterson (1997, p. 173); Nagel (2003, chap. 2); and Banton (2003).

nosomatic and other types of ethnicity that would justify establishing entirely separate objects of analysis to be addressed with different analytical tools.

Perhaps it is useful to briefly address the political worries that seem to motivate opponents of an encompassing definition in the United States. They argue that subsuming race as a particular form of ethnicity is part of a sinister neoconservative agenda (Omi and Winant 1994, chap. 1) meant to negate the role that racist ideologies have played in the colonization of the world and to deny that racial exclusion might be relevant in contemporary U.S. society and beyond (Bonilla-Silva 1999, p. 899; Winant 2000, p. 179). However, an encompassing definition does not imply that race no longer matters in the United States. Quite to the contrary, it allows one to see *how much* it matters by situating the U.S. case in a comparative horizon. Within that horizon, we will find societies with phenotypical variation among the population but without racialized groups (Sanjek 1996, p. 5–6; Horowitz 1971), societies without phenotypical variation but racially defined groups in stark opposition to each other,[6] and nonracialized systems of ethnic differentiation that are as exclusionary as race is in the United States. An encompassing definition not only allows us to situate the U.S. experience better but also prevents us from misinterpreting the specific ethnosomatic order of this particular society as a universal form of social organization and then projecting this form onto other societies across the globe (see the *philippica* of Bourdieu and Wacquant [1999]; Bonnett 2006).

Having defended my definition of ethnicity, I will elaborate briefly on the notion of boundary used in this article. A boundary displays both a categorical and a social or behavioral dimension. The former refers to acts of social classification and collective representation; the latter to everyday networks of relationships that result from individual acts of connecting and distancing. On the individual level, the categorical and the behavioral aspects appear as two cognitive schemes. One divides the social world into social groups—into "us" and "them"—and the other offers scripts of action—how to relate to individuals classified as "us" and "them" under given circumstances. Only when the two schemes coincide, when ways of seeing the world correspond to ways of acting in the world, shall I speak of a social boundary.[7]

[6] See the distinction between "red humans" and "white humans" among the Rendille described by Schlee (2006, p. 82).

[7] The best discussion of the relationship between the two dimensions of ethnicity is still Mitchell (1974); with regard to the boundary concept in general, see Lamont (1992, chap. 1). An example of a categorical distinction with few behavioral consequences is the sharp moral boundary most contemporary Americans draw against atheists (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartman 2006).

A further clarification might be necessary in order to avoid a potential misunderstanding. The concept of boundary does not necessarily imply that the world is composed of sharply bounded groups. As I will show below, ethnic distinctions may be fuzzy and boundaries soft, with unclear demarcations and few social consequences, allowing individuals to maintain membership in several categories or switch identities situationally. The concept of boundary does not imply closure and clarity, which vary in degree from one society, social situation, or institutional context to another. It represents one of the foremost tasks of the comparative study of ethnicity to account for such varying degrees of boundedness.

FOUR DIMENSIONS OF VARIATION

The past decades of research have produced hundreds of ethnographic studies, contrasting case comparisons, and historiographies of ethnic groups and boundaries. Seen together, they offer a breathtaking panorama on a variety of ethnic forms. Here, I review and organize this literature by outlining four dimensions of variation along which an individual case could be situated.[8] Each will bring to light different empirical and analytical challenges that the comparative study of ethnicity has so far failed to address in a systematic way.

The Political Salience of Boundaries

The first challenge is to understand why some ethnic boundaries are politically salient while others are not. When boundaries are salient, political alliances are more likely to be formed between coethnics than between individuals on opposite sides of a boundary. In Switzerland, for example, not a single political party, trade union, or major civil society organization is organized on the basis of language (Wimmer 2002, chap. 8). In Northern Ireland, by contrast, politics is conceived as a matter of ethnoreligious power relations, and political loyalties rarely cross the ethnoreligious divide. How are we to explain comparatively such varying degrees of political salience?

This question is relevant not only from a comparative perspective but also from a case study point of view because many systems of ethnic classification are of a multilevel character: they comprise several nested segments of differentiation—in contrast, for example, to gender classifi-

[8] For other attempts at laying out the dimensions of variability in ethnic forms, see Horowitz (1971); Cohen (1981); Shibutani and Kwan (1965, pp. 48–51). Arthur Stinchcombe (2006) recently described general forms of variation in the features of social boundaries.

cations or ranked social estates—all of which might become the main focus of political loyalty. The following example illustrates this widespread feature of ethnicity. A Southern Californian may identify as Blue Hmong as opposed to White Hmong, as Hmong in opposition to other persons of Vietnamese origin, as Vietnamese in contrast to other Asian nationalities, as Asian-American in opposition to African-Americans and Euro-Americans, or as American from a global perspective.[9] Which of these potential lines of cleavage will be politically relevant, and which ones will not?

Several attempts have been made to address the salience question. The "situationalist" approach, developed by anthropologists working in complex, "plural" societies (Okamura 1981, but see also Galaty 1982),[10] offers a straightforward answer: the salience of the various levels of differentiation depends on the logic of the situation and the characteristics of the persons interacting. Thus, in the example above, a political activist will emphasize his Blue Hmong identity when struggling with White Hmongs over which group's cultural heritage will be recognized by the Californian government. When traveling in Europe, he will be treated as and identify with "being" American and will have to defend the foreign policy of "his" government.

However, there are social forces beyond those emerging from specific social contexts that make certain levels of categorical distinction more important than others for a person's overall life chances. Whatever the situational relevance of a Blue-White Hmong boundary, a person's assignment to the racialized category of "Asian" will be more important for college officers when they decide whom to admit to their programs or for political entrepreneurs who design electoral strategies—even if his personal identity may situationally be defined in other terms (Kibria 2002, chap. 3). Following Despres (1975) and others in the pluralist school, we may thus want to identify those categorical cleavages that are the most consequential and salient for the overall structuring of political relations in a society. The framework outlined in later sections will identify these social forces—institutions, power, and networks—that are most likely to produce such effects of "structuration," to borrow Anthony Gidden's term.

A second approach derives the salience of ethnic categories from the dynamics of economic competition. Ethnic boundaries that correspond to groups in competition on the labor market will be politically more relevant

[9] For a discussion of this aspect of ethnicity, see Moerman (1965); Keyes (1976); Okamura (1981); Galaty (1982); Jenkins (1997); Brubaker (2004, chap. 2); Waters (1990, pp. 52–58).

[10] Compare also the "contextualist" arguments in Cornell and Hartman (1998, chap. 6); Jenkins (1997, pp. 63–70).

than those that cut across lines of economic interest. This solution to the salience problem is at the core of the only genuinely comparative tradition in the field of ethnic studies, stretching from Abner Cohen's work in the 1970s to Amy Chua's recent best-seller (see Cohen 1974; Patterson 1975; Banton 1983; Bonacich 1974; O'Sullivan 1986; Olzak and Nagel 1986; Chua 2004; Chai 1996, 2005). Competition theory indeed helps to understand the situation of trading minorities for which ethnic networks represent a considerable advantage in the provision of cheap credit and labor (see Landa 1981; Ward and Jenkins 1984; Boissevain et al. 1990; Wintrobe 1995). The broader claims, however, proved to be problematic. The economic structures of labor markets are poor predictors of where the most salient fault lines in the ethnic landscape come to lie, as the following two examples illustrate.

Olzak (1993) studied U.S. cities during the high tide of immigration before World War I, to confirm the competition argument. However, increasing job segregation and reduced competition between African-American immigrants from the South and the established labor force did not decrease the salience of the black-white boundary. Quite to the contrary, most of the violence was directed against black migrants rather than those from Europe (Lieberson 1980), even though it was the latter who increasingly competed for the same jobs as local Euro-Americans.[11] A recent study by Dina Okamoto (2003) also finds results that directly contradict the predictions of competition theory: higher degrees of occupational segregation between Asian-Americans and others *in*creases the likelihood of pan-Asian mobilization, while more competition *de*creases such mobilization.

It seems that economic competition theory does not help to understand who is seen as a legitimate competitor and who is not. The dynamic of ethnic boundary formation follows a *political* logic that cannot be derived in any straightforward way from economic incentive structures.[12] More often than not, the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate competitors in the economic field maps onto that between national majority and minority—a thesis to which I will return.

A third answer to the problem of salience is provided by scholars who believe that the visibility of ethnic markers determines which cleavage will be the most relevant for social interactions and political life. Various authors (Hale 2004; van den Berghe 1997) have maintained that differ-

[11] For more extensive empirical critiques of the competition argument, see Horowitz (1985, pp. 105–35) regarding the trading minority model and Bélanger and Pinard (1991) and Wimmer (2000) regarding labor market competition theory.

[12] This point has been made by Bélanger and Pinard (1991) and by Espiritu (1992, chap. 1).

ences in physical appearance are more likely to be used to draw boundaries because they are easy to recognize and thus cognitively economical. According to another group of authors, racialized boundaries originated in colonial conquest, slavery, and postemancipation segregation and thus will be more politically salient than the less exclusionary boundaries between ethnic groups (Isaac 1967; Omi and Winant 1994; Bonilla-Silva 1996; Cornell and Hartman 1998). This is certainly a reasonable assessment of the contemporary situation in the United States—but it proves to be difficult to generalize once we enlarge the horizon both historically and cross-nationally.[13]

In the history of American ethnic and race relations, groups such as Jews (Saks 1994), Irish (Ignatiev 1995), and Italians (Guglielmo 2003) that were once considered to be phenotypically ambivalent and probably even belonging to other "races" are now considered "white" ethnics. The perception of racial difference and associated practices of racial discrimination seem to shift over time and do not depend on "objective" phenotypical appearance alone. In other plantation societies of the New World that do not know the American "one drop rule," the location of boundaries on the somatic continuum varies even more. In Puerto Rico, the definition of "white" expanded considerably over time to include individuals of "mixed" background previously considered "colored" (Loveman and Muniz 2006). In Brazil, the classification of similar-looking individuals into ethnosomatic types varies according to a number of contextual factors (Sansone 2003, chap. 1). In Colombia, people with the same somatic features might be "black" in one region of the country (Wade 1995) but not in another (Streicker 1995). The difficulties of deriving the salience of boundaries from "racial" differences appear even more clearly if we compare across societies. As Hoetink noticed some time ago, "one and the same person may be considered white in the Dominican Republic or Puerto Rico, . . . 'coloured' in Jamaica, Martinique or Curaçao . . . [and] may be called a 'Negro' in Georgia" (Hoetink 1967, p. xii).

Social Closure and "Groupness"

A second challenge is to understand which ethnic boundaries are relevant for the structures of social networks and the access to resources that they enable. Some ethnic groups have firmly closed themselves off against outsiders. In other cases, relationships flow easily across ethnic boundaries. Sometimes, ethnic boundaries are associated with high levels of discrimination and exclusion; sometimes they do not matter for hiring and firing, marrying and divorcing, befriending and feuding. What is the best way

[13] The best discussion of this remains Horowitz (1971, pp. 240–44).

to organize and describe such various social consequences of ethnicity? Richard Jenkins (1994) proposes to distinguish between an ethnic category, which may be entirely imposed by powerful outsiders and is associated with high degrees of discrimination and exclusion, and an "ethnic group" based on self-identification and a shared sense of belonging.[14]

However, the distinction between group and category is not one of principle, as Jenkins notices, because imposed categories may over time be accepted as a category of self-identification and thus transformed into a group. The black-white divide in U.S. society, to give an example, has been reproduced despite immigration from countries where other modes of classification prevail. Second-generation immigrants from Cape Verde (Ito Adler), Haiti (Woldemikael 1989), and working-class children of West Indian immigrants living in innercity neighborhoods (Waters 1999) come to identify with the imposed category of "black"—while their parents still vehemently emphasized their national identity in order to counter the stigma of "blackness."[15]

If ethnicity can be both a category—imposed by outsiders—and a group—embraced by its members—a dichotomous distinction obviously looses its value. We might want to replace it with a continous variable. A good starting point is Max Weber's discussion of ethnic group formation as a process of social closure (cf. Loveman 1997). High degrees of closure imply that a boundary cannot be easily crossed and that it is consequential for everyday life because it denies access to the resources that have been monopolized by the dominant group.[16] Social closure does not occur exclusively in such hierarchical relationships, however, but may be of a more symmetric nature, as when Indian peasant villages in Mexico each control their own piece of communal land and deny access to outsiders (Wolf 1957). To be sure, social closure is not a universal feature of ethnic

[14] On the distinction between group and category (i.e., individuals sharing an ethnic trait), see also McKay and Lewis (1978). A Nepalese example nicely illustrates what Jenkins means by ethnic category: "The majority of Rajopadhyaya Brahmans of the Katmandu valley," Gellner writes, "do not today see themselves as Newars, do not call themselves Newars, do not speak Newar to their children, and to not support Newar ethnic activism. Yet they are seen as Newars by many others, an identification . . . which they themselves reject" (Gellner 2001, p. 6).

[15] The mechanisms that lead to the "internalization" of imposed boundaries are well known from social psychology. Several studies have shown that low-status group members are more likely to identify with their own category when the boundaries are perceived as impermeable (Mummendey et al. 1999); another line of work demonstrates that high prejudice leads to more identification with one's group as a first step of establishing a positive self-concept (Branscombe, Schmitt, and Hervey 1999).

[16] In such contexts, the theory of "identity choice," as developed by Patterson (1975), Lustick (2000), or Laitin (1995*a*), is of little help, because the choices by individuals placed in subordinate categories are much less consequential for their own lives than the ones made by more powerful actors.

group boundaries. The literature offers a range of ethnographic examples where no such closure has occurred and where permeable boundaries are of little consequence for access to resources.[17] We are thus well advised to distinguish between different degrees of closure and to try to understand under which conditions these emerge.

Another dimension of variation follows from this. Depending on the degree of closure, ethnic boundaries may or may not separate "groups" in the sociological sense of the term, implying widely shared agreement on who belongs to which category, as well as some minimal degree of social cohesion and capacity for collective action. Ignoring this variability, many authors have fallen back into a "groupist" default language, to use Rogers Brubaker's term (Brubaker 2004). These authors *assume*, rather than demonstrate, that an ethnic category represents an actor with a single purpose and shared outlook.[18] Such ontological collectivism overlooks, however, that ethnic categories may shift contextually and that there might be substantial disagreement among individuals over which ones are the most appropriate and relevant ethnic labels.[19] The list of well-documented examples is quite long.[20] In such contexts, we may well speak of "ethnicity without groups" (Brubaker 2004) or ethnicity without boundaries. Moerman's description of the fluid, fuzzy, and overlapping modes

[17] On the identity choice among white Americans, see Waters (1990); for the back and forth switching between Tatar and Bashktiar categories in Tatarstan, see Gorenburg (1999); for the change of self-identification in Latin America, see Lancester (1991) and Wade (1995).

[18] See also the critique by Chai (1996).

[19] For a recent example of "groupist" analysis, see Ross (2001).

[20] Gorenburg (2000) reports that the identification with Tartar nationalism varies across occupational groups; Sanjek (1981) describes how individuals group tribal-ethnic categories in different ways in urban Ghana; according to Starr (1978), who did research in prewar Beirut, the classification of an individual depends on the context of interaction and the ethnic characteristics of the classifying person; Levine (1987) reports how different systems of ethnic and caste classifications in Nepal may be used in different contexts; Berreman (1972) arrived at similar findings regarding ethnic and caste classification in North India; Labelle (1987) shows that the use of ethnoracial labels in Haiti varied, among other things, by social class; in Nicaragua, it depends on how formal the situation of interaction is (Lancester 1991); Harris's (1980, chap. 5) research in Brazil found widespread disagreement in the use of ethnoracial categories for the same persons and even different classifications for siblings; research by Landale and Oropesa (2002) highlights the varied strategies of self-identification of Puerto Ricans in the United States. To make things even more complex, some ethnographic studies have shown that even the self-classification by individuals may be context dependent and variable (e.g., Jiménez [2004] on contemporary Californians of Mexican and "white" parentage; Campbell, Lee, and Elliott [2002] on northeastern China under the Qings; Nagata [1974] on urban Malaysia; Mayer [1962] on rural migrants in urban South Africa; Waters [1990, pp. 36–38] on suburban white ethnics in the United States; Russell [1997] on the Yahka of East Nepal).

of ethnic classification in northern Thailand represents the locus classicus for this assertion (Moerman 1965).

I would like to note, again, that these examples represent one end of a continuum only. An equally diverse sample could be cited as support for the opposite proposition: that ethnic boundaries are drawn unambiguously, are relevant for many different domains of everyday life, are agreed upon by a vast majority of individuals, and form the basis for collective action and resource mobilization. In Gil-White's example from Mongolia, there is little disagreement among his interviewees that a Mongol is a Mongol even if born from a Kazah mother and brought up among Kazahs (Gil-White 1999).[21] Northern Ireland could be cited as another society where variation in the use of ethnoreligious categories is rather limited, the consequence of a long history of segregation, endogamy, and conflict (Ruane and Todd 1996).[22] Various scholars have observed that classificatory variability and ambiguity are greatly reduced through violence and war (most explicitly, Smith [1981] and Appadurai [1998]). "Who are the Albanians?" to paraphrase the title of Moerman's article, is maybe too easy a question to deserve an answer in present day Kosovo. Given this wide spectrum of variation, it is certainly useful to distinguish between various degrees of "groupness," as Jenkins (1997, p. 50) put it, and to attempt to explain these comparatively.[23]

Cultural Differentiation

Contrary to Barth's famed dictum that it is the boundary that matters in ethnic relations and not the "cultural stuff" they enclose (Barth 1969*b*, p. 15), a number of authors, including Barth (1994) himself some 30 years later, have noted that this stuff may indeed make a difference. In the landscape of cultural variation, to use a metaphor coined by Tim Ingold

[21] A similar argument centering around the notion of "participant's primordialism" is offered by Roosens (1994). His example are first-generation Spanish immigrants in the Netherlands.

[22] This does not preclude, obviously, a great deal of dissent over the meaning and political implications of those boundaries, as the Northern Ireland example illustrates. Ethnographic research shows that there is space for local negotiations over the implications of the religious divide in daily interactions (Harris 1972; Burton 1978). Individuals may blur one categorical dimension of the boundary (e.g., by associating with Catholics in a sports club), as long as they are straight on other dimensions (e.g., not dealing with anybody with open sympathies for the IRA).

[23] Allowing for the existence of ethnic groups does not imply ontological collectivism: they might be thought of as aggregate consequences of individual-level processes and mechanisms (see the discussion in Wimmer [2007]; for a useful distinction between ontological and methodological collectivism/individualism, see Hedström [2005, pp. 70–74]).

(1993), we may observe discontinuities and ruptures: a graben between tectonic plates, or an abrupt change in soil composition and vegetation, to push the geological metaphor. Ceteris paribus, we expect that ethnic boundaries will follow some of these more dramatic cultural ruptures, such as those brought about by long-distance migration or conquest.[24] We would indeed be surprised if first-generation Chinese merchants in Jamaica would *not* see themselves and be perceived by Afro-Caribbeans as ethnically different—at least among the first generation of immigrants.[25]

If cultural difference and ethnic boundaries do coincide in this way, they can reinforce each other in a two-way process. Cultural differentiation may make a boundary appear quasi natural and self-evident, while social closure along ethnic lines may reinforce such differences through the invention of new cultural diacritics,[26] such as when Chinese traders in Jamaica converted to Catholicism to set themselves apart from the rest of the population and stabilize the boundary (Patterson 1975).

However, this again only represents one end of a continuum. In other constellations, ethnic boundaries do not divide a population along obvious cultural lines but unite individuals who follow quite heterogeneous cultural practices. Examples include multilingual, multireligious national communities such as the Swiss who managed, to the bewilderment of observers such as Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill, Ernest Renan, Max Weber, and Karl Deutsch, to develop a strong sense of belonging and to draw sharp boundaries toward immigrants from neighboring countries (Wimmer 2002, chap. 8). Another example is the Maconde, who are perceived and perceive themselves as a distinct ethnic group despite vast cultural differences between migrants from Mozambique and town dwellers in Tanzania and despite the fact that they are divided into endogamous

[24] Max Weber saw migration and conquest as prime forces of ethnic group formation (Weber 1978, pp. 385–98; see also Keyes 1981). Schermerhorn (1970) adds the emergence of pariah groups and "indigenous isolates" in settler societies to the list of ethnicity generating dynamics.

[25] See the novel on a Chinese trader in Jamaica by Powell (1998); on the Chinese in Mississippi, see Loewen (1971).

[26] This argument has been made by different authors and in different analytical language. Bentley has used Bourdieu's habitus theory to explain why cultural differences easily—yet not automatically—translate into perceptions of ethnic difference (Bentley 1987; cf. also Wimmer 1994). Cornell argues that if an ethnic group's identity is primarily built around shared values, as opposed to shared interests, this culture may act as a "filter" for the perception of interests and thus influence the strategies of boundary maintenance (Cornell [1996]; cf. Barth [1994]; the filter argument can also be found in Keyes [1981]). Hale takes a cognitive perspective and argues, in a neo-Deutschean mode, that communication barriers such as those represented by language differences will make it more likely that individuals find the boundary meaningful and will use the corresponding linguistic markers as clues to make cognitive sense of the social world and reduce uncertainty (Hale 2004).

castes (Saetersdal 1999).[27] Finally, where ethnic boundaries originally *did* coincide with cultural difference, the boundary may nevertheless be blurred subsequently and eventually break down completely—such as among the Chinese in Guyana (Patterson 1975) or Cuba (Corbitt 1971) and countless other cases of assimilation.

Stability

A final challenge for the comparative understanding of ethnicity is that some groups and boundaries are tenacious and change only slowly, over the course of many generations, while in other contexts, substantial shifts in the ethnic landscape may occur during the lifespan of an individual.[28] It seems that ethnic boundaries cannot always be redefined or changed ad libitum, as radically constructivist interpretations of Barth's writings suggested. Following Katherine Verdery, we would be well advised to "situate the situationalims" of radical constructivism (Verdery 1994).

It seems that the degree of stability is linked to various modes of transmitting ethnic membership. The most stable boundaries are found among peoples who identify individuals through multigenerational, unilineal descent lines, such as among Mongols, Pathans, Jews (Gil-White 1999), and Germans. More unstable boundaries, one could argue, are those defined by behavioral, rather than genealogical, membership criteria. Among the Vezo of Madagascar, for example, one is considered "being Vezo" if one behaves like "a typical Vezo" and lives the lifestyle of "a Vezo," independent of the ethnic background of one's parents (Astuti 1995).[29]

Whatever the correlates are of more or less stable boundaries, the con-

[27] Other examples would include the Tat in Dagestan, which include Christian, Jewish, and Muslim sections; the Karen of Thailand and Burma, which comprise adherents of Protestantism, Catholicism, animist religions, Buddhism, and several syncretist religions (Keyes 1979); Kachin groups in northern Burma that speak Jinghpaw or Lisu (cf. Leach 1954), or the Hadiyya in Ethiopia which comprise Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic sections (Braukämper 2005).

[28] Examples are the melting away of "Yugoslavians" from the 1980s onward, the swelling of the ranks of self-identified Indians in the wake of the red power movement in the United States (Nagel 1995), the identity shifts between Han and Manchu in the eastern provinces of China under the Qing (Campbell et al. 2002), similar oscillations between Tatar and Baskir categories in central Russia during Soviet rule (Gorenburg 1999), and the spectacular spread of the Chetri caste in Nepal through intermarriage (Ramble 1997).

[29] This echoes the discussion of open vs. closed citizenship regimes, which allow for more or less easy naturalization of immigrants and thus more or less stable boundaries between nationals and foreigners. Access to citizenship is easier, it has been argued, when the nation is defined in terms of political behavior; national boundaries are more stable and impermeable, on the other hand, where membership is defined by ancestry (Brubaker 1992; Alba 2005).

trast between ethnic categories that perdured over thousands of years—the Jewish community being the most prominent example—and those that have been invented, adopted, and forgotten within a generation, such as the "Ciskeian nation" of the apartheid era (Anonymous 1989), is striking enough to ask for a comparative explanation.

Intellectual Genealogies

So far, I have shown that explaining different degrees of political salience, social closure, cultural differentiation, and historical stability represents a major challenge for the comparative sociology of ethnic group formation. I have also demonstrated that the existing literature offers little help in addressing this task. In what follows, I outline a theoretical framework that might represent a first step toward an analytically more sophisticated theory that allows one to explain the wide range of ethnic forms that the comparative literature has brought to light. The model draws inspiration from three research traditions.

The first goes back to Max Weber, who conceived ethnicity as a mode of drawing boundaries between individuals and thus creating social groups. This focus on group *making* stands in opposition to studies of "collective identity" in social psychology (cf. Le Vine and Campbell 1972, pt. 3; Scheff 1994) and of "group relations" in both sociology (Pettigrew 1980; Banton 1983) and social psychology (Dovidio, Glick, and Rudman 2005), which all take for granted that—rather than explain why—a society is divided along ethnic lines. The genealogy of this boundary and group-making approach leads from Weber to Fredrik Barth (1969*a*), Michèle Lamont (2000), Mara Loveman (1997), Richard Alba (2005), Charles Tilly (2006), and other contemporary writers.

The second tradition is the study of ethnicity as the outcome of a political and symbolic struggle over the categorical divisions of society. This line of research was initiated by political anthropologists of the Manchester school such as Boissevain, Turner, and others, and later canonized and popularized by Pierre Bourdieu (1991). Today, it includes Bentley (1987), Loïc Wacquant (1997), Rogers Brubaker (2004), Wimmer (1994, 2004), and many others who rely on Bourdieu's framework. Some anthropologists and historians work along similar lines but have adopted Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony (Mallon 1995; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Omi and Winant 1994), to be discussed later on in this essay. Both the Bourdieusian and the Gramscian strands developed largely as a response to, and in opposition to, a range of other theories that continued the Herderian line of thinking in conceiving ethnicity as an identity based on the shared culture and values of a group.

The third intellectual source for this project is the emerging institu-

tionalist tradition in the study of ethnic politics. Institutions provide incentives for actors to draw certain types of boundaries—ethnic rather than class or gender, for example—and to emphasize certain levels of ethnic differentiation rather than others. While some have emphasized macropolitical institutional transformations, such as the shift from indirect to direct rule (Hechter 2004) or the spread of the nation-state form (Brubaker 1996; Meyer et al. 1997; Wimmer and Min 2006), others have looked at mesolevel and microlevel institutional mechanisms that lead actors to emphasize certain ethnic boundaries over others (Posner 2005; Koopmans et al. 2005). This institutionalist approach contrasts with various microsociological traditions that see ethnic boundaries as "emerging" from the minutiae of cognition, action, or interaction, variously conceived as conversational encounters (as in the ethnomethodologist tradition pursued by Day [1998]), performative enactments (Sharp and Boonzaier 1994), rational choices (e.g., Kuran 1998) or the cognitive processing of information (Fryer and Jackson 2003).

ELEMENTARY STRATEGIES OF ETHNIC BOUNDARY MAKING

This article draws these three traditions of research together and integrates them into a unified theoretical framework. It derives the topography and character of ethnic boundaries from the institutional structures, the network of alliances, the distribution of power, and the dynamics of representational politics that they shape. The model is presented in several steps. The first one, to be undertaken in this section, consists of taking stock of the various possible strategies of ethnic boundary making that may be pursued by different actors in different social contexts. Summarizing a diverse empirical literature, I distinguish between five types of such strategies:[30] those that seek to establish a new boundary by expanding the range of people included; those that aim at reducing the range of the included by contracting boundaries; those that seek to change the meaning of an existing boundary by challenging the hierarchical ordering of ethnic categories; those that attempt crossing a boundary by changing one's own categorical membership; those that aim to overcome ethnic boundaries by emphasizing other, crosscutting social cleavages through what I call

[30] The typology has been inspired by Lamont and Bail's work on destigmatization strategies (Lamont and Bail 2005); Zolberg and Woon's (1999) distinction between boundary crossing, blurring, and shifting; and Donald Horowitz's (1975) discussion of amalgation, incorporation, division, and proliferation as strategies of categorical fusion and fission. In the sociopsychological literature on attitude change, a similar distinction between "de-categorization," "common ingroup identity," and "intergroup differentiation" is being made (Gonzalez and Brown 2003).

strategies of boundary blurring. In the following paragraphs, I present the bare bones of this typology, referring the reader to another article on the subject for more details (Wimmer 2007).

Shifting Boundaries through Expansion

Actors may create a more encompassing boundary by grouping existing categories into a new, expanded category. Examples from across the world at different levels of aggregation and from various historical periods can be found in the literature. Many modernizing empires have created, from the 18th century onward, larger ethnic minorities out of smaller groups in order to tighten and centralize the system of indirect rule over their subjects. Similarly, colonial authorities grouped various previously independent tribes and other local communities into larger ethnic entities, often by appointing chiefs or other representatives, as numerous works in colonial historiography have shown. Not all such strategies of minority making, it should be noted, have been successful in creating durable and salient boundaries.

Other examples of ethnogenesis come from newly nationalizing states after independence. Several of the ethnic categories that imperial administrations had created were further grouped into ethnoregional blocks by politicians who attempted, with varying success, to establish a larger political base in order to compete more successfully in the new national political arena, as a whole tradition of research in political anthropology has shown. Similarly, nationalizing states in the West have grouped various minorities into larger entities for the purpose of administration and—some would say—hegemonic control.

Perhaps the most consequential form of boundary expansion in the modern world is nation building: "making French" out of peasants, Provençales, and Normands; Brazilians out of whites, blacks, and browns; Jamaican Creoles out of Afro-Caribbeans, Europeans, and Chinese; and so forth. Not all such strategies, it should again be noted, have been successful.

Shifting Boundaries through Contraction

The opposite strategy is to promote narrower boundaries than those already established in the social landscape. Ethnic localism may be an especially attractive strategy for individuals and groups that do not have access to the centers of communication and whose radius of action remains confined to narrower geographic spaces. The indigenous groups of Mexico provide a good example. Their social world was once defined by imperial polities that had established wide areas of cultural commonality. After

conquest and the dismantlement of these empires and kingdoms, indigenous peasants started to draw an ethnic boundary separating their municipality, the new center of their political, social, and spiritual universe, from the rest of the world—a formidable symbolic weapon against the claims to exclusivity and cultural superiority that the Spanish-speaking elites made when distinguishing themselves as "gentes de razón" (people of reason) from the indigenous majority as "gentes naturales" (Wimmer 1995).

Another example of boundary contraction is the insistence, among middle-class, second-generation Chinese and Koreans in Los Angeles, that they should be referred to and treated as Chinese-Americans and Korean-Americans rather than lumped together under the term "Asian" (Kibria 2002)—similar to immigrants from the West Indies who fight for recognition as "Jamaicans" and "Trinidadians" in order to avoid being categorized as "black" (Waters 1999).

Inversion

In contrast to expansion and contraction, the strategy of normative inversion does not target the location of the boundary but the hierarchical ordering of ethnic groups. The category of the excluded and despised comes to designate a chosen people who are morally, physically, and culturally superior to the dominant group—the "Umwertung der Werte" (transvaluation) that Nietzsche so profoundly detested. Examples of normative inversion abound. The most widely known in the Western world is probably the cultural nationalism among African-Americans in the United States and the African nationalism in South Africa. To be sure, not all attempts at inversion were successful, and not all despised and dominated groups have developed such powerful political movements.

Repositioning

Repositioning describes a strategy in which the principles of hierarchy are not contested (as they are in normative inversion) nor are boundaries expanded or contracted. Rather, an actor seeks to change her own position within an existing hierarchical boundary system. Status change may be pursued individually or, much less often, by repositioning one's entire ethnic category within a multitiered hierarchy. Assimilation and passing are the main strategies for individuals to "shift sides" and escape a minority stigma. Both can be found in an enormous variety of social contexts, including among contemporary immigrant minorities, Jewish converts in 19th-century Europe, Dalit groups embracing Islam in prewar India, Mexican Indians after the revolution, and Polish workers in prewar Germany.

The best example of collective repositioning is perhaps what anthropologists have called "caste climbing." By adopting the lifestyle of the upper castes and strategically demanding certain *jajmani* services from members of other castes (a central feature of local caste systems), a group may slowly acquire a higher standing in the ritual hierarchy (Bailey 1969). Other examples are the Chinese of Mississippi who managed, although originally classified as nonwhite, to cross the caste boundary onto the other side (Loewen 1971).

Blurring Boundaries

Boundary blurring aims to overcome ethnicity as a principle of categorization and social organization altogether. Other, nonethnic principles are promoted in order to undermine the legitimacy of ethnic, national, or racial boundaries. Examples include such explicitly antinationalist organizations as the Communist International, radical Islamic movements that dream of the restoration of a supranational caliphate, some forms of transnational and transethnic feminism, as well as less organized, less politically salient forms of boundary blurring. Transethnic localism represents a good example for the latter, such as in Sophiatown in the 1950s, a township outside Johannesburg (Hannerz 1994). Africans, Jews, and immigrants had formed what they perceived as a cosmopolitan culture inspired by American Jazz, British fashion, and continental literary styles. They saw this urban lifestyle, at least in part, as a counterculture that would stand against the racial classification and segregation imposed by an emerging apartheid regime.

Emphasizing civilizational commonalities is another way to blur ethnic boundaries. Perhaps the most politically salient example is to underline membership in one of the world religions, especially Islam, Buddhism, or Christianity. Out of many possible cases, I may cite a recent study on British Pakistanis whose Muslim identity is more salient in daily life than the "Pakistani" category officially assigned to them by the state (Jacobson 1997). Similarly, Maghrebinian immigrants in France emphasize their membership in the *umma*, rather than their national origin or immigrant status (Lamont, Morning, and Mooney 2002).

Even more encompassing boundaries are drawn when individuals pursue what Lamont has called "universalizing" strategies. Universal moral qualities and membership in "the human family" are often evoked, so it seems, by the most excluded and stigmatized groups, such as working-class African-Americans (Lamont 2000) or African immigrants in France (Lamont, Morning, and Mooney2002), refugees from Kosovo in Central Europe (Karrer 2002, chap. 12), or Muslim caste groups in Hyderabad (Ali 2002).

INSTITUTIONS, POWER, AND NETWORKS

Actors are obviously not free to choose whatever strategy they like best—whether to "invert" the normative hierarchy or simply cross the boundary into the dominant group. In this section, I discuss three types of constraints that all derive from the structures of the social field within which actors are situated. They are constrained, first, by the institutional environment that makes it appear more plausible and attractive to draw certain types of boundaries—ethnic, class, regional, gender, tribal, or others. Second, the distribution of power defines an individual's interests and thus which level of ethnic differentiation will be considered most meaningful. Third, the network of political alliances will influence whom the boundaries will include and who will not be counted as "one of us."

Institutions

Institutional frameworks specify the historical context within which the dynamics of ethnic boundary making unfolds. Much has been written about world historical trends that have shaped these contexts: the colonization of the non-Western world, the racialization of its populations (Balibar 1988), and at the same time its division into ethnic domains (Mamdani 1996); the role of forced labor and slavery in the making of the Americas and the various ethnosomatic constellations that it produced (Patterson 2005); and the spread of the nation-state in the postcolonial era and the ways in which this has transformed the dynamics of ethnic politics (Wimmer and Min 2006). The model to be outlined here treats these world historical developments as exogenous. It focuses on how particular types of political institutions—whatever the macrohistorical processes that led to their emergence and global spread—shape the strategies of ethnic boundary making that actors pursue.

More specifically, I focus on the peculiarities of the institution of the nation-state, which dominates contemporary politics across the globe. An analysis of the incentives that it provides for ethnic politics offers a crucial starting point to understand why much of contemporary politics is about drawing, maintaining, and shifting the boundaries of ethnicity, race, or nationhood. This argument draws upon a growing tradition of research that looks at the interplay between nation building and the making of ethnic minorities (Young 1976; Williams 1989; Verdery 1994; Wimmer 2002; Mann 2005).

While it would be exaggerating to maintain that empires or premodern territorial states were not at all interested in shaping and policing ethnic boundaries, the change from empire to nation-state provided new incentives for state elites to pursue strategies of ethnic—as opposed to other

types of—boundary making.[31] On the one hand, the principle of ethnonational representativity of government—that like should rule over likes—became de rigueur for any legitimate state. It provided the main institutional incentives for state elites to systematically homogenize their subjects in cultural and ethnic terms, usually by expanding the boundaries of their own group and declaring their own ethnic background, culture, and language as forming the national pot into which everyone else should aspire to melt. On the other hand, the nation-state also needs to define its territorial boundaries in ethnic terms. The transethnic, universal principles of imperial rule—in the name of Allah, the spread of civilization, revolutionary progress—meant that the boundaries of a polity were never defined in ethnonational terms. In modern nation-states, however, only territories populated by the nation should be integrated into the polity. Defining the ethnic boundaries of the nation therefore is of central political importance, and state elites are encouraged to pursue the strategies of nation building and minority making outlined above.

The nation-state also provides institutional incentives for nonelites, especially political entrepreneurs among "ethnic minorities," to emphasize ethnic rather than other social divisions. The principle of ethnonational representativity can be "turned on its head" by applying it to the minorities themselves. Minorities can thus be transformed, through a strategy of normative inversion, into "nations" (Wimmer 1993). Evoking the logic of ethnonational representativity, they can demand an independent state for their own group or at least fair representation within an existing state—to have the minority culture respected and honored in national museums, to have its language recognized as an official idiom to be taught in schools and universities, and so forth.

For the population at large, the nation-states also provides incentives to pursue ethnic boundary-making strategies: majority members might discriminate against minorities in the day-to-day interactions on the job, marriage, and housing markets and feel justified, if not encouraged, to do so because they have become dignified as representing "the people" of a particular state and thus entitled to a privileged seat in the social theater. They might enforce the boundary toward minorities or encourage boundary expansion by assimilating minority members into the national family. Minorities are encouraged to cross the boundary into the national majority and pursue strategies of passing and assimilation that will overcome the consequences of the new structure of exclusion and discrimination or, to the contrary, to divert the stigma associated with their minority status

[31] I explore the relation between the nation-state and politicization of ethnicity in greater detail in *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflicts* (Wimmer 2002).

through boundary blurring, emphasizing the village, the continent, or humanity as the main focus of identity and source of human dignity.

The ethnic logic of the nation-state thus shapes the boundary-making strategies of many actors and comes to permeate many different social fields. The precise way in which the boundary between the nation and its various "others" are drawn varies substantially from society to society, as a large body of comparative research has shown (most recently Bail [in press]). The nature of this boundary then determines the kind of the claims that ethnic minorities make in the public domain. In Britain, the racialized boundaries of the nation are reflected in the ethnosomatic modes of self-identification by migrant organizations, while none of the migrant organizations in France portray their constituency as a "racial minority" but instead emphasize their status as politically and legally excluded. In the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland, national identities are more prevalent while "race" as an identifying marker is almost absent from the discursive repertoire of minority politics—conforming to the way the national majority defines its boundaries toward immigrant others (Koopmans et al. 2005, chap. 4).[32] The task remains to explain how these varying definitions of the national boundary came into being—a topic to be addressed in the remainder of this section.

Before we proceed, however, two qualifications are in order. The above does not imply that the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are drawn along ethnic or national lines in *all* institutional fields and in *all* situations (cf. Bommes 2004; Brubaker et al. 2007). In the emergency rooms of hospitals in the contemporary United States, to give an example, distinctions based on ethnicity, nationality, or race are considered inappropriate, while distinguishing between bodies with life-threatening and non-life-threatening injuries is part of the institutional routine. Outside emergency rooms, however, when it comes to the treatment of diseases that pose no threat to immediate survival, some hospitals may inquire about the legal status of Spanish-speaking immigrants (see, e.g., Preston 2006) or may give black patients less care than Anglo-American patients with similar health problems (Thomson 1997). It is a matter of empirical analysis to determine how far the ethnonational master scheme of modern society has penetrated these institutional domains in a particular case.

Second, other institutions also influence the dynamics of ethnic boundary making once modern nation-states have been established, producing further variation across cases. Democratization politicizes and deepens the boundary between national majority and ethnic minorities, as it provides additional incentives for politicians to appeal to the shared interest

[32] For other research that shows how ethnic claims making depends on institutionalized opportunity stuctures, see Ireland (1994) and Okamoto (2006).

of "the people" and unravel the machinations of its ethnic enemies (for evidence, see Mansfield and Snyder [2005]). The shift from one-party regimes to democratic multiparty governments may also entail incentives to emphasize other levels of ethnic differentiation hitherto of little political significance (Posner 2005). Similar effects can be observed when the institution of federalism is introduced (see the Ethiopian case study by Braukämper [2005]).[33]

Power

Thus, the institution of the nation-state provides strong incentives for elites and nonelites alike to emphasize ethnic rather than other types of boundaries, using the various strategies outlined above. But there are many different ways of drawing ethnic boundaries, because systems of ethnic classifications often entail various, segmentally nested levels of differentiation, as noted above. Which level of ethnic differentiation an individual will emphasize depends on her position in the hierarchies of power that the institutional order establishes. The effects of power are twofold.[34]

First, an actor will prefer that level of ethnic differentiation that is perceived to further her interests, given her endowment with economic, political, and symbolic resources. The best model to understand this process is the theory of frame selection offered by Hartmut Esser (Esser 2002; Kroneberg 2005). It describes how actors first choose a cognitive scheme appropriate to the institutional environment and conducive to their perceived interest and then the script of action most suitable to attain the goals defined by the scheme. Depending on information costs and the logic of the situation, both choices are made either in a fully conscious, reflexive mode of reasoning or in a semiautomated, spontaneous way. It should be underlined that in this model the perception of interests is not independent of the institutional environment and the cognitive frames that have already been routinized. I will discuss such path dependency effects later on in this article, focusing on the types of boundaries that are more likely to produce them.

[33] Supranational institutions provide other and sometimes contradicting sets of incentives. On the effects of European Union conditionality on minority politics in Eastern European candidate countries, see the literature cited in Kymlicka (2007, p. 41 n. 26). On the the political opportunities offered by the supranational indigenous rights regime, see Passy (1999).

[34] I define "power" by referring to the three Weberian/Bourdieusian dimensions of social stratification: economic assets and income, the possibility to influence other actor's choices even against their will (political power), and the "Kapital der Ehre," the honor and prestige associated with one's social standing.

But even where a particular ethnic boundary has already been established and routinized in everyday cognition and action, individuals have a choice between different interpretations and instantiations of the ethnic scheme. They will choose that particular version that allows them to claim an advantagous position vis-à-vis other individuals of the same ethnic category, as the following example illustrates. Michèle Lamont and her collaborators have accomplished a series of ethnographic studies on how African-Americans draw social boundaries in order to counter stigmatization and exclusion. Marketing specialists pursue a strategy of inversion by emphasizing the power of consumption and the "hipness" of black culture. They thus draw a line between insiders and outsiders that places themselves—as experts in the production and consumption of things fancy and as members of the black community—at the very top of the symbolic hierarchy (Lamont and Molnár 2001). The highly educated and successful upper-middle class, by contrast, stresses professional competence, intelligence, and achievement as criteria to identify the morally and socially superior—thus relying on the classic scheme of meritocracy to establish equality between "black" and "white" (Lamont and Fleming 2005). Finally, working-class African-Americans draw on religious universalism and underline the value of caring personalities to emphasize that they belong to the right side of the moral divide. Each of these groups thus interpretes the black-white categories in such a way as to give legitimacy to their own claims to moral worth and social standing and to place themselves at the top of the prestige pyramid.[35]

Second, the endowment with power resources not only determines which strategy of ethnic boundary making an individual will pursue but also how consequential this will be for others. Obviously enough, only those in control of the state apparatus can use the census and the law to enforce a certain boundary. Only those in control of the means of violence will be able to force their ethnic scheme of interpretation onto reality by killing "Catholics," "Shiites," or "Furs," or resettling "Tatars" and "Germans" à la Stalin, thus making Catholics, Shiites, Furs, Tatars, and Germans. Discrimination by those who control decisions over whom to hire, where to build roads, and to whom to give credit is much more consequential than the discriminatory practices of subordinate individuals and groups.

[35] Other examples could be cited to underline the point. Contrast the game of ethnic identity choice that white, middle-class suburbanites in the United States are playing (Waters 1990) with the rather anxious insistence on the relevance of the black racial divide among their working-class peers (Lamont 2000). Many studies have shown that educational background (or class status) explains most of the variance that we find in how sharply majority members draw a boundary toward minorities/immigrants (e.g., Betz 1994; Mugny et al. 1991; Semyonov et al. 2006).

However, we should not overstate the hegemonic power of dominant modes of ethnic boundary making. While powerful actors can make their vision of the social world publicly known and consequential for the lives of all, subordinates may develop counterdiscourses and other modes of dividing the social world into groups than those propagated by the dominant actors (cf. the notion of "hidden transcripts" by J. Scott [1990]). Sometimes an imposed category is countered by a strategy of boundary contraction: insisting on "being" Jamaican rather than black (Waters 1999), a Zinacanteco rather than Indio (Wasserstrom 1983). Sometimes boundary expansion is the answer: being Muslim rather than a Pakistani (Jacobson 1997) or a "child of God" rather than a black person (Lamont 2000). In still other contexts, boundary blurring is the counterhegemonic strategy of choice: checking the "other race" box on the U.S. census (Almaguer and Jung 1999).

To recognize the possibility and existence of such counterdiscourses—or of "resistance" in more romantic terms—is of crucial importance for the model that is being proposed here. It helps to avoid equating strategies of classification by powerful actors with the formation of groups in everyday life and thus allows a crucial question to be asked: under which conditions do subordinate actors pursue counterstrategies, and under which do they embrace the categorical distinction imposed upon them, thus transforming the category into a group and the classificatory distinction into a social boundary? I return to this question below.

Networks

Institutional frameworks and power differentials explain if and what strategies of ethnic boundary making actors will choose. They will adopt ethnic classifications—rather than distinguighing between classes, genders, religions, villages, tribes—if there are strong institutional incentives to do so, and they will choose that level of ethnic differentiation and that interpretation of an existing boundary that ensures that the individual is a full member of the category of worthy, righteous, and dignified. But *where* exactly will the boundaries between "us" and "others" be drawn? Which individuals will be classified to which ethnic groups? Here, networks of political alliances come into play, the third characteristic of social fields in the framework that I propose here.[36]

I hypothesize that the reach of political networks will determine where

[36] Such networks are in turn structured by the institutional framework (which defines who actors are and what kind of resources they may use to pursue which types of strategies) as well as the distribution of power (which influences the possibilities for forming stable alliances between persons with different resource endowments).

the boundaries between ethnic "us" and "them" will be drawn.[37] This can be illustrated with examples of nation building. The political alliances of state elites in the early periods of nation-state formation are most consequential for the location of the boundary between nation and minority, as the comparative literature shows. Anthony Marx (1999) explains how different constellations of conflict and alliance led to the inclusion of large sections of the population of African descent into Brazil's nation-building project and to their exclusion in the United States and South Africa. Modifying Marx's point slightly, we may argue as follows: when slavery was abolished and restricted forms of democracy introduced, Brazil's elite relied on an extensive network of clientelist ties stretching far into the intermediate class of mixed racial origin that had emerged in previous centuries. In the United States, however, this intermediate class was composed of Anglo-American peasants and tradesmen (Harris 1980, chap. 5), and no transracial political ties had previously developed. Accordingly, Brazil's new political elites aimed at integrating and mixing peoples of different racial origin,[38] while in the United States the nation was imagined as white and mixing conceived and treated as a *horribilum* to be avoided at all costs (Ringer 1983; Hollinger 2003).[39] The lack of well-established transracial political networks helps explain why nation building in America was set off against the "black" population as its *inner* other, rather than against the nation of competing neighboring states as in much of Europe.

Similar lessons can be drawn from a least similar case comparison involving Switzerland, Iraq, and Mexico (Wimmer 2002). It shows that the reach of elite political networks in the early days of nation-state formation determine which groups will be considered part of a national project. In Switzerland, the new political elite relied on already established civil society networks that stretched across French, German, and Italian-

[37] A related hypothesis plays an important role in social movement research. It has been shown that movements are mobilized along existing networks and that the relevant boundaries become salient also on the level of identity and categorization (Bearman 1993; Zelizer and Tilly, in press). That the boundaries of networks and ethnic categories coincide is one of the most important mechanisms explaining ethnic solidarity, as research in experimental economics has shown (Habyarimana et al. 2006).

[38] Similarily, such "transracial" political ties were formed during the wars of independence in Cuba (Helg 1995) and explain why the nation was imagined in a comparatively inclusive way.

[39] The Populist Party or the Readjuster coalition in Virginia that attempted to *build* a transracial political network from scratch failed to break the "white" transclass alliance established during the war and institutionalized within the Democratic Party. On the rise and fall of the Readjuster movement, see Dailey (2000); on the defeat of the Populist Party and the control of Democrats over the black vote, see Goodwyn (1978, pp. 187–200); Hicks ([1931] 1961, pp. 251–54).

speaking cantons when they mobilized a following to compete in the arena of electoral politics. This explains Switzerland's exceptional history of multiethnic nation building. Those networks were limited to a Creole-mestizo elite in newly independent Mexico, and the vast majority of the indigenous populations remained excluded from the nation-building project up until the Mexican Revolution. The segregation of political networks along ethnoreligious lines in preindependent Iraq prevented the rise of a popular Iraqi nationalism once the country was released from the colonial leash. No independent civil-society organizations were allowed under the Baath's ethnocratic dictatorship, and transethnic alliances like those that had formed from the 1940s onward within the Communist Party were destroyed. Once the American invasion led the Iraqi state to collapse, political alliances rarely crossed the ethnoreligious divides, and politics quickly became a matter of the balance of power between ethnoreligious blocks (Wimmer 2003).

STRUGGLING OVER BOUNDARIES: CONFLICT AND CONSENSUS

It follows from the previous analysis that different actors will pursue different strategies of boundary making, depending on their position in the hierarchies of power and the structure of their political networks. If they want their preferred ethnic classification to be accepted by others and the associated boundaries of inclusion and exclusion generally enforced and socially respected, they have to convince others of their view of society. They thus have to enter a negotiation process with other actors that may prefer other types of boundaries. We are now ready to consider this interactional dynamics and analyze under which conditions they may lead to a shared understanding of the location and meaning of ethnic boundaries. But how is such consensus possible between actors who pursue different strategies and are motivated by diverging interests?

The perhaps most prominent answer to this question is the one provided by scholars working in the (neo-)Gramscian tradition.[40] They assume that subordinates consent to the cultural models developed by elites, including categories of ethnic or national belonging, thus stabilizing the underlying system of political and economic domination. The precise ways in which this consent is conceptualized diverge widely, however, not least because of the many ambiguities in Gramsci's own writings (Anderson 1976). Some scholars emphasize the overwhelming definitional power of dominant actors. Subordinates passively receive and internalize hegemonic discourses,

[40] The Marxist tradition of conceiving such agreements as a sign of "false consciousness" (cf. Kasfir 1979) has now been abandoned. For attempts at transposing Bourdieu's habitus theory into the domain of ethnicity, see Bentley (1987) and Wimmer (1994).

thus leaving no room for autonomous agency. This interpreation of hegemony makes it impossible to understand why subordinates sometimes pursue counterhegemonic strategies such as boundary blurring, inversion, or crossing.[41] More promising are other followers of Gramsci, notably Roseberry (1994), Grandin (2000), and Mallon (1995), who underline the informed, partial, and strategic nature of consent by subordinates and show that elites are bound by the hegemonic accord as well, even if this may at times go against their immediate self-interest. In this interpretation, hegemony denotes a partial consensus between groups and individuals, which reflects a particular constellation of power and alliance.

This variant of neo-Gramscianism comes close to the theory of cultural compromise that I have developed elsewhere (Wimmer 2002, chap. 2; 2005). According to this theory, a consensus between individuals and groups endowed with different resources is more likely to emerge if their interests at least partially overlap and strategies of classification can therefore concur on a shared view.[42] It is then possible to agree that a particular ethnic boundary indeed represents the most important division of the social world. Interest overlap does not necessarily imply that interests are *identical*, however. Quite to the contrary, a consensus may result from the "exchange" of different economic, political, and symbolic resources between individuals occupying different social positions. A partial overlap of interests therefore reflects a particular structure of inequality and political alliances in a social field.[43]

Let me illustrate the usefulness of this concept of cultural compromise with some examples. Perhaps the most interesting is the spread of the idea of the national community. What compromise does underlie this consensus? The elite of a newly established nation-state promotes the

[41] For such a Foucauldian interpretation of Gramsci, see Comaroff and Comaroff (1991); Omi and Winant (1994, p. 66). For critiques, see Donham (2001); Merry (2003).

[42] For experimental support for this assumption, see the sociopsychological research tradition established by Thibaut (1968). For a similar approach in political philosophy, see John Rawls's (1987) notion of an "overlapping consensus."

[43] I prefer this theory of cultural consensus over the neo-Gramscian framework for three closely related reasons. First, it does not imply a dichotomous view according to which a society is necessarily composed of two classes with opposite interests—the Marxian legacy in the Gramscian framework. Second, the language of cultural consensus leaves no doubt that subordinate actors are capable of developing their own classificatory practices. It thus avoids the implication that individuals act and think against their "true" interests that is part of the conceptual baggage of "hegemony," at least in the dominant interpretation of Gramscian writings (cf. Gramsci 2001, p. 145). Finally, the concept of hegemony was coined as an argument to support certain political strategies among Russian revolutionaries, within the Comintern and later the Italian Communist Party (Anderson 1976) and the New Left. The concept bears the marks of this political history and does not travel particularly well to other constellations outside of the orbit of these ideological preoccupations in the West.

expansion of the boundary of the nation in order to give legitimacy to increased state centralization and administrative control that the shift from indirect to direct rule has brought about (Hechter 2000). On the other hand, individuals of varying ethnic backgrounds may accept the offer of assimilation and cross the boundary "into the nation" because this allows them to claim equal treatment before the law, while access to justice previously depended on one's social status and wealth. Assimilation into the nation also increases the chance that their voice will be heard now that the government claims to rule in the name of "the people," while beforehand political participation was limited by birth to certain clans, families, or ethnosocial strata (Wimmer 2002). Thus, the nation-building strategy pursued by state elites may be mirrored by subordinate strategies of boundary crossing through individual assimilation or collective repositioning. The exact nature of the nation-building process therefore depends on the constellation of power and political alliances that sustain it, as the previous discussion of the United States, Brazil, Mexico, Switzerland, and Iraq has already suggested (cf. also Mallon [1995]).

Cultural consensus is also negotiated at lower levels of social organization, however, including in environments characterized by face-to-face interactions and dense social networks.[44] In a previous work on indigenous communities of Mexico and Guatemala, I have shown how the ongoing negotiation between local elites and peasant farmers may result in agreements on different types of ethnic boundaries, depending on the configuration of power between actors and the exchange equilibrium it induces. One example is the exchange of the political loyalty of peasant farmers for collective goods provided by the local elite, most importantly the defense of the community's land holdings against the encroachment of agricultural entrepreneurs or other peasant communities. For both sets of actors, the idea of the local ethnic community as the prime locus of political solidarity and as the spiritual center of the universe makes sense and subsequently becomes institutionalized and routinized in many fields of social life, including religion (Wimmer 1995). Similarily, Mallon (1995) and Grandin (2000) have described the local and regional "hegemonies" that bind together members of ethnic communities in the Sierra Norte de Puebla and in Quetzaltenango, despite sharp differences in economic and political power.

Such local consensus is not limited to village communities but may also

[44] For a theory of ethnic identity that emphasizes this interactional, situational level of the negotiation process, see Eder et al. (2002). A good empirical example of the negotiation dynamics at the individual level is provided by Bailey's analysis of how an adolescent of Dominican origin situationally emphasizes his black, Hispanic, or American identities (Bailey 2000).

emerge in modern urban environments, as research on the boundary struggles in immigrant neighborhoods in Switzerland shows. Here, the consensus is much thinner than in the previous examples but still has powerful consequences for the dynamics of ethnic boundary making. Despite disagreement on who legitimately belongs to the morally, socially, and culturally acceptable circle of persons, and what the appropriate standards of judgment may be, men and women, old and young, established immigrants and autochthons agree that recently arrived refugees from the former Yugoslavia bring trouble, indecency, and violence (Wimmer 2004). This consensus on the categorical boundaries of belonging is reflected in the structures of social closure. Network data show that there are almost no personal relationships between immigrants from former Yugoslavia and established residents. Those excluded from the realms of the morally decent and socially acceptable, however, do not share this view of the social world. They pursue a strategy of blurring by emphasizing universal moral qualities that make the division of the world into ethnonational groups appear wrong and unjustifiable (Karrer 2002, chap. 12).

As this last example illustrates, a consensus over boundaries may not include the entire population. In the Swiss case, the boundary is one-sided; that is, only the long-established neighborhood residents agree on its relevance and legitimacy. We may refer to this as an asymmetrical consensus. In other cases the consensus is partial. Most people would agree on the topography of boundaries—who belongs on which side—but individuals on either side disagree strongly on the nature and the political meaning of the ethnic divide. In Northern Ireland, there is little dissent as to who is a Catholic and who is a Protestant, even if on the local level there is room for negotiation and occasional boundary blurring (Harris 1972; Burton 1978). Yet views on the significance and political implications of the religious divide diverge sharply. In the United States, the "one drop rule" draws a sharp line between "black" and "white" and is largely accepted by individuals on both sides, with only a small minority advocating its blurring by adding a "mixed race" category. But disagreement about the meaning and political implications of the boundary, as over the legitimacy of affirmative action, are perhaps as pronounced today as ever (Hochschild 2003). In such cases, Sandra Wallman wrote, the boundary "is not a conceptual fence over which neighbors may gossip or quarrel. It becomes instead a Siegfried line across which any but the crudest communications is impossible" (Wallman 1978, p. 212).

Such struggle and contestation are characteristic of all cultural compromises, even when no open disagreements appear. According to the theory of cultural consensus, every group and every individual constantly tries to interpret the cultural compromise in ways that seem to justify their own demands, to validate their own actions, and to represent their

own private vices as public benefits. The notion of cultural compromise therefore does not lead back to a functionalist view of society where conflicts and change vanish from sight. A cultural compromise merely limits the horizon of possibilities within which individuals can argue in their search for power and recognition. A cultural compromise may thus be more or less encompassing. It may be limited to elites and counterelites, or it may be shared by larger segments of the population. It may be more or less stable, more or less reversible, more or less detailed and elaborated. All these variations are, according to the analytical framework offered here, dependent on the constellation of interests produced by institutional patterns, hierarchies of power, and structures of political alliances.

BOUNDARY FEATURES

So far, I have offered a series of hypotheses to explain under which conditions a widely shared consensus over ethnic boundaries will arise. We are left with the task of explaining the varying nature of these boundaries, or, more specifically, their political salience, cultural significance, social closure, and historical stability. I will argue that these characteristics vary according to the degree of power inequality as well as the reach of the consensus—whether it is partial or encompassing, asymmetric or symmetric. Institutions and networks—the other main variables in the model—influence whether ethnic boundaries matter at all, and if they do, whom they encompass and whom they exclude. They are less important for understanding the *properties* of the boundary. In the following, I suggest some preliminary hypotheses of how the degree of inequality and the reach of consensus shape boundary features.

Closure, Salience, Differentiation

The more encompassing a compromise—that is, the more symmetric and complete it is—the less politically salient a boundary will be. When the location, meaning, and implications of a boundary are widely accepted, it will be taken for granted on an everyday basis and impossible to challenge in the political arena. An encompassing consensus also allows cultural differentiation to proceed smoothly since adding new cultural diacritics appears as a natural process when everyone agrees that the social world is composed of ethnic groups with different cultures. On the other hand, where there is no agreement on either the social location of ethnic boundaries, let alone their consequences for the allocation of resources, we expect ethnicity to be politically more salient. Thus, the question of where boundaries lie and what the legitimate consequences of being an

X rather than a Y should be may move to center stage in the political drama.

Let us now consider how degrees of inequality affect the nature of ethnic boundaries. Where power differentials between individuals of different ethnic backgrounds are high, degrees of social closure are also high, as Cornell and Hartman have postulated (Cornell and Hartman 1998, chap. 6). Those who have successfully set themselves apart from the rest of the population as "ethnic others" and managed to monopolize economic, political, or symbolic resources will try to police the ethnic boundary and make assimilation and other strategies of boundary crossing difficult. The more the maintenance of privilege depends on collective group membership, such as in the "Herrenvolk" democracy of the post–Civil War American South, the more fiercely strategies of closure will be pursued. Conversely, where market forces—such as a "meritocratic" system of elite recruitment through expensive private schools and universities—ensure status reproduction, tendencies of closure may weaken. Social closure and high degrees of "groupness" in turn will lead, as we have learned from Max Weber (1978, pp. 341–48) and Pierre Bourdieu (1982), to cultural differentiation because those who set themselves apart reinforce the boundary by adding new cultural diacritics in order to show how culturally different and inferior the subordinated groups are. This reinforces the taken for grantedness of the boundary, which leads to further and ongoing cultural differentiation, and so forth.

At the other end of the continuum, low degrees of inequality may make strategies of boundary enforcement and policing less likely and in any case less successful because the power to contest boundaries through inversion, shifting, or blurring is more equally distributed across a population. The results are low degrees of social closure and less cultural differentiation. In many cases, the boundary will be contested, fuzzy, varied, and soft enough to let observers agree, even those most inclined to "groupist" thinking, that there is no clearly identifiable "ethnic group" of which a traditional anthropologist could write an ethnography.

Stability and Path Dependency

The relative stability of a boundary—the last of the four dimensions of variation to be addressed—derives from the three other characteristics discussed above. Where boundaries are not politically salient, where degrees of closure and hierarchization are low, when cultural differentiation has not produced an empirical landscape with clearly demarcated territories of cultural similarity, classificatory ambiguity and complexity will be high and allow for more individual choice. Accordingly, boundaries will change more easily. On the other end of the continuum, powerful

effects of path dependency develop (cf. Mahoney 2000). If ethnic boundaries correspond to cultural difference, they represent a plausible empirical landscape against which any new classificatory discourse will have to argue; if high degrees of social closure characterize an ethnic hierarchy, a crosscutting, newly defined ethnic boundary needs to be advocated by actors possessing considerable political power and legitimacy; if political networks are aligned along an ethnic boundary, it will be difficult to establish crosscutting alliances.

Such effects of path dependency are reinforced through the sociopsychological process of identification. When members of an ethnic category self-identify and are identified by others as "belonging" to a "group" with little ambiguity, when they share easy-to-identify cultural repertoires of thinking and acting, and when they are tied together by strong alliances in day-to-day politics, we expect strong emotional attachment to such ethnic categories to emerge (Brubaker 2004, pp. 46–47.). Ethnic identity will be "thicker" than in other contexts, and group members will be prepared to incur high costs to defend the culture and honor of their community and the authenticity of its culture, thus stabilizing a boundary even in situations of profound social change.

To put it differently, "thick" identities reduce the range of strategic options that actors dispose of—they will thus be more likely to choose the scheme of interpretation and the script of action that corresponds to the ethnic category in question, they will be more likely to define their interests in terms of those of the entire ethnic community, and they will be more likely to respond to group pressure from their ethnic peers (cf. Cornell 1996). Under these circumstances, "identity" may indeed assume primacy over "interests," as some authors in the "identity" school have observed and unfortunately assumed to be a universal characteristic of ethnicity per se.

Figure 1 summarizes the hypothesis regarding boundary features into a three dimensional graph. It shows how the three boundary features (with values plotted on the z-axis) are expected to vary depending on the degree of power inequality (on the y-axis) as well as the reach of a consensus (the x-axis). These hypotheses could be tested using various research strategies, including comparative historical methods, multisite fieldwork, or cross-national studies. The data problems to be overcome for a statistical test are quite formidable, however. So far ethnic boundaries have rarely been treated as an outcome to be explained (but see Chai 2005) but rather as an independent variable that influences *explananda* such as economic growth or the propensity of civil wars. While there are several indices that measure ethnic diversity either in demographic (Fearon 2003) or political terms (Cederman, Girardin, and Wimmer 2006) or that indicate the level of political mobilization of ethnic groups (Gurr

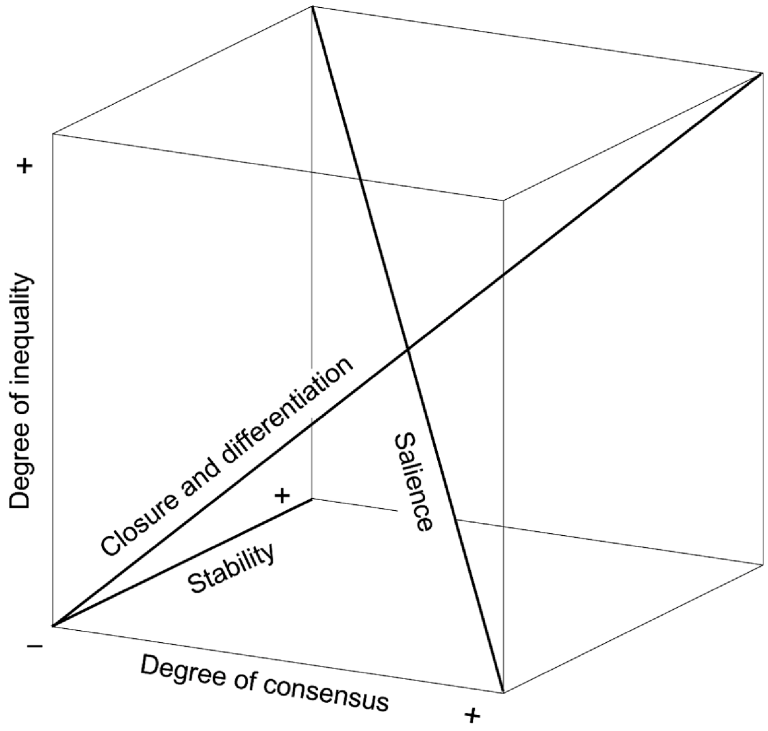

FIG. 1.—Boundary features as a function of the nature of consensus

1993), no data set exists that describes the nature of ethnic boundaries, their degrees of closure, salience, or stability.

DYNAMICS OF CHANGE

In the preceding section, I outlined the major mechanisms that stabilize a boundary by reducing the range of strategic options from which actors choose. Certain ethnic boundaries therefore will be more resistant to strategic reinterpretation or blurring than others. Path dependency, however, is not a deterministic concept. Under certain historical circumstances, a path may be abandoned, and change becomes possible.[45] Following the central tenets of the model outlined so far, three mechanisms of change can now be discussed: first, the field characteristics (institutional frameworks, power distributions, or political alliances) may change because

[45] See the mechanisms of "unlocking" described by Castaldi and Dosi (2006) and Kathy Thelen's work on slow, cumulative change over longer periods of time (Thelen 2004).

new institutions, resources, or actors are introduced (exogenous shift). Second, these field characteristics may change endogenously as the intended and unintended consequences of the strategies pursued by various actors (endogenous shift). Third, new strategies diffuse into a social field and are adopted by certain actors (exogenous drift). These three sources of change will be discussed subsequently.

1. *Exogenous shift.*—Major political events such as imperial conquest or nation-state formation transform the institutional structure, which in turn provides incentives to pursue new strategies of boundary making while letting go of old ones. Similar patterns of transformation can be triggered by comparatively less dramatic institutional shifts. Dan Posner shows how the democratization of Zambia resulted in a process of boundary expansion (Posner 2005). In the post–civil rights era in the United States, the shift to an ethnically based system for distributing state resources has provided incentives for political actors and individuals to organize social movements on the basis of ethnic claims.[46]

The structure of power relations and political alliances can change exogenously through various processes. New actors may enter a field, such as when international organizations become actively involved in the ethnic politics of a country. The interventions of the European Union in the candidate countries of Eastern Europe (Kymlicka 2007, chap. 6) or the engagement of the UN and other international organizations for the "protection of indigenous rights" in various Latin American countries are examples here (see Conklin and Graham 1995; Warren 1998). International migration may also change the constellation of actors quite dramatically. These new actors also offer new opportunities for forming alliances and thus provide an impetus to redraw ethnic boundaries.

Exogenous processes may also shift the power base of actors, as the following example illustrates. The resources that Latin American state elites controlled dwindled when they were forced by financial markets and the International Monetary Fund to shift toward a policy of lean government. Clientelist, corporatist forms of political incorporation broke down and reduced the attractiveness of the nationalist, encompassing classification. Political networks no longer extended from the centers of power to the indigenous hinterland. Both factors together led to the rise of ethnonationalist movements (Yashar 2005).

2. *Endogenous shift.*—Boundaries may also change endogenously due to the cumulative consequences of the strategies pursued by actors. If all members of a particular ethnic category pursue a strategy of boundary crossing into another group, and if members of this second group pursue a strategy of boundary expansion and allow such assimilation, the first

[46] See Glazer and Moynihan 1975; a case study is provided by Padilla (1986).

ethnic group will slowly disappear over time—as has happened to Mishars and Teptiars in Russia (Gorenburg 1999) or as seems to be the case among the Mayas of Belize (Gregory 1976) or the French speakers of Alberta (Bouchard 1994).

A second endogenous mechanism is that small changes in the mix of strategies pursued by individuals may cascade into dramatic shifts in the structure of ethnic boundaries, as Kuran (1998) has shown, because they may "tip" the dynamics of interaction and negotiation between actors toward a new consensus. Such cascades may in turn "empower" (or "disempower") political movements who claim to represent the interests of an ethnic group and who intentionally aim at redrawing the landscape of ethnic divisions.[47]

Third, if such movements are successful, they may not only manage to shift the consensus over the location and meaning of boundaries in their direction but also destabilize and denaturalize existing hierarchies of power, institutional structures, and political alliances. These shifts in the distribution of power, institutional order, and networks of alliance in turn lead actors to pursue new strategies of boundary making and transform their bargaining power in the process of negotiation and contestation, leading to a further transformation of the system of ethnic boundaries until a new "equilibrium" is reached.

The Mexican Revolution provides an apt illustration for this "feedback" mechanism of endogenous change. The revolutionary wars mobilized large sections of the indigenous population and provided the basis for their integration into a new, pervasive network of clientelist relationships managed and controlled by the emerging one-party regime. These political networks supported, as I have shown elsewhere (Wimmer 1995, chap. 3; cf. also Mallon 1995), a new concept of the Mexican nation. While "Mexicans" were imagined in the prerevolutionary period as consisting of *criollo* elites who felt called to keep the racially inferior Indios in check, the revolutionaries now conceived of the Mexican people as an amalgam of Indian and Spanish cultures and peoples. As the model described in this article predicts, the expansion of political networks was mirrored in an expanded concept of the nation, resulting in a massive process of boundary crossing by those indigenous villages most closely involved in the revolutionary struggles and thus most integrated into the emerging clientelist power apparatus. Accordingly, they quickly ceased to think of themselves as anything other than "Mexican" (cf. the case study of Friedrich [1970]).

3. *Exogenous drift.*—The system of ethnic boundaries may also change because actors adopt new strategies that were not part of existing rep-

[47] For other "tipping" models, see Laitin (1995*b*); for a descriptive approach, see Nagel (1995).

ertoires. Innovative actors, who recombine separate schemes of thinking and acting, may invent these new strategies or they may, more often than not, be adopted from the outside. Examples are the global diffusion of the strategy of normative inversion pursued by the U.S. American civil rights movement, which has inspired not only "red power" (Nagel 1995) and other ethnic minority movements (Takezawa 1995) in the United States itself but also the political mobilization of Quebecois in Canada, Catholics in Northern Ireland, postcolonial immigrants in the United Kingdom, "blacks" in Brazil (Telles 2004), and so forth. Another strategy of inversion is the discourse of "indigenousness" that has been adopted by many ethnic minorities in Latin America and beyond (cf. Niezen 2003): by Crimean Tatars, Roma, Afro-Latin Americans, Kurds, Palestinians, Abkhas, Chechens, Tibetans, and Dalits (Kymlicka 2007, p. 285). Even more important in world historical terms has been the global spread of nationalism—the principle that ethnic and political boundaries should coincide—and corresponding strategies of ethnic boundary making from the middle of the 19th century onward. This diffusion process has profoundly changed the political outlook of the globe and transformed it from a world of empires to one of nation-states (Wimmer and Min 2006)—thus globalizing an institution that provides strong incentives for the further ethnicization of social and political life.

SYNOPSIS AND OUTLOOK

I have now discussed all the different elements of a multilevel process theory of ethnic boundary making that promise to address the empirical and analytical challenges faced by the field of comparative ethnicity today. The first part of the model consists of three basic features of a social field that together determine which actors will pursue which strategy of ethnic boundary making (see fig. 2). First, the institutional order provides incentives to draw boundaries of a certain type. More specifically, I have discussed how the modern nation-state entices elites and subordinates alike to distinguish, both in the political arena and in their private lives, between ethnic "us" and "them," rather than between man and women, rich or poor, carpenters and college professors, and the like.

However, such institutional frameworks do not determine which level of ethnic differentiation will be emphasized—whether the Blue Hmong, Hmong, Vietnamese, Asian, or American identities, to come back to an example introduced ealier. The choice depends on the position in the hierarchy of power. Actors will choose that level of ethnic distinction that will best support their claims to prestige, moral worth, and political power. Networks of political alliances, finally, will determine the precise location

of the boundary, that is, who will be included in the group of the culturally authentic, morally dignified, and politically entitled. These three field characteristics thus determine, in a probabilistic way to be sure, which actors will pursue which strategies of ethnic boundary making.

In the next step, I looked at how these actors pursing different strategies of boundary making interact with each other. Consensus over the social topography and meaning of ethnic boundaries may or may not evolve from these ongoing negotiations. I have maintained that consensus will emerge where institutional structures, power differences, and networks of alliance create a zone of mutually beneficial exchange between actors, a sphere of overlapping interests around which strategies of boundary making can converge. My primary example for such consensus was nation building, where the boundary expansion strategies of state elites and the assimilation strategies of minority individuals converge. Other, more local level examples referred to indigenous peasant communities in Mexico and immigrant neighborhoods in Switzerland.

In the last step, I discussed how the nature of consensus shapes the characteristics of boundaries: whether they remain largely categorical or actually have consequences for the everyday web of social relationships (degree of closure and groupness), how significant the cultural differences between individuals on opposite sides of the boundary will be (cultural differentiation), and how far a boundary will be relevant for the forging of political alliances (political salience). The model predicts, in a nutshell, that the higher the degree of ethnic inequality and the more encompassing the consensus between actors, the more closure and cultural differentiation we expect to observe. The more inequality and the less consensus, on the other hand, the more politically salient boundaries will be.

Finally, I identified four mechanisms that either stabilize or change a system of ethnic boundaries. Highly salient, socially closed and culturally marked ethnic groups will produce high degrees of identification among its members and thus stabilize a boundary through path dependency effects. Shifts in the structure of a social field—and thus in the strategies pursued by individuals and the nature of the consensus they might reach—can be brought about by new institutions (such as through conquest, revolution, or democratization), new actors (as through migration or the emergence of new transnational actors), or new power resources. These are treated as exogenous to the model, as is the invention and diffusion of new strategies of ethnic boundary making, such as the global spread of nationalism. The intended and unintended consequences of action represent an endogenous mechanism of change: successful ethnopolitical movements intentionally transform field structures through concerted political action while unintended consequences may cascade into shifts in the location and meaning of ethnic boundaries.

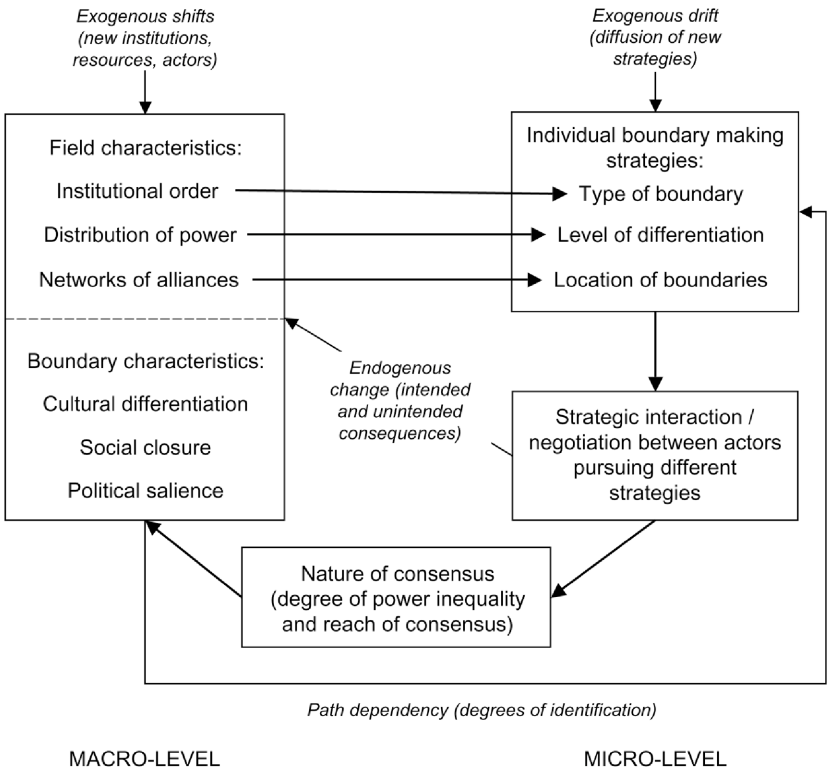

FIG. 2.—A processual model of the making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries

The theoretical framework introduced here departs from other approaches in several important ways. First, it does not follow the static logic of standard typologies in comparative ethnicity. These distinguish societies in which ethnicity coincides with social class from those where it crosscuts class divisions (Horowitz 1971), or societies with high from those with low degrees of ethnic institutional pluralism (van den Berghe 1967; Smith 1969), or societies where ethnic groups are segregated from more integrated ones (Hunt and Walker 1979), or postnationalist Western societies from the primordially ethnic rest (Heisler 1991), and so forth. While these typologies confine themselves to outlining different forms and functions of ethnicity, the model presented here explains these as the outcome of a cycle of reproduction and transformation composed of various stabilizing and transformative feedbacks.

Second, a multilevel process theory does not offer a simple formula relating "dependent" to "independent" variables as in mainstream social science, for example, by predicting the degree of political salience of eth-

nicity from levels of gross domestic product, democratization, or ethnolinguistic heterogeneity (see the attempt by Chai [2005]). Rather, it is a generative model where variables are "dependent" or "independent" depending upon which phase in the cycle of reproduction and transformation we focus. The model thus concurs with a series of recent approaches in sociology (Abbott 1998; Emirbayer 1997), political science (Greif and Laitin 2004; Thelen 2003), and economics (Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson 2004), which emphasize that in order to understand the logic of social life we should focus on the processes that generate and transform its varying forms (Cederman 2005).

Like other such models and similar to evolutionary models in biology (cf. Lieberson and Lynn 2002), it is empirically "void." That is, it needs to be tailored to the relevant social and historical context in order to arrive at a concrete prediction of which ethnic boundary we expect to result from the dynamics of negotiation and contestation. The model thus does not represent a lawlike universal operator but an analytical framework for generating context-specific, local predictions. More specifically, one needs to first "fill in" the historically grown character of existing boundaries (their salience, closure, cultural differentiation, etc.) before specifying the institutional constraints, the distribution of power, and the structure of alliances that prevail in a social field at a particular point in history to then understand the dynamics of negotiation and contestation that will make a specific path of transformation more likely than others.

Finally, the model is more complex than others because it integrates existing insights from both the macro and micro sociological traditions, rather than pursuing only one avenue of research, such as rational choice theories or, on the other end of the spectrum, the various world-system approaches. It therefore covers several levels of analysis—from the country level down to the micro processes of boundary contestation in everyday life. It specifies the mechanisms that link these levels by showing how macro social phenomena, such as institutional structures, the distribution of power, and political alliances, influence micro behavior—such as the choice of particular strategies of boundary making. It also analyses how the interplay of various strategies (the dynamics of consensus and conflict) in turn reflects back on macro structures, that is, the nature of ethnic boundaries that characterize a social field. The model therefore offers a "full circle" explanation, as specified by Coleman (1990), Bunge (1997), and Hedström (2005), leading from macro to micro and back to the macro level again.

That the model is of a processual nature, empirically unspecified and of a multilevel nature, does not mean that it cannot be tested empirically. It contains a range of comparative hypotheses that are meant to explain in which societies and contexts ethnicity will be relevant, which actor will

pursue which type of ethnic boundary-making strategy, under which conditions a more or less encompassing consensus over the location and meaning of such boundaries will emerge, why such boundaries are more or less politically salient, whether they imply more or less social closure, how correlated they are with cultural differences, and so forth. Some of these hypotheses have already been robustly tested. The idea that the institution of the nation-state gives ethnic boundaries a new meaning, for example, has been solidly confirmed by quantitative cross-national, comparative historical, and ethnographic research. Other hypotheses, most importantly those concerning the boundary properties themselves, have to wait for serious empirical testing in the future.

The aim of my model, then, is to situate these more specific empirical propositions within an encompassing theoretical framework. Obviously enough, this framework itself cannot be subjected to an empirical test and thus cannot be "falsified."[48] Its ambition is situated on a different level: first, to foster the conversation between the disjointed and segregated fields of macro sociological, comparative historical approaches to ethnicity, race, and nationalism, on the one hand, and the micro sociological and ethnographic traditions, on the other hand. The goal is not integration on a mere rhetorical level, but to identify as precisely as possible the mechanisms that link the various levels and domains on which these school of research have traditionally focused. Second, the paradigmatic framework offered here is meant to move the debate forward by showing that the most prominent theories of ethnicity—from primordialism to constructivism, from instrumentalism to identity theory—are best seen as descriptions of particular ethnic constellations, rather than as general theories of ethnicity. The major challenge ahead that this paper has identified and tried to address is to comparatively explain the emergence, stabilization, and transformation of these various forms of ethnicity.

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[48] This understanding of the relation between empirical test and theoretical propositions is based on Stegmüller (1985).