

**'Ethnic relations are a continuation
of race relations by other means':
critically discuss this claim**

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Introduction

This essay suggests discussing ethnic relation as a continuation of race relations. It should be mentioned that there already exist a considerable number of studies in the field of race and ethnic relations. In this sense, the difference between the concept of race and ethnic relations resides in the way both concepts are perceived by scientists. Whereas the concept of race relation is often associated with physical characteristics as skin colour, and so on, the ethnic concept is mainly regarded as cultural aspect and other social manifestation.

Scholars have been showing that the concept of race on biological grounds is a scientific error. Indeed, biology science can never provide a precise concept of race among human beings relating to a classification based on characteristics. Nevertheless, the persistent view of differentiation among humankind gives way to the raising concept of ethnic relations. On the other hand, social scientists, mostly in the field of sociology and anthropology, have always been concerned whether the biological concept of race has been extended to the concept of ethnic relations.

In general, there is a tendency among scholars to answer this question in a negative response. They deny the extension of the biological concept because such extension is no longer politically and scientifically valid. Above all, it is because achievements of knowledge in the field of genetic investigation cannot explain the hypothesis of evolutionary hierarchy. Although social usage of the term 'race' that emerged within the Chicago School was concentrated on Park's studies, it influenced many scholars to emphasize that race relations are still on and apparently has brought ethnic relations into the discussion. The concept of social race relations on the words of Park, "*are the relations existing between peoples distinguished by marks of racial descent, particularly when these racial differences enter into the consciousness of the individuals and groups so distinguished, and by so doing determine in each case the individual's conception of himself as well as his status in the community*" (1950: 81). This concept is basically quite the same to the biological concept of race. This view, most of time, emphasises that ethnic relations are highly influenced by the concept of race.

The duality in the view of the biological and popular concepts of race has further implications for sociological theory. In these miscellaneous concepts, sociologists are unable to distinguish, which relations, involving people of either different origins or different physical appearances, are race and/or ethnic relations, without knowing in which situations these particular differences are relevant. However, according to Banton, "*some scholars have tried to draw a sharp distinction between the race idea, as essentially a political phenomenon, and the race concept, as something in the realm of science. We are suspicious of attempts to cut a way out of the maze by representing biological and sociological research as fields whose subject-matter*

must be for ever separate. We argue that the use of the term race in both biological and everyday world needs to be understood historically" (1975: 31).

Concept of race - a scientific error

The most effective use of the biological term of race comes from the theorists of the nineteenth century in regard with Darwin studies. These theorists affirmed that there was natural law and also they assumed that characters were invariably associated and transmitted to the next generation as part of a tie together deal (Banton, 1975). This idea, later on, gave way to a concept of race which for many decades had been a reference for many researchers in the academic purpose.

However, in the twentieth century, the racial conflicts were observed closer by researchers, and yet such methods were unable to offer credence for the academics. Thus, many scientific concepts lost their authority among researchers. Therefore, some scholars (Banton, 1975; Miles, 1982; and Rex, 1986) have demonstrated that race in the biological concept is a scientific error. Miles states that *"in a sense, then, those who proposed a classification of the world's population into discrete races using phenotypical characteristics were wrong"* (1982: 15). Meanwhile Rex notes *"such physical differences were correlated with behavioural or psychological differences, hence the notion that 'race' could be used to justify unequal treatment was rejected"* (1986: 19). Critiques of the biological concept of race have led many sociologists, anthropologists and many others scholars to adopt a position contrary of this concept and an approach to intergroup difference prominence ethnicity principles of classification and organisation. Indeed, as race was accepted in academic context as scientific error by sociologists and by many different researchers, so ethnic relation was called in to absolve the problem and then put forward a solution. However, the singular focus on ethnicity has left undressed the persistence of racism and its invidious impact on local communities.

In agreement with Hurley and Haddon, *"it is very desirable that the term race as applied to human groups should be dropped from the vocabulary of science. In other animals the term subspecies has been substituted for 'race'. In man what we observe is the relative isolation of groups, their migration and their crossing. In what follows the world race will be delivery avoided and the term (ethnic) group or people employed"* (1935: 91). In the recent years, ethnic relations, instead of race, have taken a place in the academic discussion as a new term employed by sociologists, anthropologists and many different researchers. The definition of the field of ethnic relations varies widely in popular and political discourses addressed by many different scholars. In this way, it is difficult to sponsor a consistent discussion about what would be the best use of the term. However, I do not wish to pursue the implications of these different definitions. Whereas, I shall concentrate on the definition of ethnicity that many sociologists have been using and formulating in an appropriate relationship between sociology and politics in the arena of ethnicity.

Theories of Ethnic

There already exists a large proportion of contemporary studies on ethnicity by sociologists. Many researches are also being carried out in anthropology, political science, history, economics, and social psychology. In this view, I shall pay attention only in the sociological discipline. Ethnicity is a more appealing and legitimate concept for social scientists, not only because it is intrinsically social but also because it is extremely rooted at least in the self-definition of members (Manson, 2000). Ethnic attachments are variously seen as ways to preserve a precious cultural heritage and to protect groups, which are disadvantaged from the economic and political advantages groups.

In order to understand the definition of ethnicity, it is better to give a contextual view of the term. This contextual view of ethnicity seems to have different interpretations. Thus, I will try to relate this view with each other for a better understanding. In the words of Omi & Wirant, *"The paradigm has passed through three major stages: a pre-1930's stage in which the ethnic group view was an insurgent approach, challenging the biologicistic (and at least implicitly racist) view of race which was dominant at that time; a 1930s to 1965 stage during which the paradigm operated as the progressive/liberal 'common sense' approach to race, and during which two themes – assimilation-ism and cultural pluralism – were defined; and post 1965 phase, in which the paradigm has taken on defence of conservative (or 'neo-conservative') egalitarianism against what is perceived as the radical assault of 'group rights'"* (1994). I will try to explain each particular stage, bringing different emphases for this discussion.

The discussion about ethnicity that took place in the 1920's and 1930's was based on the paradigm of ethnicity. It appeared to be ambiguous in literature over the term 'primordial', since it referred to the strong naturalist position outlined as a biological ethnicity. This pre-existence of biological paradigm tried to explain racial inferiority as part of natural order of humankind. This discussion had some of the statement in social Darwinism. In this miscellany, appeared the work of Geertz with the concept of primordial tie, who explains the ethnicity with reference to culture. This definition later on appeared to be the concept of primordial ethnicity. Geertz, who first stated the primordial view of ethnicity, says:

*"by a primordial attachment is meant one that stems from the 'givens' or more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed 'givens' of social existence: immediate contiguity and live connection mainly, but beyond them the givenness that stems from being born into a particular religious community, speaking a particular language, or even a dialect of a language, and following particular social practices. These congruities of blood, speech, custom and so on, are seen to have an ineffable, and at times, overpowering coerciveness in and of themselves. One is bound to one's kinsman, one's neighbour, one's fellow believer, **ipso facto**, as the result not merely of personal attraction, tractical necessity, common interest or incurred moral obligation but at least in great part by virtue of some unaccountable absolute important attribute to very tie itself."* (1963: 109)

However, with the works presented by sociologists of Chicago School in the early decades such as cultural pluralism and assimilation, the biological concept started losing coherence. According to Omi & Wirant, *"It had come under attack by adherents of Progressivism, and had also been called into question by the work of the 'Chicago School' of sociology. The progressive attack was led by Horace Kallen, who also introduced the concept of **cultural pluralism**, which was to become a key current of ethnicity theory"* (1990). The Chicago sociologists at that time were led by Robert E. Park, who established the most important current of ethnicity, *assimilation*. These sociologists suggested that race was a social category and then ethnicity itself was understood as a consequence of a group formation process based on culture and descent. In this time, the concept of race was breaking the relation to the to the concept of ethnic relation.

In the World War II and the holocaust, many Nazi Germans killed many Jews, arguing that they belonged to a different race. A variety of boards within the United Nations Organizations (UNO) required biologists to better explain what they have considered as human race, feeling themselves unable to give any explanation. Then sociologists were called to explain. In the words of Rex, *"the concept of race as the biologist used it was seen to be irrelevant to the explanation of political differences amongst human beings, and it was suggested that the explanation why such*

differences were regarded as due to race was left to the sociologists" (1986: 19). In addition Rex states:

"Sociologist responded in three ways to this challenge. The first was to assimilate all so-called racial problems into the category of ethnic problems. The second was to recognize that racial differences did exist and often acted as maskers for the differential apportionment of rights, but to limit the range of application of the term race and to deny that it had any justificatory significance. The third was to use the terms race relations situation to refer to situations marked by racism" (1986: 19).

This definition and acceptance of the term ethnicity or the ethnicity paradigm definitively dislodged the biological concept of race. According to Glazer & Moynihan, *"social scientist tend to broaden the use of the term 'ethnic group' to refer not only to subgroups, to minorities, but to all the groups of a society characterised by a distinct sense of different owing to culture and descent, itself reflects the somewhat broader significance that ethnicity has taken up in recent years"* (1975:25).

Afterwards, many researchers have been developing new concepts of ethnicity in order to explain ethnic conflicts in our society. Most of them refer to the works of Chicago School principally with Park. One of the most useful concepts of ethnic relations that have been used by many scholars of different disciplines is attached to the concept of situational ethnicity that is developed by anthropologists. And later on, it has been criticised by sociologists. A theory of situational ethnicity has been developed by some anthropologists and can be traced back to the work of Gluckman (1940), who, in turn, cited Evans-Pritchard (1937) as the source of his ideas (Okamura, 1981).

This idea and concept of situational ethnicity, has been used by many different researchers for the analysis of the structure and process of ethnic relations. It has gained credence in recent studies approaches to ethnicity, as well. According to Okamura, *"this focus on analysis at a lower level of social organization than the overall society is congruent with an increased concern with subjective and perceptual notions of ethnicity in terms of the actor's understanding and explanations of social behaviour. For clearly, it is at this level of abstraction that the variable meanings of ethnicity, the difference criteria for ascription of ethnic identities, the fluidity of ethnic boundaries, and the varying relevance of ethnic and other social identities are most apparent for the actor and the researcher alike. A situational approach to ethnicity manifests the essential variability in its significance for social relations in different social contexts and at different levels of social organization"* (1981: 452).

Situational Concept

Recent scholars, as I have mentioned before, concentrate their studies on the situational concept instead of the primordial concept. Wallman (1977) gives the concept of situational ethnicity that approaches this discussion and defines ethnic relations nowadays. She states, *"the term 'ethnic' popularly connotes 'race' in Britain, only less precisely, and with a lighter value load. In North America, by contrast, 'race' most commonly means colour, and 'ethnics' are the descendents of relatively recent immigrants from non-English-speaking countries. 'Ethnic' is not a noun in Britain. In effect there are no 'ethnics'; there are only 'ethnic relations'. This level of variation in 'ethnic relations' warrants more academic attention than it gets. The proper study of intergroup relations depends on understanding the epistemology of difference"* (Wallman, 1977: 531).

The concept of ethnicity suggests that the term *"ethnicity is most usefully described*

as a reaction occurring where two sets of people, or individual members of two sets of people come into contact or confrontation with each other. It is a felt boundary between 'us' and 'them' which involves both difference, and the meaning put upon difference. Thus: 'they' may behave or eat or marry in ways that 'we' admire or deplore, but it is only when we use 'them' to define 'us' that our relations are ethnic" (Wallman, 1978: 307). Ethnicity in this definition is the recognition of the difference between them and us. As can be seen, ethnicity refers here to the perception of group difference and so to the social boundaries between sections of a population. In this awareness, 'ethnic difference' is the recognition of a contrast between *us* and *them* (Wallman, 1977). At the same time, some analytic attention has been paid to the "terms of that contrast – to colour, citizenship, competition, etc., as markers of social boundary. Also, little attention has been given to the flexibility of that boundary, to contextual shifts in the line between '**us**' and '**them**' and to the fact that both advantages and disadvantages accrue from keeping that line intact" (Wallman, 1977: 532).

In the same method of definition, Yinger defines ethnicity "as a segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves and/ or others, to have a common origin and to share important segments of a common culture and who, in addition, participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients" (1985: 159). This particular definition given by Yinger shows that ethnicity apparently creates ethnic groups.

However, there exists a disagreement with both primordial ethnicity and situational ethnicity in the sociological view. In this case, the situational ethnicity has been supported among researchers rather than the primordial ethnicity. Bringing the critics of the situational ethnicity, Rex argues that "the main difference between the two types of theory probably lies in the fact that the theorists of situational ethnicity play down the possibility of the overall mobilization of the resource of ethnicity in the interests of a class, and that they have failed to develop the other side of their theory, namely that which sees ethnicity as stigma or a liability. I believe that these differences in the political perspectives of those involved. The theory of situational ethnicity has been developed by anthropologists who are not much concerned with political issues of class struggle and racism, while the approach adopted here sees the interplay between class, ethnicity and race, and the oppression and exploitation of racial and ethnic groups as its primary concern" (1986). This essay will not enter into this discussion, but I think that it will be relevant to show that there are disagreements between both.

Assimilation

Ethnic relations are related, in most cases, to group migration that has moved specially to Britain and America in the last decades. Consequently, some scholars have been aware of the process of assimilation that Park mentioned. After explaining this process, I will be able to critically discuss the title of this essay. This discussion seems to be ambiguous and controversial, but I think, assimilation continues to play as an important concept for researchers of ethnicity, principally those dealing with the United States and Britain, where many group boundaries have historically been more permeable than in most other societies.

We may start with the assimilation process. According to Yinger, "assimilation is a process of boundary reduction that can occur when members of two or more societies, of ethnic groups, or of smaller social groups meet. When the process is carried to completion, an assimilated ethnic population is defined operationally as a group of persons with similar foreign origins, knowledge of which in no way gives a better prediction or estimation of their relevant social characteristics than does knowledge of the behaviour of the total population of the community or nation

involved" (1985). Also, to Park and Burgess, assimilation "is a process of interpretation and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of others persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life" (1969).

Assimilation apparently reflects the identity of ethnic groups. However it seems to me that the process of assimilation do not suggest that ethnic relations are a continuation of race relations. Therefore, assimilation can be seen as a dialectic consequence where both groups – the migrants and the society that receives them – will be involved in assimilation. On the other hand, "ethnic attachment are variously seen as ways to preserve a precious cultural heritage; to soften class lines; to protect or win economic political advantages for disadvantages groups; to furnish a more intimate and flavourful connection with large, impersonal societies; and to retard the shift of overwhelming power to the state" (Yienger, 1985: 152).

Are ethnic relations a continuation of race relations?

The question of this essay suggests that ethnic relations are a continuation of race relations. To answer this question, some scholars will be invoked in order to support my argumentation. I will state that ethnic relations are not a continuation of race relations. If ethnic relations are not a continuation of race relations, how then do they differ?

First, the difference between them seems to be historical. It took place apparently when Park introduced his concept of assimilation around 1930s. The Chicago School stated that race was a social concept and then ethnicity was based on ethnic formation, dealing with culture and descent. Here, theoretically, the term ethnic relations show evidence that they are not related to the concept of race relations in the way that ethnic relations are not associated to the physical characteristics of the people.

Second, in Wallman's words, "when we try to understand 'race' or 'ethnic' relations, we are, in effect, trying to understand more than difference or even the perception of difference: both 'race' and 'ethnic' relations are about the perception of significant difference" (1978: 306). In this case, the term race and ethnic relations may present some technical similarities, however they are completely different. Wallman "demonstrate that 'race' and 'ethnicity', as we use them in Britain, represent opposite sides of the same boundary coin; and to suggest that the choice of one notion over the other says more about the perceptions of the classifier than it does about the characteristics of those being classified" (1978: 306). It does not mean that ethnic relations are a continuation of race relations. As Wallman states, "both 'race' and 'ethnicity' are principles of classification, but not, at first thought, of the same kind" (1978: 306). Race as definition and concept rings firmer and more objective. This supposition is a thought of the eighteenth and nineteenth century biological and anthropological notions of race which defined categories such as species of animals and was distinguished by specific sets of physical characteristics (Banton, 1977; Wallman, 1978). According to Wallman, "if 'race' difference is not **objective difference** but an effect of **subjective differentiation**, it becomes difficult to distinguish between 'race' and 'ethnicity' as principles of classification" (1978:307).

To clarify the difference between these two terms, I will invoke an example of Wallman. She explains:

"this becomes as soon as an effort is made to distinguish the concepts of 'race' and 'ethnicity' by using them in the same analysis. In these, the position of West

Indians and of Asians (by which he means people from the Indian sub-continent) is contrasted. West Indians are called a 'racial group', Asian an 'ethnic group' or 'groups'. The contrast rests on the premise that the only, or at least the significant, difference between British whites on the one hand and British West Indians on the other is their 'race'. But the labels are unlike; the first refers to a lack of skin pigment, the second to a place of origin. 'Race' here probably means only colour, perhaps phenotype, but certainly not 'stock' or 'line' as it once did. These last, like 'kith and skin', are connections which 'we' have and 'they' do not. The term race is often used in a way that meaning to identify differences between human population groups." (1978: 308)

This makes evident not only the fact that the boundaries of race and ethnicity shift with changes in context and situation, but that the distinction between ethnicity and race can be quite different in different settings. According to Wallman, "*in the United States, for example, 'ethnics' are more or less recent immigrants of non-English origin. They may or may not be WASP, but they are (or have, until recently, been) white, never black. And because blacks cannot be (or could not be) 'ethnics', so race relations and ethnic relations have been separate fields of enquiry, anxiety and policy. In England, by comparison, there are no 'ethnics', there are only 'ethnic relations' – and latterly, of course, 'ethnic' food and 'ethnic' shirts. More significant, ethnic relations in England not only involve non-whites, they are somehow caused by non-whites*" (1978: 307).

As conclusion, we have to considerate as well that ethnic relations issue brought to our mind reflects something more important: a shift in the general understanding of ethnic groups. Formerly seen as survivals from an earlier age, to be treated variously with annoyance, toleration, or mild celebration, we now have a growing sense that they may be forms of social life that are capable of renewing and transforming themselves (Glazer & Moynihan, 1975). Also, I agree with the discussion introduced by ethnic relations which has treated the inequality between different groups existent in society with respect to a toleration, and the discussion of 'race' becomes less salient and silent.

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