Managing Ethnic Diversity: Meanings and Practices from an International Perspective

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Chapter 1

The Complexities of Ethnic Diversity

Reza Hasmath

The complexities of ethnic diversity have caused much debate and ink to flow. At the onset, the concept of ethnicity lacks a clear theoretical framework and is often bemused by contradictory and limited empirical scope. In fact, the term ‘ethnic’ itself is a contentious one refashioning new significance in the twentieth century. The term derived from the classical Greek word *ethnos*, referring to ‘pagan’ or ‘heathen’, and was popularized by the New Testament appearing 167 times. In Catholic Europe, the term *ethnos* was primarily used in this sense from the mid-fourteenth century until mid-/late-nineteenth century, when it gradually began to refer to ‘racial’ characteristics.\(^1\)

In the twentieth century, an understanding of ethnicity and ethnic groups has taken divergent paths. At one extreme, particularly in nations with a rich Communist history such as Russia, China and various Eastern European nations, ethnicity has been heavily influenced by a Soviet model which politicized and institutionalized the identification and categorization of ethnic minority groups. A *natsionalnost* or minority ‘nationality’ was officially characterized by the State following a “four commons” criterion: (1) a distinct language; (2) a recognized indigenous homeland and a common territory; (3) a common economic life; and, (4) a strong sense of identity and distinctive customs, ranging from dress, religion, foods. As discussed further in Chapter Six, this has resulted in 55 official ethnic minority groups being recognized in China, in spite of a potential pool of more than 400 ethnic minority groups. Operationally, this form of fixed identification essentially narrows the ability of the individual to define themselves outside the boundaries of State accepted ethnic group categories.

A corollary of this idea is the classification of ethnicity by nation of birth, as practiced in Austria, France, Germany and Italy. An ethnic minority is thus born into a particular ethnic category based on national boundaries and is seen a member of that group for life. Further, given one’s ethnicity is bounded by national boundaries the relative freedom to classify one’s ethnicity by sub-national areas

\(^1\) The term ‘race’ in the modern context has questionable descriptive and analytical value. While the term continues to appear in literature and discourse on ethnicity, there are two principal reasons why it may potentially be flawed to speak about ‘races’. First, there has always been interbreeding between human populations that it would be meaningless to talk of fixed boundaries between ‘races’. Second, as Cavalli-Sforza et al. (1994) argue, the distribution of hereditary physical traits does not follow clear delineations.
(e.g. Scottish) or religious-oriented groups (e.g. Sikh) is subdued. For example, if a Kurdish person is born in Turkey and migrates to Austria after the age of six, they will subsequently be classified as Turkish rather than Kurdish for the remainder of their natural life.

Finally, in classic post-World War Two immigrant reception societies such as Canada and Australia, ‘ethnics’ initially evolved into a polite term referring to first-wave immigrants, from 1945 to the late 1960s – most prominently the Italians, Portuguese, Greeks – who were often considered ‘different’ on cultural grounds relative to the Charter groups (non-Aboriginal, non-British and in the case of Canada, non-French). By the second-wave of immigration from the late 1960s to late 1990s, marked by changes in immigration policies that removed overt favour for family sponsorship and subsequent patterns of chain migration of Western European backgrounds, the ‘visible ethnic minority’ demographics increased steadily. Today, 9.2 percent of Australia’s population (the majority comprising of Asian ancestries) and 13.4 percent of Canada’s population (a mix of Asian, Latin American and Caribbean ancestries) are visible ethnic minorities, who have colloquial taken on the mantle of ‘ethnics’.

Due partially to a legacy of recent mass-immigration, both Canada and Australia practice self-identification of ethnicity. This is perhaps the most accepted normative form of identifying membership into an ethnic group as it provides the freedom of the individual to define him or herself. Given our nominal repertoire of identities, individuals in this form of identification are able to choose the ethnic group category(-ies) that define them. Moreover, the advantages of self-identification versus a fixed style is evident for immigrant receptive societies – it encourages migrants to receive a strong message that they are welcome to their host nation; and to promote a multiculturalist tenet of pride in one’s ancestry, which has become a stronger part of prevailing multicultural ideologies as demonstrated throughout the chapters, self-identification based on people’s ancestries is promoted. In the process however, there is a risk of confusing ancestry with ethnicity, so that everyone’s ‘true’ ethnic identity is presumed to be rooted as a fixed concrete entity.

2 In the Canadian case, changes in immigration policy were timed with the formalization of multiculturalism policy. In 1966, a new immigration policy based on a points system involving factors including age and occupational qualification, replaced the older system which stressed sponsorship. Not coincidentally, only a year prior to changes in the immigration policy the Canadian government commissioned the Preliminary Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, which is commonly referred to as the first use of multiculturalism as a social policy for managing ethnic differences.

3 No one is completely free to self-define his/her ethnic membership. Constraints may be imposed by numerous circumstances, family and genetic markers to name a few. The point nevertheless remains that within reason, self-identification of ethnicity provides a relative freedom to choose one’s ethnic membership both in a legal sense and in daily life.
The Complexities of Ethnic Diversity

Definitions and Scope

Suffice to say, ‘ethnic groups’ and ‘ethnicity’ have cogently become commonly used to the extent that most individuals using these terms find definitions unnecessary, political toiling and census reporting notwithstanding. As Cohen (1978) insightfully pointed out – and still holds true today – the literature takes for granted that ‘ethnic groups’ and ‘ethnicity’ refer to a set of named groupings singled out by the researcher as ethnic units. Ethnic membership in these named groupings is thereafter shown to have an effect or correlation with one or more dependent variable(s). In this respect, ethnicity is used as a significant structural phenomenon, but this does not constitute a definition.

In the most simplistic form, sociologists and anthropologists view ethnicity in two lights, which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The first, as a primordial occurrence that is unchanging and universal, meaning certain ethnic traits can be ascribed at birth, for example one’s skin pigmentation (see note one for potential objections). The second understanding sees ethnicity as socially constructed, forged on the basis of a particular history. In other words, ethnic identity is achieved after birth, for instance, a member of an ethnic group may be identified by the language spoken (Fishman 1980); by ancestry – either by place of birth or the ancestors of the individuals forming the group (Schermerhorn 1970); by religious affiliation (Goldman 2000); and more broadly, by cultural artefacts, i.e. foods, traditions. The majority of ethnic group identities are not based on ascribed traits, but rather on shared values, beliefs and concerns that are open to acquisition by social conditions. As a consequence, the characteristics that define ethnic groups may vary by context. For example, Thai may be considered an ethnic minority in

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4 When Isajiw (1974) examined sixty-five studies of ethnicity in sociology and anthropology he found only thirteen defined the term.
Australia, yet in another context, in Thailand, Thai can constitute a combination of several ethnic groups in the south-east Asian nation.

The concept of ethnicity can become so complex that Max Weber even suggested abandoning it altogether. Ironically, it is Weber’s definition of ethnic groups that became the standard bearer for generations of sociologists. He posited an ethnic group constitutes,

those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs, or of both, or because of memories of colonization or migration (Weber 1968, 389).

For Weber, ethnicity is seen as a combination of common customs, language and values based on a sense of descent extending beyond kinship. He notes that the persistent effect of the old ways … continue as a source of native country sentiment among emigrants even when they have become so thoroughly adjusted to the new country (Weber 1997, 18).

In anthropological terms, Barth (1969, 10–11) defines an ethnic group as a designated population that has four elements: (1) has a biologically self-perpetuating population; (2) shares fundamental cultural values and forms; (3) has a field of communication and interaction; and, (4) has a membership that identifies itself and is identified by others, as constituting a category different from other categories of the same order. Barth criticizes past anthropology for isolating the ethnic unit conceptually so that its cultural and social forms are seen as remote outcomes of local ecological adaptation, via a history of “adaptation by invention and selective borrowing”. In this line of thinking, this history has produced separate ‘peoples’, each with their own culture. To move beyond this conceptual reification of ethnic groups, Barth suggests using a general identity determined in large part by origin and background. Instead of assuming ethnic groups have fixed organizational characteristics, ethnic groups are thus scaled subjectively, utilizing modes of identification based on interactions between and among groups.

**From Group Characteristics to Social and Political Processes**

In large part, the work of Barth provided an impetus to shift the focus of studies on ethnic diversity from group characteristics to analyzing social and political processes. In this mode of thinking, ethnicity is seen as a particular social and political relationship between agents who consider themselves as being culturally distinctive from members of other groups. As Eriksen (2002) puts it, when cultural differences actively make a difference in interactions between members of groups, the social and political relationships have an ethnic element. In other words,
ethnicity refers to aspects of both gain and loss in a burgeoning social and political interaction.

In this spirit, innumerable theories of ethnicity have been developed serving varying analytical purposes, including primordialist theory (see Geertz 1973; Shils 1957); modernization theory (see Hettne 1996); neo-Marxist or a class approach to ethnicity – including class segmentation (see Reich et al. 1973); split-labor

### Table 1.2 Population and Minority Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Minority Total</th>
<th>Largest Three Minority Groups</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Australia</strong></td>
<td>20,544,064</td>
<td>9.2 %↑</td>
<td>Chinese 3.37 %, Indian 1.18 %, Lebanese 0.92 %</td>
<td>2006 Census</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Austria</strong></td>
<td>8,199,783</td>
<td>9.8 %</td>
<td>Southern Slavic 4.0 %, Turkish 1.6 %, Germans 0.9 %</td>
<td>2006 Census</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Canada</strong></td>
<td>29,639,035</td>
<td>13.4 %↑</td>
<td>Chinese 3.7 %, East Indian 2.4 %, Filipino 1.1 %</td>
<td>2001 Census</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>China</strong></td>
<td>1,137,386,112</td>
<td>8.5 %</td>
<td>Zhuang 1.3 %, Manchu 0.9 %, Hui 0.8 %</td>
<td>2000 Census</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>France</strong></td>
<td>61,399,541 (2006)</td>
<td>~ 16.0 %</td>
<td>North African ~ 7.0 %, Other European ~ 7.0 %, Others ~ 2.0 %</td>
<td>Various Survey Estimates#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Germany</strong></td>
<td>82,220,000</td>
<td>9.0 %</td>
<td>Turkish 2.1 %, Serb 0.6 %, Italian 6.7 %</td>
<td>2005 Micro-Census</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Italy</strong></td>
<td>58,802,902</td>
<td>5.0 %</td>
<td>Other European 2.5 %, African 1.5 %, Others 1.0 %</td>
<td>2006 Census</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Zealand</strong></td>
<td>4,143,279</td>
<td>29.4 %</td>
<td>Maori 13.7 %, Asians 8.1 %, Pacific Islanders 6.4 %</td>
<td>2006 Census</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>9.4 % (excludes Aboriginal groups)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Taiwan</strong></td>
<td>22,858,872 (2007)</td>
<td>~ 2.1 %^</td>
<td>Hokkien ~ 70 %, Hakka ~ 15 %, Mainland Chinese ~ 13 %</td>
<td>Various Survey Estimates#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>United Kingdom</strong></td>
<td>58,789,194</td>
<td>7.9 %</td>
<td>African 2.0 %, Indian 1.8 %, Pakistani 1.3 %</td>
<td>2001 Census</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Largest visible ethnic minority groups
+ Excludes Aboriginal and Native groups
# Official statistics not collected
^ Only the 13 aboriginal groups are officially classified as minority groups
market (see Bonacich 1972); internal colonialism (see Gonzalez-Casanova 1965); and, world systems theory (see Wallerstein 1979). These theories ultimately point to different mechanisms and accuse different actors of using ethnic division to their advantage. At a more basic level, all of the approaches nevertheless agree that ethnicity has something to do with the classification of people and group relationships. They emphasize the sharing of social ties by reference to common origins and a historical past (whether real or perceived); shared cultural heritage; and/or language. But then they introduce a power factor, and this is where it gets muddy.

Ethnicity can be seen as one of several outcomes of group interactions in which there is differential power between non-minority and minority groups. An excellent way to conceptualize this idea is to look at the interplay of size and access to power to determine whether ethnic groups are dominant or subordinate. Accordingly, if an ethnic group has both power and size, it is the dominant majority. If it has power, but not size, they are the dominant elite. If it has size, but does not have power, it is classified as mass subjects. And finally, if the group has neither size nor power, it is classified as a minority group. It is important to note each of the four types of stratified groups can be multi-ethnic or homogeneous. As such, any of the group types could comprise of several ethnic groups or just one. Through situations of social change and increased mobility they may start to crosscut one another so that members of all ethnic groups are found in all strata.

In sum, ethnicity can be a useful concept to analyze contact and mutual accommodation between groups, as well as, the strategic positions of group power within the structure of modern society. This characterization opens the door to discuss the management of ethnic diversity by looking at power relations, and the management of social, political and economic resources among, and between dominant and minority groups. The objective of this book is thus to examine how ethnic diversity is managed across various national contexts – how do these manifestations and meanings of ethnic diversity vary from place to place? And to what extent are there contradictions and inconsistencies, with respect to public policy and political philosophies versus practices on the ground?

Managing Ethnic Diversity

Nearly 2,350 years ago, Alexander the Great was credited for successfully practicing one of the first mass-scale policies of cultural fusion after his numerous conquests in the Middle East and Asia Minor. His ethno-management successfully fused Macedonian, Greek and Persian cultures into court; the integration of a multi-ethnic army; the retention of local rulers; and, a legacy of tolerance for non-Greek practices. What makes the management of ethnic diversity more complex than in antiquity is rooted in the fact that the modern discourse on ethnicity has contributed to a new form of ‘ethnic’ self-awareness, notably about ‘home country’ origins and traditions. This has led to the continuation of ethnic networks which
provide a large space for local ethnic communities and economies to prosper. Major cosmopolitan cities have neighbourhoods dominated by people with the same origin as themselves and continue to regard themselves, for example, as ‘Chinese’ or ‘Nigerian’ in addition to being Canadian, Australian or British – two generations or more after their ancestors left their ‘home country’. This may be the result of ethnic organization and identity reacting to the process of modernization itself. As Friedman (1990, 311) puts it, “ethnic fragmentation and modernist homogenization are not two arguments, two opposing views of what is happening in the world today, but two constitutive trends of global reality”. Through situations of social change and increased mobility they may start to crosscut one another so that members of all ethnic groups are found in all strata.

Against this propitious background, questions about the modern management of ethnic diversity in traditional and non-traditionally viewed multi-ethnic nations have come to the forefront. In traditionally viewed, multi-ethnic nations such as Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom, where a prevailing multiculturalism policy is practiced, questions about whether this policy can lead to the advancement of group rights are pondered. For instance, Patti Tamara Lenard (Chapter 2) questions whether an increase in ethno-cultural diversity contributes to a decline in the trust necessary to sustain redistributive policies, as well as active participation? In effect, for Lenard, it is essential that we ask whether multicultural policies can serve to build or strengthen trust relations in ethno-culturally diverse societies. Relatedly, Andrew Robinson (Chapter 3) asks whether there is truly a single basis upon which varied cultural accommodations can be justified. And, if there is such a basis, can it inform normative principles to guide the design of accommodations and the adjudication of the inter- and intra-communal conflicts that will inevitably arise. Robinson’s chapter suggests that such a basis is available if the foundational value of a meaningful life is properly articulated. By illustrating how the values of personal autonomy and communal identification are capable both of working together to support meaningful life and also, conflicting to undermine it, his conception of meaningful life is used to develop normative principles that can define the parameters of a workable and justifiable multiculturalism.

It will be ill-advised to consider the contemporary management of ethnic diversity without considering the various philosophical and historical legacies that have contributed to the present reality. While Lenard and Robinson utilize a political philosophical reductionism to ascertain potential consequences of multiculturalism, Adsett (Chapter 4) adopts a historical approach suggesting multiculturalism in Canada is an outcome of British liberal political philosophy, especially that of John Stuart Mill, and could never have been accepted in Canada without the shared understanding of the meaning of liberty, equality and community that comes from that philosophical tradition. This thesis is further supported by looking at the French understanding of these three concepts, which come primarily from the philosophical works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau; and which she demonstrates, render impossible a French version of multiculturalism. Today, the differences in ethno-management are evident. Both Canada and the
Managing Ethnic Diversity

United Kingdom manage ethnic diversity by stressing integration and equality, *inter alia*, by an incorporatist approach codified in legal apparatus – primarily the 1988 Multiculturalism Act in Canada; and the 1976 Race Relations Act in the United Kingdom. In respect to the United Kingdom, Marangozov (Chapter 10) further points out that in the post-colonial period, Britain made significant efforts to integrate immigrant communities through non-discriminatory treatment in health care, social security and the franchise. This potentially, is a sharp contrast to the immigrant experience in France, where the French conception of ethnic management is not conducive to the overt acceptance of diversity in the public sphere – or so it is argued in Chapter 4.

This begs the question, is our understanding of managing ethnic diversity, via multiculturalism policy or otherwise, localized? Is it based primarily on local political and social histories? We find proof about the localization of managing diversity by looking at Suzanna Reiss’ and Reza Hasmath’s chapters. Reiss’ (Chapter 5) looks at the practice of Canadian multiculturalism through the lens of the Caribbean population. For Reiss, multiculturalism provided a way for Canada to perpetuate a myth of ethno-racial tolerance while obscuring issues of race subsumed by its official policy of accepting ethno-cultural diversity. In addition, she argues that while ethno-cultural events such as Caribana embodied for some the libratory potential of cultural affirmation, an official policy of multiculturalism clearly relegated issues of ethnicity to a strictly cultural rather than political realm; removing culture from its socio-economic context in an effort to avoid any serious challenge to the status quo. Interestingly, this message is echoed in the case of China presented in Chapter 6. The institutionalization of ethnic relations in China appears to have a double-edged sword. On the one hand, celebratory festivals and events showcasing ethnic traditions and culture serve as a mechanism to promote minority groups to the mainstream.

Yet, an attendant concern is that the socio-economic struggles of many ethnic minority groups are being masked when a celebratory version of their culture and traditions is presented.

Attempting to re-center the socio-economic context in the multiculturalism debate, Chapter 7 examines the educational attainment and occupational outcomes of ethnic minorities in Toronto and Taipei. The chapter suggests the existence of an ethnic penalty in the labour market – that is, minorities are seemingly under-represented in the managerial and professional class when accounting for their education.

We start to see Canada’s contemporary patterns in managing ethnic diversity reappearing in Australia and New Zealand. Australia and New Zealand, like Canada, has transformed itself from a predominantly ‘white settler’ society into a socially cohesive multi-ethnic nation through the implementation of an extensive mass migration program that was followed by the adoption of multiculturalism as state policy. Toula Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos (Chapter 9) argue that the Australian concept of multiculturalism has acquired a covert meaning via its implication in what they term the ‘onto-pathology of white
Australia’ and the latter’s reliance upon ‘the perpetual foreigners-within’. The basic idea is that far from doing away with migrants’ ascription of their perpetual foreigner status, multiculturalism reinforces the social positioning of specific ethnic minority groups as the perpetual foreigners-within. In extricating itself from a White Australia paradigm, the inception of multiculturalism inaugurated a new mythology around an open and tolerant society or so it is argued by Augie Fleras (Chapter 8). Fleras’ compares Australia and New Zealand’s tactics when it comes to ethnic management. Fleras’ concludes by demonstrating how debates over immigration and indigeneity may account for diverse multicultural politics in the art of living together with differences in deeply divided societies.

Our journey ends in Western Europe by examining non-traditionally perceived multi-ethnic nations such as Austria, Germany and Italy, who seemingly share common difficulties implementing effective strategies for managing ethnic differences. The chapter on Austria, a nation who Barbara Herzog-Punzenberger and Govind Rao (Chapter 11) argue possesses for many years ‘preconditions’ for multiculturalism as a potential official policy for managing ethnic differences, but has made very few steps towards its adoption. Their chapter poses the questions: What explains a country’s non-adoption of multiculturalism policy, when other factors would seem to speak in its favour? Why has the Austrian state and society remained so resistant to the idea of multiculturalism and recognition of diversity when other similar countries have adopted it? Germany appears to share many similarities with Austria. The German debate on Leitkultur (guiding culture) has sparked a great deal of media attention and can be considered as Germany’s first sustained public attempt to come to terms with the reality of an increasingly multicultural society. Ming-Bao Yue (Chapter 12) situates this conversation and discusses potential responses to the multiculturalism debate in Germany.

The case of Austria and Germany provokes the subject of the final chapter: what happens when an assimilationist logic, stressing what people have in common, comes face to face with an ethnic identity which celebrates difference? In South Tyrol, the northernmost trilingual Italian region, Nazi-fascism and the two World Wars have caused ethnic membership to become a deeply divisive issue. The post-war agreement rested on a peculiar reinterpretation of the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine. The campaign slogan adopted by the local ethnic German majority used to be: “the clearer we make the distinction between us, the better we will get on with each other”, roughly corresponding to the English saying ‘good fences make good neighbours’. Stefano Fait examines the consequences of a ‘fenced society’ in the region caused largely in part by an arrangement originally designed to protect ethnic Ladins and Germans – a majority in the region but a minority nationally – from the encroachments of the Italian state.

Throughout the chapters it becomes evident that the complexities of ethnic diversity are not the exclusive domain of one academic discipline. To cast our nets more broadly, the collection of chapters is purposely interdisciplinary in the resources it draws upon and the perspectives in constructs on salient meanings and practices for managing ethnic diversity. What is particularly interesting to observe
is that for various nations there are very different patterns of change in managing ethnic differences across time, and these changes are very much shaped by local factors and constraints. This is not to deny that there are some global forces at work as well, but even these appear to play out in unique ways in local contexts.

References