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Ethnicity and Practice

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A perusal of the contents of any social science journal will indicate that ethnicity has been a popular topic during the past two decades. Yet despite the volume of material produced, this period has not seen a notable increase in theoretical sophistication in the field (Drummond 1983:803; Young 1983). For the most part students of ethnicity remain mired in antique arguments about motivation that obscure as much as they illuminate. The following discussion attempts to break through some entrenched conceptual blinders by drawing on the theory of practice outlined by Pierre Bourdieu (1977). This theory avoids the explanatory gaps and fallacious reasoning and at the same time allows richer interpretations of ethnic phenomena, individual and collective, than do conventional models of ethnicity. Since individual and collective expressions of ethnicity have elicited divergent theoretical treatments, the practice theory of ethnicity promises to give new unity to a fragmented field of study.

EXPLAINING ETHNICITY

Ethnicity emerged as a key problem in anthropology with Edmund Leach’s (1954) challenge to the conventional assumption that societies and cultures covary sufficiently that the two terms can be used interchangeably. Leach’s argument, based on his research among the Kachins of northern Burma, was that members of a social group need share no set of distinctive cultural traits. Instead, Leach argued, social units are produced by subjective processes of categorical ascription that have no necessary relationship to observers’ perceptions of cultural discontinuities. The debate thus opened, as to whether analytical units should be based on observer’s criteria or on indigenous social distinctions, reached its apogee in an exchange between Michael Moerman
(1965, 1968) and Raoul Naroll (1964, 1968) over whether analytically useful units can be inferred from observed distributions of culture traits. Moerman, arguing that they could not, got much the better of the exchange. The ascendancy of this position was firmly established with Fredrik Barth's (1969a) seminal collection, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Subsequently the issue shifted to whether subjective claims to ethnic identity derived from the affective potency of primordial attachments (e.g., Geertz 1963; Isaacs 1975) or the instrumental manipulation of culture in service of collective political and economic interests (e.g., Wallerstein 1960; Despres 1967; Cohen 1969). This dichotomy, usually labeled primordialist-instrumentalist, continues to orient studies of ethnicity despite a growing sense that it obscures important aspects of the phenomena under study.¹

Despite apparent disagreements on fundamentals, instrumentalist and primordialist models both seek an objective grounding for subjective identity claims; both accept that cultural features and identity claims fail to covary in any predictable fashion; both view the widespread resurgence of ethnic allegiances after World War II as a consequence of sweeping socioeconomic changes in the modern world.² They differ mainly in the aspects of change they identify as critical to ethnicity. Instrumentalist models generally hold that changing political and economic contexts disrupt traditional material orders and create novel constellations of shared material interests. People with common interests coalesce into groups in pursuit of those interests. Robing interest groups in ethnic (cultural) garb takes advantage of the legitimating nationalist ideologies of modern states and/or renders such groups less vulnerable in the face of numerical or political inferiority (see, e.g., Cohen 1969; Brass 1974; Smith 1981). Ethnic groups, resurgent or newly created, exist "essentially as a weapon in pursuit of collective advantage" (Young

¹ Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1974:37) label the polar positions "primordialist" and "circumstantialist." Toby Alice Volkman (1984:152–53) cautions against taking this antinomy too seriously since few students of ethnicity would willingly accept either label. However, most people in the field still locate their own work conceptually with reference to this dichotomy (see, e.g., Despres 1982). A recent exchange between proponents of symbolic and sociological approaches to ethnicity (Jayawardena 1980; Drummond 1980, 1981a; Norton 1983) sets up a somewhat different, but equally artificial, antinomy, this time between cognitive-symbolic and political-economic causality. The tendency toward antinomous posturing in the ethnicity literature is discussed in G. C. Bentley (1983b; see also Bentley 1981a).

² Differences between the primordialist and instrumentalist approaches reflect fundamentally different assumptions about human action. Instrumentalists view human action as rationally oriented toward practical goals while primordialists view action as value-oriented (see Weber 1978); instrumentalists stress circumstantial manipulation of identities while primordialists point to the emotional power of primordial symbols; instrumentalists would mitigate ethnic conflict (in fact, corporate conflict in general) through market allocation of resources (see, e.g., Despres 1967; Rabushka and Shepsle 1972) while primordialists tend to favor accommodating ethnic collectivities through consociation or communal pluralism (see, e.g., Lijphart 1972; Novak 1972, 1977; Glazer 1983).
Ethnic affinities retain their emotional power so long as they advance shared objective interests.

Primordialist models turn the causal arrows around, holding that changing social contexts disrupt conventional ways of understanding and acting in the world. People disoriented by change seek refuge in those aspects of their shared lives that most fundamentally define for them who they are (see, e.g., Geertz 1963; De Vos 1975; Isaacs 1975; Keyes 1976; Epstein 1978). A deep-seated need for rootedness gives rise to communal sentiments that generate ethnic collectivities. Ethnic collectivities defend their members from material dislocations through collective action when threatened, but they continue to respond to emotional needs even in the absence of overt political and economic threats (Keyes 1981:11–12).

While both models possess an appealing simplicity, they also share a critical gap in their explanatory logic. Neither addresses the question of how people recognize the commonalities (of interest or sentiment) underlying claims to common identity. Primordialist models point to an array of potent symbols but fail to explain what elements of commonality are embodied in particular symbols (name, descent, language, religion, etcetera) in particular settings. Instrumentalists variously view ethnicity as a conscious expression of short-term economic interest (Patterson 1975), as a fiction constructed by leaders and sold to their impressionable followers (Brass 1974), or as the product of some unconscious and unspecified process of interest aggregation (Cohen 1974a). Each of these instrumentalist variants generalizes from one (or a few) cases to the world as a whole. Beyond their mutual inconsistency, none of them has been tested at the level of the individual, where ethnic identity formulation and manipulation presumably take place. Moreover, instrumentalist predictions regarding intensities of ethnic consciousness and levels of interethnic conflict are often disconfirmed in case studies (see, e.g., Bentley 1982a). In sum, neither of the prevailing models of ethnicity stands up well to empirical scrutiny, and both leave unexamined the microprocesses by which collectivities of interest and sentiment come into existence.

Nor is an account of this process contained in recent efforts to transcend the instrumentalist-primordialist dichotomy. Pierre van den Berghe (1978a, 1981), for example, subsumes both positions within the encompassing paradigm of sociobiology. In his view, cultural attributes mark relatedness beyond the reach of genealogical reckoning. Fitness, at this remove, is a function of ecological, economic, political, and social competition, so that ethnic sentiments reflect a biological predisposition toward kin selection. Seemingly irrational attachments to primordial symbols appear here as the expression of a higher biological rationality.

Charles Keyes (1981) has attempted to resolve the affective-instrumental dichotomy not by leaping to a more universal plane of explanation, but instead by placing both aspects of ethnicity in dialectical relation to each
other. Ethnic identities serve psychological functions, but they become socially significant "only if access to the means of production, means of expropriation of the products of labor, or means of exchange between groups are determined by membership in groups defined in terms of nongenealogical descent" (Keyes 1981:11). As contexts change, so do relevant identities, yet, once evolved, these new identities are assumed to define for people who they truly are as descendants of their ancestors or forebears. Primordial identities continue to serve as gyroscopes for those buffeted by uncertainties as to the best way to pursue their interests or for those alienated by the dehumanized agencies designed to organize the ordering of social ends in a rational way (Keyes 1981:28).

Although these attempted syntheses recognize the sterility of the instrument-sentiment dichotomy, they remain flawed in that neither explains how people come to recognize their commonalities in the first place. At base ethnicity involves a claim to be a particular kind of person. Whether the impetus to such a claim lies in an innate tendency to favor kin (even fictive kin), ecological adaptation, shared positions in structures of production and distribution, or emotional sustenance, ethnic-identity claims involve symbolic construal of sensations of likeness and difference, and these sensations must somehow be accounted for.

THE THEORY OF PRACTICE
The "theory of practice," as formulated by Bourdieu (1977), provides a way to address this problem. Bourdieu argues that objective conditions of existence, mediated by systems of symbolic representations, generate in different persons dispositions to act in different ways. These dispositions are not normally open to conscious apprehension. Extrapolating from Bourdieu’s analysis, we may hypothesize that consciousness of affinities of interest and experience embodies subliminal awareness of objective commonalities in practice. This proposition finds substantial support in the existing literature. It provides the objective grounding for ethnic subjectivity sought by both primordialists and instrumentalists and, in addition, it accounts for phenomena they cannot.

Theories of practice trace from the Marxist need to relate class consciousness to objective conditions of existence. Marxist theorists identify the shared experience and practice of the proletariat as a necessary but not a sufficient condition for true revolutionary consciousness (Lukacs 1968:19–20). In the final instance, practice is determinative of consciousness, but not in any simple or mechanical way. The idea that practice underlies con-

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3 "Marx’s insistence on the emancipatory qualities of the proletariat is, on philosophical grounds, rooted in the fact that the worker in his alienated activity comes closer than any one else to conceptualizing and feeling the concrete meaning of what is denied to him and renounced by the capitalist. The actively damaged life becomes the gate to full awareness of the universality of damaged life and the desire and willingness to reclaim the fully active human life" (Kontos 1975b:222).
In the theory of practice, the structures constitutive of a particular type of environment (e.g., the material conditions of existence characteristic of a class condition) produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions. . . . The habitus is the product of the work of inculcation and appropriation necessary in order for those products of collective history, the objective structures (e.g., language, economy, etc.) to succeed in reproducing themselves (Bourdieu 1977:72,85).

The habitus comprises a set of generative schemes that produce practices and representations that are regular without reference to overt rules and that are goal directed without requiring conscious selection of goals or mastery of methods of achieving them (Bourdieu 1977:72). What is commonly interpreted as rational interest-seeking behavior is in fact largely habitual, an acting out of objective constraints encoded in unexamined assumptions about what is reasonable and unreasonable, "a whole body of wisdom, commonplaces, ethical precepts ('that's not for the likes of us'), and, at a deeper level, the unconscious principles of the ethos" (Bourdieu 1977:77). Experience of objective constraints begins early in life, mediated by family relations attuned to them (e.g., "sexual division of labor, domestic morality, cares, strife, tasks, etc.") and the habitual dispositions thus engendered condition perception and appreciation of all subsequent experience (Bourdieu 1977:78).

Inculcation of the habitus depends on innate pattern-recognition capabilities through which persons "achieve a practical mastery of . . . classificatory schemes which in no way implies symbolic mastery—i.e. conscious recognition and verbal expression—of the processes practically applied" (Bourdieu 1977:88). This process is similar to language learning, in which competence is achieved without conscious awareness of the structure of what is learned. Practical skill mastery, logic, and values are, first of all, inscribed on the body "in abbreviated and practical, i.e. mnemonic form" (Bourdieu 1977:94; cf. Foucault 1977). It is important to note that the principles embodied [sic] in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit; nothing seems more ineffable, more incommunicable, more inimitable, than the values given body, made body by the transubstantiation achieved by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy (Bourdieu 1977:94).

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4 This trend can also be viewed as a return to the emphasis on the habitual in human action found in classical social theory (see, e.g., Weber 1978, sections on "Law, Convention, and Custom" and on patrimonial domination).

5 In this way the theory of practice avoids the finalist fallacy of teleological causation, that is, identifying an event's consequences as its cause (Bourdieu 1977:72–78).
The dispositions thus inscribed can be altered only with great difficulty. However, changes in objective conditions and consequent life experiences generate changes in structures of habitus subsequently produced, so that generation conflicts oppose not age-classes separated by natural properties, but habitus which have been produced by different modes of generation, that is, by conditions of existence which, in imposing different definitions of the impossible, the possible, and the probable, cause one group to experience as natural or reasonable practices or aspirations which another group finds unthinkable or scandalous or vice versa (Bourdieu 1977:78).

If differences in habitus can account for patterns of conflict and disagreement, similarities in habitus necessarily underlie coordinated or collective action, ‘since the corrections and adjustments the agents themselves consciously carry out presuppose their mastery of a common code’ (Bourdieu 1977:81). Like the deep structures of generative grammars, the schemes and dispositions constituting the habitus produce an infinite variety of surface expressions, but all these expressions can be comprehended by those competent in the underlying code. Moreover, all such surface representations, personal styles if you will, are recognizable as being of a single type, though those recognizing them can never articulate comprehensively, and rarely at all, the objective bases on which the judgment of similarity is made.

A CASE OF ETHNIC AMBIVALENCE

The relationship between patterns of practice and sensations of ethnic affinity can be illustrated by the experiences of a young Maranao woman who has struggled with a sense of ambivalent ethnicity, a feeling that she is neither here nor there but is instead liminal in a system of categorical identities. Her experiences also provide an opportunity to apply the theory of practice to ethnic-identity formation in the individual.

Soraya Monap is the eldest daughter of a well-to-do Maranao family living in The Islamic City of Marawi, capital of the southern Philippine province of Lanao del Sur. Although Maranao dominate Lanao del Sur, nationally they are part of a small (5 percent) Muslim minority long despised by the Catholic majority and often in conflict with it (see Bentley 1982b:1–22). Soraya’s parents had an atypical attitude toward their daughters’ upbringing. Her father in particular was impressed by his American teachers’ ethic of individual initiative and persuaded that they had shown him the key to social advancement in postindependence Philippine society. So he pushed his six daughters toward scholastic and professional achievement, goals strikingly at odds with customary expectations for Maranao women. While he was in Manila pursuing a law degree, Soraya attended high-quality private schools. There she was surrounded by the daughters of middle- and upper-class Christian Filipinos, people far more cosmopolitan than those in the provincial capital where she had spent her childhood.
After her father was graduated and had passed the bar, the family returned to Marawi, and Soraya enrolled in a high school run by Protestant missionaries. Shortly thereafter she learned that her parents had betrothed her to her father’s distant cousin, himself a law student. She did not like the man and found repulsive the thought of a traditional marriage in which she would have little or no say. Although Muslims are not legally required to register their marriages, both her father and her fiancé felt compelled as lawyers to seek Soraya’s consent (required by the Philippine Civil Code). Soraya agreed to the marriage but only on two conditions: first, the relationship would not be consummated until she was of age twenty-one so that she might finish her education and, second, she would not change her name until the marriage was consummated. Her kinsmen were shocked by this departure from tradition and appalled that her parents acquiesced in her demands. Both conditions injured the maratabat (‘‘rank honor’’) of her fiancé’s family, something marriage negotiations are arranged specifically to avoid. However, Soraya’s father defended her, saying that he had reared his daughters to think for themselves and that he would let them do so even if they defied tradition. So, in 1959, at the age of thirteen, Soraya was married in absentia. She continued to live with her natal family and to attend her high school classes. Within a year after the marriage, Soraya’s ‘‘husband’’ began an affair with one of her cousins, restoring his wounded honor by besmirching that of the Monap family. Faced with a fait accompli, the cousin’s parents decided to entertain a marriage proposal from their daughter’s lover. Thus Soraya’s cousin became her husband’s second wife in theory but first wife in fact.

Soraya completed high school in 1962 and attended the first class at the newly opened Mindanao State University. When she was graduated in 1966 at age nineteen her parents considered her education complete and the restrictions on her marriage contract fulfilled, so they once again began entertaining marriage proposals for her (Soraya’s husband had acquired four more wives, the maximum allowed under Islamic law, and apparently regarded their marriage as void). But Soraya had decided to reject any Maranao suitor. To avoid conflict with her parents, every time a new marriage proposal appeared imminent, she gathered her savings and fled to Manila for further education. She enrolled in classes at the University of the Philippines in 1966, 1967, 1969, 1972–73, and 1973–75, earning a master’s degree in the process.

During this period, by her own testimony, Soraya was ‘‘a very modern girl.’’ A photograph of her taken in 1969 shows a striking young woman wearing jeans, a polo shirt, and a red bandana around her head, a far cry from

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6 They had more than a casual interest in the marriage negotiations. Maranao kin to five degrees of collateral removal have rights to participate in marriage negotiations and to share in bridewealth receipts (Bentley 1982b:162–66).
the modest malong ("tube dress"), long-sleeved blouse, and head covering traditionally worn by Maranao women. She developed progressive political attitudes, kept up with the latest Manila fads, attended parties, danced, drank liquor, and generally indulged in all the un-Maranao activities common to young adult urban Filipinos. She received several marriage proposals in Manila, all but one from non-Maranao, but rejected them all. She considered marrying outside the group, but she could not quite envisage the complete break with her family and friends that would have resulted. In addition, her sense of being Maranao was bolstered by the prejudice she encountered in Manila. She was constantly confronted with the popular belief that Muslims are savage cutthroats or even semihuman beings with tails. To deal with her ambivalent feelings she tried to identify positive attributes of her people and their traditions. As part of her search for a satisfactory identity she joined a dance troupe that specialized in traditional Maranao dances; at the same time she practiced the latest rock-and-roll dances with her classmates.

Even though she had become estranged from most of her kinsmen, Soraya felt she could not abandon her people during a period of crisis (this was during the early years of the Bangsa Moro secession movement, the armed conflict between Muslims and Christians in Mindanao, and the Philippine Army occupation of her home province). Because her unsettled marital state made staying in Marawi intolerable, she decided in 1974 to resolve things once and for all with her "husband." Soraya accused him of violating her trust by marrying four times while she had honored their contract for fifteen difficult years. At this late date, even if he divorced his wives his children would always remind her of his betrayal. She concluded that she considered his behavior to have vitiated any remaining obligation she might have and asked, rather disingenuously, that they remain friends as they had been since childhood. He did not object.

While this confrontation clarified Soraya's marital status, she was still pressed by relatives, near and distant, to marry. She thinks that they feared her spinsterhood would set a dangerous example for other young women that, if it caught on, could destroy the Maranao system of familial alliance. It also left unhealed family schisms remaining from her earlier defiance of tradition. Despite her desire to resolve the situation, Soraya did not find any of the proposals she received attractive and began to regret not leaving Marawi permanently when she had the chance.

A solution finally appeared in the person of a Maranao man who had studied in Egypt for fourteen years and returned to Marawi in 1976 as an Islamic missionary. At first he was not assigned to a permanent station but toured the province inspecting madrasas, the Arabic medium primary schools. He appealed to the Monap family, his distant relatives, for housing. With six unmarried daughters in a society that values female chastity above all else, Soraya's parents were understandably reluctant to bring an unmarried
man into the house, but, since he was a kinsman in need and as a missionary could be assumed to be honorable, they eventually agreed. Living in the same house, he and Soraya became acquainted, though they had some trouble communicating. After his long absence he was more fluent in Arabic than in Maranao, Maranao had changed considerably during his absence, and Soraya found herself unable to express in Maranao thoughts she had in English. Still, they learned more about each other than was usually the case, given the traditional isolation of unmarried daughters. They found they agreed on many things, including the need for modernization of the Maranao people. Although he was oriented toward Islamic fundamentalism and she toward Western modernism, he, too, rejected the hidebound conservatism she detested in Maranao men. In addition, he told Soraya that he had several years earlier seen a group picture in which she appeared, and had decided then that she must be his wife, a confession (unusual for a Maranao man) Soraya found extremely attractive. When, after living in the house for several months, he asked Soraya’s father for permission to marry her, she shyly consented to the decision.

So Soraya married a Muslim missionary. She has adopted a quiet lifestyle and believes she has demonstrated that she is a good Maranao daughter. She wants her experience to serve as a model for other Maranao girls, showing that they can be progressive and good daughters at the same time. Despite her reconciliation with her Maranao identity, she still feels uncomfortable around many Maranao and resents what she perceives as their rejection of her. She draws many of her friends from the small foreign community in town. It is ironic that among her best friends in this setting, so highly polarized between Muslims and Christians, are missionary priests serving the Catholic population at the university where she teaches. She says she is determined to integrate in herself two cultures, Maranao tradition and Western modernism, retaining the positive aspects of Maranao custom and rejecting those that impede progress, including traditional marriage practices.

PRACTICE AND BELONGING

Soraya’s experiences help illustrate the nature of ethnic identities and the value of the theory of practice in explaining them. According to the practice theory of ethnicity, sensations of ethnic affinity are founded on common life experiences that generate similar habitual dispositions.7 While people sense

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7 Early students of ethnicity took it for granted that experience marked character in enduring ways. The title of W. I. Thomas and Flojan Znaniecki’s (1918) classic study, The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, refers to continuities linking styles of life in the old and new worlds. Two decades earlier, Israel Zangwill (1895:x) wrote of Jewish immigrants to Britain: “People who have been living in a Ghetto for a couple of centuries are not able to step outside merely because the gates are thrown down, nor to efface the brands on their souls by putting off the yellow badges. The isolation imposed from without will have come to seem the law of their being... Such people are their own Ghetto gates; when they migrate they carry them across the seas to lands where they are not” (quoted in Epstein 1978:61–62). However, given a pervasive ideologi-
(correctly or incorrectly) likenesses and differences among themselves, practical mastery of these patterns does not require consciousness of their objective bases. It is commonality of experience and of the preconscious habitus it generates that gives members of an ethnic cohort their sense of being both familiar and familial to each other. As the psychoanalyst Theodor Reik expresses his experience of being Jewish,

a man can prefer to be together with others and even avoid his own people; he can feel estranged from them—but he can never be a stranger to them. The very intimacy of the experience, which is nothing but common memories that have become unconscious, excludes the possibility of cutting a tie that was formed, not alone by the same blood, but by the same rhythm of living (quoted in Epstein 1978:140).

The idioms of kinship and descent used for expressing ethnic affinities are not chosen arbitrarily. The special feelings that attach to actual family members and comembers of genealogical groupings reflect the same awareness of shared habitus that underlies the familism of ethnic aggregations (see Keyes 1976; Epstein 1978:149ff). As in Soraya’s case, it is to such persons that one normally repairs for emotional sustenance, precisely because one expects from them a degree of empathy unavailable from more distant others (De Vos and Romanucci-Ross 1975:385–89).

If Reik’s description captures the nature of shared habitus (“common memories that have become unconscious”), it also captures the manner in which shared habitus is realized (“the same rhythm of living”). In illustrating habitus, Bourdieu leans heavily on descriptions of the rhythms of dance, ritual, and calendrical succession (Bourdieu 1977:93–158). These are inscribed, habitual, and significant, but at a level normally far removed from consciousness. We may recall that Soraya indicated her ethnic ambivalence by pointing to her interest in both traditional Maranao and modern pop dances. For her these were not only recreations; each style of dance expressed a fundamentally different way of being.

Studies of contrasting styles between black and white Americans similarly emphasize patterned differences in body movements and speech. These studies demonstrate that black Americans characteristically perceive and symbolize their experiences differently from white Americans and in a manner not attributable to class differences alone (Kochman 1981:8ff; contra, Glazer and Moynihan 1963:53). Different stances toward and understandings of the world inhere in the divergent intellectual and emotional evocations of particular movement styles. Moreover, differences in the underlying codes (habitus) of black and white Americans account for many misunderstandings and conflicts between them. For instance,

cal emphasis on how quickly immigrants could “become American.” This early insight quickly receded. Only a few articles emphasizing continuity can be found in the recent literature (e.g., Schooler 1976).
when blacks and whites interact in public meetings, their agenda does not typically include a discussion of the way they are interpreting each other's behavior, the reasons they are interpreting it the way they do, or the way they are expecting the meeting to evolve. Thus, unless there are reasons to think otherwise, blacks and whites at such gatherings will assume that the meanings they are assigning to all of these matters are the same and, therefore, that the motives they are ascribing to each other—based on this assumption—are also justified (Kochman 1981:7).

Since one can never be fully conscious of the assumptions that one brings to an encounter, gaps in understanding are inevitable. The frequency of interethnic misunderstanding makes clear that we cannot assume congruence between the generative schemes of habitus and their surface expressions. Again an analogy with language is helpful. Generative grammarians know that similar surface structures can derive from very different deep structures. People speaking what appears to be the same language, professing the same religion, wearing the same clothes, or otherwise displaying superficial similarities nevertheless may be operating in terms of different generative schemes. Overlaps in the behavioral repertoire of peoples having characteristically different experiences (and habitus) are likely to give rise to invalid assumptions of mutual understanding, what Jürgen Habermas (1970) calls "systematically distorted communication." Experience of distorted communication can generate feelings of discomfort, of alienation, of hostility toward or, among the more reflective, of not knowing the other. For Soraya, differences between her experience and understanding of the world and those of her relatives produced a sense of distance, of an ineffable and unbridgeable gap that haunted her intercourse with them. More generally, ethnographic evidence suggests that incorrect imputation of motives due to distorted communication accounts in part for the invidious character of interethnic stereotypes and for precipitating incidents in interethnic conflicts (see, e.g., Levine and Campbell 1972; Durrenberger 1975).

The theory of practice also reveals as illusory the apparent paradox of simultaneous emotional dependence on and situational manipulation of ethnic identities. Ethnic identities involve attaching significance to perceived differences between people as well as to sensed affinities among them (see, e.g., Mitchell 1974; Southall 1976; Drummond 1980). Dimensions of differences (and similarity) never covary perfectly and may be quite independent of each other. Gerald Berreman (1972:568–70), for instance, found that urban-rural differences in north India crosscut experiential differences based on caste, class, language, and other dimensions of aggregation. One senses the contri-

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8 Although Habermas (1970) developed this concept for application to relations between social classes in capitalist societies, it can also be applied profitably to interethnic, intergenerational, and other dimensions of social discontinuity.

9 In this regard, see Paul Rabinow's (1977) reflection on the limits to empathy in the fieldwork situation.
bution of rural upbringing to habitus in the mountain villager’s lament, ‘‘We don’t know how to dress or act in town. There even a poor untouchable puts on a shirt and pajama and looks respectable, but we can’t look like that. Even if we spend Rs. 200 on the finest cloth and have the best clothes made, we still look like fools in town’’ (Berreman 1972:577).

Of course, different social contexts evoke different elements of habitus and associated behavior. In another situation facility in urban living might be less significant than the etiquette that comes naturally to members of an elite class or ethnic group and leaves nonmembers feeling awkward and out of place (see Cohen 1981). As Berreman (1972:578) points out, ‘‘[people] behave as the situation demands or makes most comfortable rather than as consistency with belief would seem to dictate.’’ Comfort is contextual, a function of habitus mapped onto social situations so that appropriate and acceptable behavior is generated. Inability to so behave makes one uncomfortable, marks social discontinuities, and may be stigmatized (Eidheim 1969). The lack of a naturally ‘‘correct’’ demeanor can be partly mitigated through conscious selection of appropriate behaviors, but, like learning a second language in adulthood, the process is exhausting and the results usually far from perfect. As in the case of Berreman’s villager, the problem often is not one of ignorance of behavioral standards but instead is one of not being able to live up to them in practice. 10 Since ethnic identity derives from situationally shared elements of a multidimensional habitus, it is possible for an individual to possess several different situationally relevant but nonetheless emotionally authentic identities and to symbolize all of them in terms of shared descent. 11

Most anthropological studies of ethnic categorization have proceeded from the general premise that categorical distinctions order fluid experience and so make it cognizable and comprehensible (see, e.g., Mitchell 1956, 1974; Sanjek 1977; Drummond 1980, 1981b; see also Lévi-Strauss 1963). Since order is introduced through differentiation, these studies view affinities within ethnic categories as a consequence rather than as a cause of social and sym-

10 It is largely for this reason that ‘‘passing’’ is so difficult. Indian entertainers who simulate various public identities earn a living precisely because their audiences appreciate their facility in a difficult profession (Berreman 1972:577). Cases of successful imposture also figure in Western genres of literary sensationalism, presumably because of their rarity. One of the most famous of these, dating from the mid-sixteenth century, is Arnaud du Tilh’s assumption of the home, estates, and wife of Martin Guerre, for which crime he was executed (Davis 1983). Appropriately, given the present discussion, du Tilh’s downfall began with his sale of family land, a practice common among French peasants but inconsistent with his supposed Basque sensibilities. His ethnically inappropriate practice brought him into conflict with his paternal uncle and eventually led to his unmasking. Du Tilh apparently found the intimate details of another man’s life easier to assimilate than the deeply ingrained dispositions associated with his assumed ethnicity.

11 Social contexts and associated ethnic groupings usually are nested hierarchically so that, like segmentary lineages, multiple ethnic identities are not mutually exclusive (Keyes 1976:206–7).
bolic oppositions (Barth 1969b:14–15; Drummond 1980:353; Galaty 1982:16). Here ethnic identities appear as empty vessels whose content is anchored externally in conventional but arbitrary oppositions between categories. The theory of practice posits a different dialectic whose poles are constituted by affective affinities based on shared habitus and symbolic differentiations both cognitively and affectively generated. Conceptions of ethnic identity, while symbolically constructed fictions of shared descent, are not entirely arbitrary. As Berreman’s example demonstrates, ethnic identities are anchored internally in experience as well as externally in the cognitive distinctions in terms of which that experience is ordered.

Soraya’s story offers further support for this position. She shares different aspects of her life with different categories of people, categories mutually exclusive in the Philippine social context. She has chosen to live among Maranao and enjoys close relations with some members of her family (especially her mother and younger sisters), but she has also found sympathetic acquaintances among foreign residents who share her aspirations, her command of English, and her sense of alienation from the Maranao community. With the urban Filipino middle class she shares a devotion to modernity. With her husband she shares an inability to fit into traditional Maranao categories. In fact, their shared liminality has allowed Soraya to achieve a degree of comfort and empathy, an ability to be herself, unique in her experience.

In general, contexts which evoked differences rather than similarities in disposition with other Maranao produced in Soraya a stronger sense of alienation than of affinity. In these situations she questioned whether she really was or could be authentically Maranao. In contrast, situations which evoked shared experience, as of prejudice and oppression, generated in her strong feelings of ethnic affinity, leading her to return to Marawi at the height of civil strife and to choose an unusual marriage partner. Her emotional responses to these situations were not voluntary. Although she tried, she could not feel comfortable in Manila, or in Marawi either for that matter. Working with the available array of socially significant categories, she made sense of her contradictory feelings and experiences as best she could. 12

12 The Philippines provide other counterexamples to the proposition that cognitive distinctions between ethnic categories are sufficient to generate solidarity within them. In the Sulu Archipelago, ethnic identities traditionally have been calculated with reference to the core symbols of Tausug identity, the Tausug having dominated the islands throughout the historic period. These symbols include adherence to Islam, a particular body of custom and language, and recognition of the Sulu Sultanate as sovereign in the islands (Kiefer 1969). Tausug classify all Sinama-speaking peoples in the archipelago under the name Samal. However, despite objective linguistic affinities and a common label imposed on them by the Tausug, Sinama speakers have not until recently conceived of themselves as ethnically similar. Awareness of their common differentness from the Tausug was insufficient to give them a sense of shared identity, even within the restricted social universe defined by Tausug hegemony. Among themselves, Sinama speakers found local labels (island, village, etcetera) more meaningful. Ethnographers report great difficulty getting Sinama-speaking informants to generalize about Samal, even though these peoples know that the Tausug
In addition to highlighting the manner in which experience is symbolized, the theory of practice directs our attention to the way that Soraya’s early experience laid the objective basis for her later ethnic ambivalence. Soraya’s father is typical of what she calls the second wave of Maranao professionals, men (almost exclusively) who assimilated new sources of wealth, prestige, and power into existing social and political forms (Bentley 1982b:200–207). Like most of his cohort, he parlayed a professional degree acquired in Manila into an entrepreneurial and administrative career in provincial Lanao. While some of the elements of Filipino modernism he brought from Manila seemed strange to his relatives, these ideas never called into question his identity as Maranao. Reared in a traditional Maranao environment, he “acts Maranao” without having to think about it. The situation is not so simple for Soraya.

Soraya’s parents maintained a “modern” home, one more like those found in the urban Philippines than like the communal wooden torogans (“noble houses”) or the concrete-block versions of these now popular with Maranao builders. Prior to colonial rule (ca. 1900), unmarried girls of Soraya’s rank lived secluded in a raised room (lamin) at the rear of the communal dwelling where, served by personal attendants, they perfected the arts of Maranao femininity—musical performance, poetic improvisation, lyrical movement, Qur’an reading, etcetera. They emerged only on ceremonial occasions when their skills were put on display to impress prospective suitors and their families. A young bride would meet her husband only briefly prior to their marriage, or perhaps not at all.

Despite the abolition of lamins and the rise of public education for both sexes, Maranao feminine pedagogy retains much of its traditional flavor, molding its women as repositories of value that serve as the ultimate medium of familial exchange and alliance. Soraya’s parents attempted to adapt new

classify them all as such (Nimmo 1972). This situation has changed with the eclipse of Tausug power, with evidence that Sinama peoples and not Tausug were probably the first inhabitants of Sulu (a primordial identification with place), and with increasing possibilities and desires for Sinama social mobility. All these have contributed to a growing sense of “Sama” ethnic identity (see Bentley 1981b).

13 Soraya’s father is typical. Few Maranao lawyers derive their primary incomes from the practice of law (Bentley 1982b:291–94).
14 Maranao society retains a strong aspect of sexual segregation. Maranao men and women do not display affection in public, and a man who touches an unmarried woman, even accidentally, is still considered to have committed a severe offense against her virtue. In crowded university halls, young Maranao men and women manage to avoid touching each other without any apparent effort; it is the work of habitus.
15 Marriage is still the ultimate means of cementing an alliance or ending dispute. In 1978 the marriage of the son of the governor of Lanao del Sur and the daughter of the mayor of Iligan City signaled an end to guerrilla warfare that had left hundreds dead. The wedding reception was spectacular and a political watershed. It was held at one of the largest Manila hotels, with chartered planes for transporting guests, lavish entertainment, and hundreds of rooms set aside for guests indisposed by the festivities. However, while the marriage ended one feud, it provided occasion for continuing another; the son of an unsuccessful Lanao del Sur mayoral candidate shot and killed his father’s rival at the reception.
standards of value to their pursuit of this quintessential Maranao goal. They encouraged Soraya and her sisters to think and act for themselves, as their father had been taught in school, while at the same time inculcating in them through precept and example Maranao ways of responding and behaving in the world (see Bentley 1982b, 1983a, 1984). They thought this combination would enable Soraya to make a better marriage and thereby enhance the family maratabat, as indeed it could have, had it not also disposed her to reject the passive role allotted to Maranao brides in the marriage exchange.

The stresses created by Soraya’s upbringing began to become apparent when the family moved to Manila. She did well academically, but she made few friends and felt rejected by her classmates. Habituated to the Maranao world, she often misinterpreted the subtle cues by which her classmates articulated their social alignments. The gap in habitus that set her apart was interpreted in terms of the opposition between Muslims and Christians in the Philippines. She was labeled a Moro, an alien being hardly worthy of human regard.

If Soraya was uncomfortable in Manila, she could not feel at home in Marawi either. Her involuntary betrothal set her at odds with the network of kin from whom she could normally have expected understanding and support. Maranao girls are often unhappy about marriage, but they have few options. Other girls in Soraya’s position might have encouraged more attractive suitors, thereby complicating marriage negotiations and delaying the inevitable or perhaps making it more palatable. The more courageous might even have run away. Soraya’s reaction was unprecedented, logical to her, inconceivable to her relatives. No girl had ever placed conditions on her own marriage contract before. While her ploy displayed a fine Maranao sensitivity to power and how to use it, it also contradicted the constitutive principles underlying the Maranao social order. In the furor over her obstinate refusal to behave as expected, Soraya sensed how different her orientation toward the world was from that of her kinsmen. Practices they regarded as self-evidently reasonable she found revolting; they found her headstrong individualism scandalous.

Despite her repeated attempts to resolve the contradictory aspects of her identity, Soraya could not allay her feeling that she did not fit in anywhere. Her discomfiture intensified each time the issue of marriage came up. In Manila she repressed her Maranao aspect in favor of a progressive and more generic Filipino identity. However, this effort to “pass” took immense energy and left her with an emotional void.16 With the outbreak of civil war in the southern Philippines, familial and ethnic loyalties reasserted themselves and she returned to Marawi. Still, easing the strain of living in Marawi required that she resolve the marriage question. While she considered becoming an

16 Soraya’s ambivalence at this time is evident in her master’s degree thesis topic, an analysis of the elliptical imagery employed in Maranao courting poems.
ascetic, renouncing sexuality and ordinary life entirely, her ultimate choice of a marriage partner provided an artful solution to the marriage problem. Her husband was of lower descent rank than she and as a missionary stood outside the Maranao system of status competition, both of which made it less likely her identity would be subsumed in his. His overseas training and religious career compensated in part for his lack of hereditary rank and made him more acceptable to her relatives than he would have been otherwise.

Compared to the enduring commonalities Soraya and her husband have discovered, the “common memories that have become unconscious,” the differences between them, even their initial lack of a common language, seem superficial. Although their social circles initially did not coincide, each is gradually entering into the other’s social milieu. While she does not feel entirely comfortable in her present situation, she finds it less uncomfortable than any other and expresses satisfaction with her life. She has a son in whom she and her husband find great joy and whom she is determined to rear as a “modern Maranao.”

Soraya’s story illustrates the several dimensions of habitus discussed above. The habitual dispositions engendered in her through her early upbringing conditioned her perceptions of, emotional reactions to, and behavior in the social situations she encountered. Her emotional ambivalence was not a consequence of cognitive confusion as to where she fit in the structure of Philippine ethnic categories. She had no doubt about that. Instead, it reflected an objective lack of fit in habitus between her and those with whom she interacted in Manila and Marawi. Contrary to the primordialist view, she did not repair to her ethnic identity as a refuge against the vicissitudes and uncertainties of a changing world. She did not reject the present and future in favor of a past orientation (contra, De Vos 1975:18–19). She construed her personal experience in terms of the symbolic material available to her. That the available idiom was ethnic did not give her surcease from stress; it increased it. Contrary to instrumentalist tenets, Soraya did not maximize her material well-being, and, in addition, she found herself severely limited in the degree to which she could manipulate her identity without entailing intolerable emotional costs. Contrary to sociobiological predictions, Soraya did not find kinsmen (beyond her nuclear family) markedly more congenial than persons unrelated to her.18

This case study shows that the theory of practice can explain the affective focus of ethnic identity, its multidimensionality and context sensitivity, and

17 It solved his problem as well. So long as her husband-to-be stayed unmarried, his social identity remained similarly ambiguous.
18 The idea of inclusive fitness, which stands at the center of sociobiological theory, predicts a clear preference for kin over nonkin and for close versus more distant kin. The theory of practice provides an equally attractive explanation for this phenomenon, where it occurs, but evidence for it is somewhat equivocal in any case (see van den Berghe 1981; Hawkes 1983; Smith 1983).
its symbolic formulation in ways instrumentalist and primordialist models (and their multitudinous variants) cannot. Using the concept of habitus, the theory explains the objective grounding for perceptions and feelings of ethnic affinity and difference and also accounts for the clear but irregular association between social structure and ethnic consciousness. This suggests that, instead of focusing directly on the relation between objective context and subjective consciousness of identity, as have virtually all extant models, we ought to attend to how each of these is related to habitus, the intervening variable. On the one hand, we need to investigate how habitual responses to environmental constraints evolve and are inculcated in members of a group; on the other hand, we need to analyze the symbolization of the experience of shared habitus. These two processes together constitute a dialectic through which social life is shaped and given significance.

HABITUS AND DOMINATION

Thus far the discussion has centered on the sources and significance of ethnic identity for individuals. However, an outstanding feature of ethnicity in the modern world has been its importance as a medium of collective social action. Ethnicity as a collective phenomenon involves internal organization and institutional boundedness, and the forms these take cannot be accounted for by shared sentiment—hence the instrumentalist claim that ethnic groups must be ideologically masked interest groups with their organizational features adapted to political action in different settings (see, e.g., Cohen 1969, 1974a, 1974b, 1981; Brass 1974; Plax 1974; Patterson 1975; Barnett 1976; Steinberg 1981).

Accounting for the organizational features of ethnic groups in terms of their positions in larger settings is made more difficult by the fact that ethnic groups are usually internally complex themselves. Even groups identified in terms of a single economic specialty usually encompass a variety of different adaptations.19 And even where class hierarchies rank ethnically distinct strata, those strata themselves comprise hierarchically ranked social classes (see, e.g., Crespi 1975; van den Berghe and Primov 1977). Some pluralist theorists even argue that class complexity is an invariant feature of ethnic groups (see, e.g., Smith 1961, 1965; Despres 1967). As organized and bounded social entities, ethnic groups came into existence only with the development of complex economic and political structures (Francis 1976). Ethnic groups are products of complex social formations and themselves represent complex social formations.

If members of an ethnic group hold different positions in systems of production and distribution, and therefore possess different experiences and di-

19 For example, the “pastoral” Maasai comprise pastoralists, hunters, horticulturalists, blacksmiths, and diviners (Galaty 1982).
vergent interests, this raises the question of why these differences do not undermine ethnic solidarity. 20 Many advocates of the instrumentalist perspective answer that ethnic symbolism masks divergent interests and so serves as an instrument of class exploitation. According to this argument, members of the ethnic elite are the primary promoters and beneficiaries of corporate ethnic action. To obscure the self-serving nature of their activities they erect an ideological screen of shared sentiment with their followers using ethnic symbolism (cf. Brass 1974; Patterson 1975; Steinberg 1981). Secondary beneficiaries of this deliberate obfuscation are state elites which co-opt ethnic leaders, divert their followers’ potential for mass action, and so prevent more dangerous class mobilization. Granted that ethnic groups subsume relations of domination and exploitation, this analysis rests on the powerful but unsubstantiated assumption that members of an ethnic elite possess an awareness of their class interests denied their followers and so can rouse the gullible masses to act in ways not in their own interests. To the contrary, Abner Cohen (1974a:xviii) argues that, even where ethnic action clearly serves elite interests, choices of strategy do not appear to be the product of conscious deliberation (see also Cohen 1969, 1981). 21

Working from the theory of practice, we need not assume conscious exploitation by the elite in order to explain internal organization and coordinated action within ethnic groups. Adjustments to the demands of protecting and exploiting ecological or economic niches can also be viewed as the product of shared habitus (Bourdieu 1977:72–78). 22 Collective adaptation to a niche involves social differentiation sustained by relations of domination; maintenance and reproduction of these depends on the deeply ingrained dispositions of habitus. This is true even in the minimal case of differentiation by sex and age, but its importance grows with elaboration of social hierarchies. The role of habitus in sustaining hierarchy is most evident where institutional mechanisms for reproducing elite domination (e.g., armies, self-regulating markets, educational systems, etcetera) are lacking. In the absence of such institutional mediators, domination must operate through personal or personalistic relations between leaders and followers. In that situation,

\(^{20}\) Indeed, it was the unexpected failure of class allegiances to supplant ethnic ones with industrialization that prompted social scientists to devote so much attention to ethnicity (van den Berghe 1978b:xi–xii).

\(^{21}\) Moreover, this analysis attributes the ability of leaders to control their followers to the moral force of ethnic symbols (Glazer and Moynihan 1974). But that moral force is, in the instrumentalist model, supposed to be an expression of collective self-interest. Thus the instrumentalist model appears to require that ethnic followers find it in their interests to act in ways contrary to their own interests. Otherwise, ethnic symbols must be accorded a primordial moral force, and the instrumentalist analysis collapses to a form of the primordialism whose premises it explicitly denies.

\(^{22}\) Note that this perspective also allows the possibility of ethnic groups in the absence of interest competition, as in the noncompetitive contact situations described by Barth (1969b:19–20) and R. D. Grillo (1974).
this system contains only two ways of getting and keeping a lasting hold over someone: gifts or debts, the overtly economic obligations of debt, or the "moral," "affective" obligations created and maintained by exchange. . . When domination can only be exercised in its elementary form, i.e. directly, between one person and another, it cannot take place overtly and must be disguised under the veil of enchanted relationships, the official model of which is presented by relations between kinsmen (Bourdieu 1977:191).

That kin relations involve domination is well known, as is popular misrecognition of this fact (see, e.g., Laing 1971; Weininger 1975). Kinship denotes a domain of "generalized reciprocity," a realm in which strict accounting of debts is considered inappropriate, even immoral (Sahlins 1972). Instead, kin relations are supposed to involve "diffuse enduring solidarity" (Schneider 1968). Ethnicity, as fictive kinship, is similarly imbued with a sense of unending moral obligation. One's relations with one's ethnic "kin" are not limited to or even expressible in terms of material indebtedness. Instead, as in the realm of actual kinship, ethnicity carries a sense of enduring solidarity, of inescapable obligations, of debts that can never be fully repaid.

Thus ethnic groups can be viewed as demarcating fields of symbolic domination, reproduction of which depends on the unconscious work of habitus. Although ethnic leaders may consciously pursue strategies aimed at establishing and maintaining relations of personal dependence, the structures of domination these strategies serve to reproduce, "must be disguised and transfigured lest they destroy themselves by revealing their true nature; in a word, they must be euphemized" (Bourdieu 1977:191). Symbolic domination depends upon mastery of the common code of euphemisms that constitute the conceptual and dispositional "horizon" within which all action takes place:

Agents lastingly "bind" each other, not only as parents and children, but also as creditor and debtor, master and khammes, only through the dispositions which the group inculcates in them and continuously reinforces which render unthinkable practices which would appear as legitimate and even be taken for granted in the disenchanted economy of "naked self-interest" (Bourdieu 1977:196).

Thus the habitus weaves the veil of enchantment which allows differentiated social formations to reproduce themselves.

These functional restrictions on consciousness apply to all members of a group. If members of an elite possess an objective consciousness denied their followers, then they must consciously affect the habitual dispositions through which symbolic domination operates. These are the normally unconscious

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23 "Master and khammes" refers to tenancy relations among the Algerian Khabylie which are symbolized as quasi-kin relations (Bourdieu 1977:190–91).

24 This model allows interclass and intraethnic domination to coexist; indeed they complement each other since ethnic collectivities can embody sensations of the shared habitus on which class domination depends. While social institutions (especially those associated with the state) carry much of the burden of reproducing class domination, the ubiquity of ethnicity in the modern world demonstrates the continuing importance of symbolic domination as well (Kontos 1975a).
understandings of the world that underlie sensations of collective identity and through which collective action is conceived and motivated. But affectation entails the same difficulty as ethnic passing and second-language learning; conscious affectation of normally habitual behavior is exhausting and usually ineffective. Especially considering that the burden of investing the world with meaning through ritual falls heaviest on occupants of elite positions, it seems more plausible that the enchantment of habitus operates at least as strongly on ethnic leaders as on their followers (see Bentley 1983a, 1984). This suggests that the symbolism of ethnicity will carry the same sense of authenticity and moral compulsion for ethnic leaders as for their followers. This symbolism will carry moral force so long as the coordination of habitus holds, that is, so long as leaders and followers operate within a coherent field of domination.

DOMINATION, CHANGE, AND ETHNIC MOBILIZATION

Regimes of domination do not exist in stasis, and their internal coherence cannot be assumed. They must constantly adjust to changing requirements of production and reproduction. Even incremental changes can disrupt the shared dispositions on which coordinated action and sensations of ethnic affinity depend. Rapid political and economic change can severely disrupt regimes of domination. Given that domination operates through the habitus and cannot be apprehended consciously, breakdowns in regimes of domination (like their operation) cannot be recognized as such. Instead they are likely to be experienced indirectly, often as crises of ethnic identity.

This process of displacement has several interrelated aspects. Changes in political and economic environments alter structures of objective interest within a population. Adjustment to these changes occurs through conscious exploitation of new opportunities, but more profoundly through habituation to new structures of possibility and the recognition both of heretofore unthinkable options and of means by which to exploit them. As individuals develop new ways of dealing with a changing world, old truths erode; as what was formerly inconceivable becomes commonplace, degrees of sharing and affinity, hence ethnic identities, become problematic. At the least, under these conditions ethnic symbolism is likely to take on different meanings for differentially adapted segments of a population. Because structures of possibility inhere in the habitus, which is a product of early experience, conflict over the meaning of ethnicity is likely to place members of senior and junior generations in opposition to each other. It comes as no surprise that ethnic movements often appear as attempts by ethnic juniors to precociously assume (or usurp) leadership positions. Many students of ethnicity have taken these intergenerational conflicts at face value and have been satisfied that struggle over the spoils of leadership is mainly what ethnic mobilization is about.25

25 This motive stands out in analyses that focus on elites as promoters and beneficiaries of ethnic movements (e.g., Brass 1974; Smith 1981; Steinberg 1981).
However, given that such movements tend to take place under conditions of profound economic and social change, emphasis on this readily apparent feature of ethnic movements may obscure ultimately more consequential processes of social and cultural transformation. While ethnic movements can represent power struggles within (or attempts to revitalize) existing regimes of domination, they can also represent attempts to institute new regimes adapted to changing political and economic circumstances.

Symbolic domination requires sufficient integration of preconscious assumptions about the world to maintain a functional complementarity of perception and motivation among leaders and followers. Even where change occurs over many generations, it erodes this integration as it produces people who are disposed to perceive the world differently and so, in a phenomenological sense, live in different worlds. Young and old are always separated by different conceptions of the possible, the reasonable, and the desirable (Bourdieu 1977:78). Where economic and political change take place rapidly, forcing sharp discontinuities in practice on whole populations, disruption of systems of domination (and consequent social instability) can be profoundly unsettling.

The unprecedented possibilities created by rapid political and economic change may be experienced positively as opportunities for innovation and interest advancement, but they are likely also to be experienced negatively as disorienting and alienating. In systemic terms, both aspects are equally destabilizing. On the one hand, people freed from the constraints of conventional thinking can act in ways destructive of the existing order. On the other hand, the loss of coherence between experience and the symbols through which people understand it causes feelings of discomfort and alienation, of rootlessness and anomie. Both represent powerful goads to action, hence motives for political mobilization. Mitigating these factors requires institution of new regimes of domination adapted to new realities of power. Inevitably this process involves reconfiguration of the perceived world and of one’s place in it.

Michel Foucault (1977) has termed these perceptual and conceptual discontinuities “epistemological breaks” and has found that they take place relatively rapidly. Such breaks mark new junctures (or crystallizations) of re-

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26 Monika Langer (1975:103) describes Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological argument: “By the mere fact of perceiving in the world, the human being structures that world, transforms it, gives it a human shape. In perception, the human being and the world constantly elicit and respond to modifications in one another. Merleau insists that there is already a ‘dialogue’ at the most basic level of perception. The perceived world ‘speaks’ to the incarnate subject, and the latter ‘replies’ at a prereflective level—the level of the ‘bodily cogito.’”

27 Eric Wolf’s (1982) recent survey of the European impact on “the people without history” demonstrates the impact of the world economy on even the remotest peoples.

28 While Foucault (1977, 1978) has focused on the “human sciences” and their role in modern regimes of domination, I see no difficulty extending his perspective to other settings,
regimes of domination (Foucault 1980:133). Viewed in this light, ethnic mobilization may represent an attempt to revitalize existing self-conceptions and modes of domination, or it may reflect a particular kind of epistemological break, a shift in conceptions of personal identity as new modes of domination are instituted in response to changed environmental circumstances. Given the pervasiveness of political and economic change in the modern world, I believe this second process accounts in large part for the ubiquity of ethnic movements during the past four decades.

While many movements could be cited as examples of identity breaks, their general outlines can be illustrated using two: the political mobilization among black Americans and the Sinhalese Buddhist nationalism in Sri Lanka. The American case is marked by appropriation and transformation of an imposed epithet—"black"—into a positive assertion of collective identity. For the political movement associated with this symbolic inversion to succeed, the new identity had to "take," that is, asserted affinities based on shared experience had to be symbolized in compelling fashion. For many black Americans, African origin became a potent symbol, captured in self-identification as Afro-American, a symbolism similar to that formulated by Marcus Garvey fifty years earlier (see, e.g., Carmichael and Hamilton 1967; Nembhard 1978; Garvey 1983; Vincent n.d.). This symbolism of shared origins and descent came to be associated in the civil rights movement with a primordial experience shared by (the ancestors of) virtually all black Americans, denial of their civil and constitutional rights. The shift in labels from "Negro" to "black" and "Afro-American" did not only mark a political movement, an attempt to capture a share of publicly allocated spoils through collective action. It also provided a charter for black ethnicity, for a new and potentially enduring sense of shared identity, experience, and purpose (Green 1981).

especially given the similarity between his concept of "epistemological break" and the concept of "mazeway resynthesis" that Anthony Wallace (1970:169ff) uses to explain revitalization movements.

29 The appeal of descent symbolism seems impervious to the disillusioning experiences of black Americans who travelled to Africa to find "home," but who found instead how thoroughly American they themselves were (e.g., Baldwin 1955:124–37; Baldwin 1961:3–12). While some scholarly effort has gone into discovering historical and cultural connections between black American and African peoples, much of Afro-American history in recent years has simply elaborated an Afro-American origin myth. Its emotional appeal is evident in the popularity of Roots, Alex Haley's (1976) speculative tracing of his ancestry back to a Nigerian village.


31 Identifying the political and economic shifts and the changes in domination that underlay black mobilization goes far beyond the present discussion. However, relevant factors include black migration to the industrial north during and after World War II in response to demands for unfettered labor and the consequent institution of more open labor recruitment practices than had obtained in the agricultural south (see Cox 1976; Gordon 1977; Winston 1977). Both of these trends may be viewed as part of the long-term development of capitalist labor domination in the
The development of Sinhalese Buddhist identity in Sri Lanka represents a similar response to the stresses caused by political and economic transformation. According to Gananath Obeyesekere (1975:244ff), the ascetic Anagarika Dharmapala, in working out his personal identity problems, provided a model for subsequent generations of Sinhalese caught in the same processes of change which had affected him. Dharmapala’s dilemma derived from his early experience as Don David Hewavitarana:

In the first place, his father, who belonged to the goyigama (farmer) caste had given up his primary group identities (his kinship and caste obligations) and emigrated to Colombo, where, in all probability, he was not accepted into Colombo’s elite society, which was Protestant. Dharmapala then was born into a family which had no established place in the community (Obeyesekere 1975:245).

The psychological consequences of his liminal social origins were exacerbated by his upbringing. Buddhism was practiced in his home, but he received most of his education in Catholic and Protestant mission schools. As he matured, Dharmapala became acutely sensitive to contradictions between preaching and practice in all these settings. Searching for a way to resolve the contradictions that framed his existence, he came under the influence of the theosophists Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and Colonel Henry Steele Olcott when they visited Ceylon in 1882 (Obeyesekere 1975:248). With their encouragement he renounced his secular career and immersed himself in Buddhist theology and Sinhalese mythology and history. However, even though he changed his name and adopted an ascetic lifestyle, Dharmapala did not reject the world.32 In Max Weber’s phrase, his was an “‘inner-worldly asceticism.’” He sought to revitalize the world by promoting a reformed universalist Buddhism identified with the glories of precolonial Sinhalese history (Obeyesekere 1975:250–55). Dharmapala’s first adherents comprised a group of people who were in a sense like Dharmapala himself, alienated from the traditional culture of the village, and from the politico-economic system controlled by the British and the English-educated elite of Colombo. Though his initial impact was on members of the alienated Sinhalese intelligentsia living in villages, he later had an impact on all Sinhalese Buddhists (Obeyesekere 1975:250).

Dharmapala’s writings provided the intellectual charter for a twentieth-century Sinhalese nationalism which responded to the erosion of the colonial order and which culminated during the 1950s in the institution of a new mode

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32 Recall that Soraya Monap also contemplated asceticism as a solution to her identity problems.
of domination adapted to the postcolonial political and economic environment.33

The Sinhalese case points to the significance of individual identity transformations as catalysts for ethnic movements. Dharmapala’s identity change, his personal “epistemological break,” provided a model for others who experienced contradictions similar to his, initially among the Sinhalese village intelligentsia, later among peasants and urban workers as well. The experiences of Elijah Muhammad and Malcolm X provided a similar model for many black Americans, as had those of Marcus Garvey in an earlier era (see Baldwin 1963). In a sense, these individuals constructed out of their personal experiences origin myths which facilitated the “coming to consciousness” of those who followed them.34 The modern world, with its rampant destruction of traditional ways of life, produces many alienated persons capable of recounting their renewal through identity change. However, few such persons draw enough adherents to spark significant ethnic movements. The theory of practice suggests that those leaders will succeed whose personal identity myths resonate with evolving configurations of habitus, practice, and experience.35

While the material benefits offered by ethnonational movements cannot be ignored, neither should be the affective and cognitive satisfactions offered by such movements. In cases where material sacrifices exceed likely gains, and this includes many ethnic rebellions, epistemological breaks represented by ethnic movements may be more important than any redistribution of material goods.36 Moreover, the benefits of what Obeyesekere (1975) calls “identity affirmation” are in principle independent of material considerations. Those benefits consist of a renewed coherence in experience of the world and conceptions of one’s place in it. Thus, in order to account for ethnic group formation and mobilization, we must identify dimensions of common experience and habitus that underlie the ability of ethnic leaders to mobilize their followers. In addition, we need to analyze how ethnic appeals implicate conceptions of personal and group identity in order to account for their effectiveness (see, e.g., Ileto 1979; Sewell 1980; Taussig 1980). Both of these

33 The current Tamil nationalist movement centering in north Sri Lanka can be analyzed as a similar process of identity transformation and collective mobilization.
34 With this in mind, it is interesting that Malcolm X’s collaborator in the writing of his autobiography (1965) was Alex Haley, the expert mythmaker who later produced Roots.
35 This may represent a way to address Eric Hobsbawm’s (1983:307) query as to why some invented traditions find public acceptance and others do not.
36 This position contrasts with the instrumentalist emphasis on the material satisfactions provided by ethnic movements. It also contrasts with “reactive” theories of ethnic mobilization (e.g., internal-colony models) which ultimately refer to material rewards to explain ethnonational mobilization (see, e.g., Hechter 1975; Ragin 1977). Michael Hechter and Margaret Levi (1979), for instance, explain the relative intensity and timing of ethnonationalist movements in terms of the organizational capacities of ethnic groups and changes in the world economy, especially as these affect elite abilities to deliver promised material benefits to their followers.
issues are subordinate to the more general question of how habitus and its symbolization serve processes of social reproduction.

CONCLUSIONS

The field of ethnicity studies clearly needs an infusion of new ideas. The preceding discussion has drawn on the theory of practice to answer this need. Using the concept of habitus, the theory of practice accounts, as primordialist and instrumentalist theories cannot, for the sense of compulsion that attaches to ethnic identities. Rooted in preconscious patterns of practice that are not susceptible to conscious apprehension or alteration, ethnic identities implicate, in a phenomenological sense, who people are. It is this authenticity that advocates of instrumentalist models deny. At the same time, the idea of habitus accounts for ethnic-group formation and coordinated ethnic action without having to assume that ethnic identities represent either artifice or the product of some psychologically improbable process of unconscious interest aggregation.

Much of conventional social theory, including both instrumentalist and primordialist approaches to ethnicity, has foundered on ambiguities in the concept of rule (or law). Rules by which regularities in behavior are described become, by a semantic sleight of hand, rules by which observed behavior is produced. Thus analysts’ mental models are transformed into causal principles located in the (conscious or unconscious) minds of the people whose behavior is being studied. In ethnicity studies this meant that if ethnic groups act in ways that appear strategically advantageous, then strategic advantage must be the raison d’être of those groups; if ethnicity increases in visibility during times of disorienting change, then it must be because people seek in ethnicity an emotional refuge from change. The theory of practice avoids this fallacious reasoning because it does not identify the systemic consequences of collective action with individuals’ intentions. An aphorism of Foucault’s states that “people know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don’t know is what they do does” (quoted in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982:187). Students of ethnicity are well advised to keep this in mind. Failure to distinguish individual motives from collective results has contributed little to understanding ethnicity but much to sterile arguments about the importance of sentimental versus instrumental motives.

The practice theory of ethnicity does not preclude the possibility of individuals manipulating ethnic symbolism to their own advantage. Nor does it preclude formation of ethnic political parties and other organizations dedicated to advancing their members’ (or leaders’) interests (see, e.g., Barnett 1976). Neither does it preclude people from drawing emotional and psychological support from ethnic groups and organizations. However, the theory of practice does remove the need to assume that ethnic symbols come into existence in order that they may then be manipulated to those ends.
Tied as they are to temporal processes of reproduction and change, ethnic identity transformation and political mobilization reveal their real import only when viewed in historical perspective. It is for lack of this perspective that ethnicity so often emerges in the literature as an empty vessel given content only by the social contexts in which it appears. Remediying this error requires that investigation of a given case be broadened in time to show how ethnicity contributes to social reproduction, and in space to take account of regional and world-scale factors impinging on systems of domination. By viewing ethnicity’s role in reproducing domination in this larger context, it should be possible to identify factors generating pressures toward epistemological breaks and consequent political mobilization.

The practice theory of ethnicity promises to reintegrate a field fragmented by preferential application of different models at different levels of analysis. Where primordialist approaches have informed some excellent case studies of individual ethnic experience (see, e.g., Epstein 1978) and instrumentalist models provide better macroscopic accounts of ethnic dynamics, mobilization, and competition (e.g., Nagata 1974), the practice theory of ethnicity accommodates both levels of analysis with equal facility. Instead of extrapol-
lating from the individual to the group or vice versa, it incorporates empirically valid conceptions of both individual and corporate identity and action and suggests interesting hypotheses about the relations between these. Clearly this theory has substantive implications far beyond those discussed in this paper.\(^{39}\) As its potential is explored, the practice theory of ethnicity promises to break through primordialist and instrumentalist conceptual conventions and to inform richer interpretations and explanations of ethnic phenomena than have been possible heretofore.

REFERENCES

Barth, Fredrik. 1964. “‘Competition and Symbiosis in North East Baluchistan.’” Folk, 6:1, 15–22.

\(^{39}\) In a forthcoming analysis of the Bangsa Moro rebellion in the southern Philippines, the practice theory of ethnicity is used to explain the dynamics of an ethnonational revolt (Bentley n.d.).


