

Media, ethnicity and identity

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The media and place-defined identity

Although the media are generally assumed to be powerful shapers of culture and communication, Meyrowitz has argued that media contribute to social change today in ways largely overlooked. He sees the media as the 'missing link' between culture and personality (1986: 22). In this framework, 'information' combines the study of media environments with the study of face-to-face situations in somewhat the same way identity itself mediates between culture and communication.

How do the media unite or separate different people into similar or different informational worlds? What is the relationship between *social place* and *physical place* as influenced by the media?

Joshua Meyrowitz (1986) asked these questions and hypothesized that the electronic media — especially TV — have led to radical restructurings of social life and social performance, undermining the traditional relationship between physical setting and social situation. Electronic media are able to do this by merging formerly distinct social spheres, blurring the dividing line between private and public, and thus severing the traditional link between physical and social place (1986: 71). The result is a diffusion of group identities. Meyrowitz speaks of a '*placeless* culture'.

Using Goffman's metaphor of the drama, which pictured humans playing different roles for different audiences, Meyrowitz (1986: 28) borrowed the idea of 'back region' vs. 'front region' to illustrate the shifts from once private (backstage) behaviours to now media-exposed public (on-stage) behaviours. Groups whose *place* was formerly shaped by physical isolation (for example, American Indian 'reservation isolates')

are no longer segregated from larger social groupings. Aspects of group identity that were once dependent on particular physical *places*, and the experiences available in them, then, have been permanently altered by the electronic media (Meyrowitz, 1986: 125). The concepts we use to define ourselves are influenced today by the media as symbolic *place*.

The theme of Meyrowitz's powerful book is that electronic media allow people to escape from traditional *place-defined* groups (1986: 57). Emphasis is not so much on physical setting as '*place*' but on information, or social knowledge, that people have about the behaviour of themselves and others (Meyrowitz, 1986: 37). 'Electronic media affect us', argued Meyrowitz, 'not primarily through their content, but by changing the "situational geography" of social life' (1986: 6).

Electronically mediated interactions are no doubt reshaping both social situations and social identities (Meyrowitz, 1986: 117). 'Geographic identity', or *identity of place*, has been subtly altered by electronic media, resulting in an homogenizing effect on group identities. No longer identifying as 'Samoans' from a specific island in Samoa, islanders migrating to New Zealand, for example, are more likely to refer to themselves simply as 'Pacific Islanders'. The fact of migration cannot fully account for this difference. The electronic media, to some extent, have changed the social rules of behaviour. The media, of course, are not the only causes of homogenization or necessarily the ultimate moulders of behavioural changes; but Meyrowitz sees the media as an important causal backdrop for such changes. The media have profoundly changed both social relationships and perceptions of self.

Wilson and Gutierrez (1985: 233) claim that the communication media formerly kept society together by building a common culture which fed people in different parts of the country a similar diet of news and entertainment. The media have begun to play a different role with the emphasis on marketing to separate audiences. While the communication media once built a mass audience by looking for commonalities, today they may actually reinforce differences between groups (Wilson and Gutierrez, 1985: 216). The mass media can no longer afford to exclude minorities. In responding to diversity, the authors see an end to 'mass' media influence. This conclusion may be too simplistically formulated, as both cultural homogenization and social diversification seem to be happening simultaneously. The influence of the media is still a present reality.

Ethnogenesis: the metaphor of identity construction

Few attempts have been made to look at the complex relationships between ethnicity and the cultural media. Sollors (1986) explores a seeming paradox: whereas more and more people of different backgrounds

share an overlapping culture influenced by the media, there is a strong tendency for certain groups today to insist that they are at least symbolically distinct. This process of 'emerging ethnicity' has been called *ethnogenesis*, the development and public presentation of a self-conscious ethnic group. Investigating the connections between objective cultural differences and similarities and the ethnic portrayals of such cultural differences, Roosens (1989: 46) defined ethnogenesis as 'how people feel themselves to be a people and how they continue to maintain themselves as such', even in the face of contradictory historical evidence. What happens to 'objective culture' in ethnic interactions, and how is the media influencing human perception?

In short, people are becoming more culturally uniform, but some ethnic groups try at the same time to differentiate themselves by deliberate appeals to traditions (the 'survival of cultural baggage' metaphor) and reinterpretations of past history.² Many aspects of what is really going on are obscured by the use of concepts, such as 'culture', 'cultural uniqueness', and 'past', and are often perceived by outsiders as 'fake ethnic' claims. One thing is for certain, such cultural revivals are never truly a return to the past. The past is usually reconstituted to serve the group as they try to go forward (Roosens, 1989: 125). The children of immigrants, for example, cannot return to a 'former culture' that they never had. Any second- or third-generation culture is truly a 'cultural mutation', to use Roosens's terminological appraisal.

Although profoundly modified by media reality, the peculiarly modern tendency for certain groups to try to keep their cultural traditions (clinging to an ethnic identity) has created a huge gap between the 'rhetoric about culture' and the everyday realities of social change and adaptation. Carroll (1987: 136) maintains that social and cultural changes are not identical and that we may be committing a serious error when we confuse the two.

People today may create identities from very few cultural relics. Roosens (1989: 20) suggests, as a case in point, that naive Canadians are being forced by Indian arm-twisting to recognize a 'non-existent' Indian people. The example given is the Hurons, a people who recently have sought to recapture their ethnicity after being nearly obliterated culturally (1989: 32). The Hurons are described by Roosens (1989: 57) as a 'counterfeit culture', a deliberate attempt to construct a stereotypically 'Indian counterculture': they no longer know their own language and probably today would not be identified by an outsider as phenotypically Indian.

Polyethnic countries are no longer an exception but the rule, yet 'ethnic group' is often confused with 'culture' in daily usage as well as in scholarly discourse. Sollors (1986: 25) sheds some light on this confusion. Arguing that the attempt to maintain ethnic distinctiveness despite a good deal of cultural assimilation is ultimately a source of cultural vitality, he suggests that such 'defiant ethnic revivalism' nonetheless calls for a rethinking of

theories of ethnicity and a clarification of terms that describe this process of self-definition.

Ethnicity, according to Sollors (1986: 25), is a fairly new term coined by W. Lloyd Warner in 1941. In many parts of the world, ethnicity became fashionable in the 1960s, in vogue by the 1970s. For most people, however, the term retains the connotation of minority status, lower class, or else migrancy (Sollors, 1986: 39). Unfortunately, the metaphors used to describe ethnic groups have often reinforced this negative imagery.

Derived from the Greek word *ethnikos*, the label originally meant 'heathen', not people in general, but outsiders or 'cultural strangers'. This contrastive feature is central to the notion of ethnicity, thus generally excluding dominant groups (hence, the commonsense question, 'Are Yankees ethnic, too?'). Defining people contrastively gave way in the mid-nineteenth century to the more familiar meaning of ethnic as 'peculiar to a race or nation'. Nonetheless, we still retain the idea of 'non-mainstream culture', as well as the religious connotation of 'heathen' (Sollors, 1986: 25). Writers have sometimes employed conflicting metaphorical images in trying to represent the changes that have occurred in interethnic communications.

Sollors (1986: 84), for example, suggests that the 'melting pot' metaphor, which has dominated the ethnic rhetoric for decades, represents an ethnic extension of the religious drama of redemption and rebirth, portraying ethnicity in the imagery of melting in contrast to the stubborn hardness of boundaries.³ This metaphor of regeneration has been gradually replaced by a more instrumental, 'building metaphor', which suggests that identity is something self-constructed ('achieved' identity) and morally 'good'. The popularity of such a 'generative metaphor' is, according to Sollors (1986: 221), that it provides a kind of 'moral map' of what people take to be 'wholesome change'. Metaphors may help to create identities and identities may feed on metaphors, but common metaphorical language does not always indicate consensus of feeling or thought about identity, ethnicity and culture.

Ethnicity has thus been transformed from a social liability to a desirable identity to be achieved. There is, in fact, an almost voluntary ('multiple-choice') aspect of identity as a modern ethnic. Sollors (1986: 33) gives the example of two American-born brothers, one identifying as German-American, the other opting for a Franco-American identity. This perspective sees ethnicity as a dynamic metaphor emerging through potential negotiations of identities by groups or individuals in social contexts.

The new ethnicity — defiant cultural revivalism

What is the real substance of this ethnicity is the question that challenges scholars of identity.

When considering the 'new ethnicity' (as political pressure groups), distinctions can be drawn between motivation, knowledge and performance as three different aspects of role behaviour. It is easier to say that one favours participating in a certain ethnic life-style than actually doing so. Modern ethnic identifications work more by 'external symbols' (symbolic identities) than any actual cultural ability, knowledge or performance (Sollors, 1986: 35). The emotional significance of such attachments persists while the actual cultural content has dramatically changed. More attention is given today to the attitudinal level of identity (subjective aspects) than to overt behaviours (objective aspects), to private versus public areas of behavioural change, and to 'situational' contexts of changing identities.

Ethnic status today can be conspicuously devoid of solid cultural content. Consider Sollors's (1986: 35-6) provocative question about ethnicity in the United States: 'Are ethnics merely Americans who are separated from each other by the same culture?' The consensus is that the term 'ethnic' should be used sparingly and with caution since not all scholars can agree on the cultural basis of ethnic identities. A moral polarization is more common today, supported by simplistic metaphorical images of culture, ethnicity and identity. In this 'idealized antithesis', ethnocentrism becomes 'bad' and ethnic 'good'. Americans now value ethnicity regardless of what it is (Sollors, 1986: 179).

Sollors argues further that scholars themselves participate in the 'ethnicizing process' with their dualistic tendencies, and the media offer previously isolated outgroups new forms of recognition, participation and control (Meyrowitz, 1986: 181). Ethnic feelings and concerns are more documented and commented on by the media today. Certainly media play a major role in reshaping relationships, hence social and cultural identities.

Meyrowitz (1986: 135) sees the real sign of the times as our sense of rootlessness caused by a media-influenced 'placeless society'. 'Contrary to general belief', he expounds, 'the recently popular search for "roots" and "ethnic identity" may not be a sign of rising group identity in the traditional sense, but an indication of its decay'. There is still an enormous gap between everyday *social* realities and unsupported discourse about *culture*. Confusion of the constructs *culture* and *society* is part of the problem rendering sometimes overly simplistic solutions. Identity does not necessarily involve the maintenance of a separate culture, and social changes may not detract from ethnic self-awareness; in fact, such changes may actually enhance identity.

Ethnicity — colour, class and culture

There are, then, definite limits to ethnicity. Sollors (1986: 38) outlines how race in ethnic studies has been largely ignored because of the National Socialists' campaigns of 'genocide' in the name of 'race', which gave the

word a bad name and supported the substitution of 'ethnic' for 'race'. Race has virtually disappeared from scholarly discourse following extended criticisms of its scientific basis in the 1940s and 1950s (more recently as a result of tendencies in Pop Culture, which consistently lump society and culture together, calling any group with *socially* perceived differences a *culture*).⁴ Keefe et al. (1989: 6) claim that 'the role played by physical attributes in establishing markers of and variation in ethnicity would appear to deserve greater attention'. In what ways, for example, is ethnic identity and group formation dependent upon physical differences?

It has been predicted that by 2080, Whites in the United States will no longer be a majority (Wilson and Gutierrez, 1985: 18). At the same time, Blacks are an economically and socially diverse group, and a certain percentage risk becoming polarized into an 'underclass' (Wilson and Gutierrez, 1985: 25). With the United States more racially integrated than at any other time in history, the media and other institutions seem positively responsive to racial diversity. In fact, today it has been argued that the 'successful' image of American Blacks in the media may be as far removed from reality as negative portrayals in the recent past (Wilson and Gutierrez, 1985: 112).

Nonetheless, van Dijk (1987), using discourse analysis, tried very hard to make a case for the existence of racism in his analysis of out-of-context statements concerning ethnic interactions in the United States and Holland. In considering the research conclusion of a major American study (Schuman et al., 1985) that 'attitudes about general principles of racial equality and integration have steadily improved', van Dijk (1987: 224) invokes the nebulous notion of 'symbolic racism' when he finds insufficient support for *actual* racism.

His study, like a lot of research on so-called 'cultures' today, is a not-so-subtle academic polemic about racism without much concrete evidence. Granted that racism (substitute the word 'ethnicism') can be subtly combined with other forms of ethnocentrism, it seems unsatisfactory to lump them together under the umbrella term 'racism'. When van Dijk recognizes that ethnic attitudes are embedded in present socio-economic contexts, perhaps the result of perceived competition for scarce resources, he is on firmer grounds (1987: 228). To further erode his argument, he uses 'ethnic prejudice' ('the mental programme of racism') rather loosely (1987: 222). Recognizing differences does not automatically translate as implied 'inferiority'. It would be equally interesting to look at the possible 'prejudices' of minorities toward the majority.

In my own study (Fitzgerald, 1986) which involved contrasting attitudes of Polynesians and New Zealand Whites. I found that each group held certain stereotypes about the other. Sometimes these were fairly serious misunderstandings, more often simply amusing. Thus, when each was asked about the other group's presumed food habits, they both said

essentially the same thing: 'Bloody beer and fish and chips!' was the inaccurate and cryptic response. A certain amount of mutual out-group stereotyping may be inevitable when ethnically different groups live side by side, but these perceptions often serve different functions (such as strengthening in-group ties at the expense of an out-group) without necessarily implying racism. It really boils down to which group makes the major adjustments and in what situations. 'Symbolic racism' is invoked when one can no longer find *real* racism?

Race, however, doesn't go away so easily. Race may be only one aspect of ethnicity but, being an important aspect, it can't be swept under the carpet of a broadly conceived ethnicity. The categorical separation of race and ethnicity leads to false generalizations. As Sollors (1986: 38) argued, we may end up with hypocrisy about our past as a result. Ethnicity often involves *colour, class and culture*. Today we tend to give most of the weight to *culture*.

We accept cultural differences but try to deny their racial and socio-economic consequences. As information about ethnic minorities is formulated and transmitted through mass media, for example TV, Marcus and Fischer (1986: 38) believe that the tendency to play down the 'socially negative' is reinforced by the widespread diffusion of communication technologies. Certainly class, or economic positioning, is a case in point.

Roosens (1989: 13) argues convincingly that self-affirmation ('ethnogenesis', or creating ethnicity), although not a uniform process in all parts of the world, is related to the defence of social or economic interests. In short, people change ethnic identities only if they can profit by doing so. All people seek material survival, improved living conditions, and enhanced personal status.

'Not all people act this way all of the time', claims Roosens (1989: 156), 'but most do most of the time'. Economics, then, play a crucial role in present ethnic aspirations; and the media often give sympathetic support to ethnic causes, even sometimes to misleading charges of 'ethnocide'. 'In all case-studies', writes Roosens,

ethnicity has to do with material goods, whether in a positive or negative way: the Hurons [Canada] maximize their ethnicity in order to obtain resources, whereas the Aymara [Bolivia] try to destroy their own cultural and ethnic traits for the same reason. The longing for material goods does not by itself procure ethnic identity and ethnicity. Ethnicity, however, is directly concerned with group formation, and this with power relations (1989: 158)

Ethnic groups, through media dialogues, become 'pressure groups with a noble face' (1989: 14). Ethnic identity, then, is a powerful psychological reality whether based on authentic culture or not.

An interesting paradox is that the most vocal champions of cultural revivals are almost always the educated elites among such minorities. This

is paradoxical because the slogans of 'ethnogenesis' are formulated by the very people farthest removed from their traditional culture. Roosens (1989: 153) argues that a certain level of economic prosperity must first be obtained before the 'cultural' struggle of ethnic groups can achieve any lasting effect. This economic theory suggests that claims for 'revivals' based on reputed tradition rely on a substantial degree of economic security.

My study of the New Zealand Maori university graduate (Fitzgerald, 1977), suggested a similar conclusion. The most traditional, often physically isolated of the group, are often the ones least concerned with self-conscious identity and self-defined ethnicity. The same theory applies to the children of immigrant parents as later generations are usually economically more secure, thus having more political clout. As such, their demands are more likely to be accepted by members of the larger society.⁵

Sollors (1986: 29-30) argues that among ethnic groups in the United States, there is little cultural distinctiveness that can be historically authenticated. Labels, slogans and self-naming have become the important goals; 'romantic racialism'⁶ (championed by what has been called the 'Aren't-Negroes-Wonderful' School) has replaced real racism; and, symbolically, the ethnic has taken the place of the 'truly chosen one'.⁷ 'In America', continues Sollors (1986: 31), 'casting oneself as an outsider may in fact be considered a dominant cultural trait'.

'Vulgarized cultural relativism'

Certain general principles, if not totally understood, would seem to be almost universally agreed upon today: (1) People should have a right to their own 'culture' (without being very sure what that culture is); and (2) People have a right to maintain their own 'cultural' identity (whether this involves a separate culture or not). In short, regardless of historical circumstances, ethnic groups are claiming the 'right' to both a separate identity and a matching 'culture' of their own choosing. This presumption rests on the dubious assumption that cultures, in fact, can be discarded or created as a matter of human will. *Social* realities may be more complex than the *cultural* metaphors we use to describe them.

This philosophical shift in perspective has been traced to a 'vulgarized cultural relativism' for its ideological support (Roosens, 1989: 152). In its heyday, cultural relativism, a powerful doctrine of intellectual critique, was a strong liberal challenge to the neglect of human diversity (Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 20). A form of egalitarian humanism, the original position simply stated that other cultures (societies) should be viewed from their own perspectives, trying not to impose on them an outsider's values. Unfortunately, cultural relativism has come to be interpreted as 'the equal validity of all value systems', making moral judgements virtually impossible (Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 32).

Although we may wish that people determine the content of their own 'cultures' in an unrestrained manner, it is an error to confuse culture with society or, by extension, cultural change with social change.

Related to the elastic use of the culture concept, but more central to the concerns of this paper, is the widespread tendency to treat culture and identity as essentially the same entity, assuming that where you find one (identity) you necessarily find a supporting other (culture). This paper questions such an assumption.

It is suggested here that identity — in large part, due to media influences — loses its 'placed-defined' quality and, in form and function, begins to act independently of culture *per se*. The terms 'ethnic group' and 'culture' were more or less interchangeable in scientific discussions until the early 1970s, but the terms 'culture' and 'identity' are unfortunately still blurred in popular discourse. The confusion of the constructs involving *colour*, *class* and *culture* remains a thorny problem for social scientists.

People often gain a sense of 'alikeness' by being isolated together, sometimes only then becoming conscious of minority status because of feelings of 'exclusion'. Meyrowitz (1986: 132) claims that sharing special experiences creates a *paradox* as far as minority consciousness is concerned. While many such minorities loudly proclaim special identities — often based on putative 'cultures' — unconsciously they hope to shed at least part of their 'specialness' in becoming a part of a larger grouping (Meyrowitz, 1986: 133). Protesting too much ('defiant ethnic revivalism', to use Sollors's label), in fact, may suggest a widespread degree of cultural assimilation.⁸

Meyrowitz (1986) has warned that this paradoxical call for both recognition of differences and blindness to them should *not* be interpreted to mean that minorities espousing separate identities actually want to be in a separate culture isolated from fellow human beings. Group identity can be both positive (inclusive) and negative (exclusive) — hence, the familiar modern-day dialogue between *social* reality and *cultural* rhetoric (as 'unsupported or inflated' discourse).

People can be 'different' in various *social* ways while still sharing the *same* culture. The rhetoric of distinctiveness, as Carroll (1987: 145) has reminded us, may change without the culture itself altering very much. In other words, when an individual changes socially, the cultural premises (and the logic which gives order to the world) do not necessarily change. What is changed, Carroll argues, is the way of expressing the basic truths, not the truths themselves. Hence, she acknowledges the attempts of Black Americans to try and create an Afro-American 'culture', i.e. accentuate belonging to a different social group, but strongly suggests that Black Americans in Spain, Africa or travelling in France will still be seen as *Americans first* (1987: 142). To confuse social change with cultural change is an error with serious implications for intergroup communication.

The notion of 'cultural authenticity' is surely grounded in the idea that

ethnic identity requires validation in concrete culture or life-style differences; but, as Roosens (1989: 152) informs us, cultural identity need not presume the existence of an 'objective' cultural continuity. Though seemingly a paradox, it is possible today to find examples of *cultural identity without a culture*. Cultural absence, however, does not preclude identity persistence. In fact, in some cases change seems to accelerate identity formation.

The Lumbee of eastern North Carolina, a racially mixed group (Black, White and Indian), whose struggle to gain acceptance as 'Indians' was studied by Blu in 1980, and the current movement to have the term 'Afro-American culture' adopted by the larger culture are both social facts described by Keefe et al. (1989: 2) as reflections of a contemporary concern with ethnic identity as a political force rather than cultural authenticity. The new labels, for both groups, may be a way to avoid the more negative connotations of previous racial terminology. By defining itself, ethnically or otherwise, a group escapes classification by others. Ethnic identity, as one among many possible identities in a hierarchy of identities, remains a psychological reality to be reckoned with whether or not based on authentic culture.

Keefe et al. (1989: 33) have studied Appalachian and non-Appalachian students using three dimensions of ethnicity, structural, cultural and symbolic, and concluded that, although cultural ethnicity did not emerge in the study as very significant, symbolic and structural Appalachian ethnicity were still apparent. Parenthetically, they further suggest that, if such cultural differences do not exist from the past, it is expected that the group may well 'create' new ones in the future in order to support the idea of difference.

The thesis here is clear. While cultural differences are minimal in distinguishing Mountain people from newcomers, structural (class?) and symbolic ethnicity are used to construct (using the typically American instrumental 'building' metaphor of self-construction) what it means to be Appalachian: 'They "know" they exist but they cannot articulate many distinctive cultural traits beyond recalling stereotypes' (1989: 34).

The metaphor of 'cultural property'

Richard Handler (1989: 20) offers the metaphor of 'cultural property' to suggest how scholars have attempted to validate ethnic identities in the face of cultural erosion. 'Culture' becomes the 'property' which proves the existence of a group. This possessive metaphor marks the group's existence in a concrete way and, as well, provides it with a sense of worthiness.

Citing 'Ethnicity in the Museum' as an example of the metaphor of 'cultural property', Handler (1989: 23–4) examines the issue of slavery in

Colonial Williamsburg and its presentation in contemporary museum contexts. Blacks, always a significant component of the Colonial workforce, have been variously portrayed in museums over the years. In the 1950s, slavery was something not talked about. By the 1980s it was insisted that slaves had a culture which, argues Handler, presumably 'allowed them to lead lives worth living . . . even under cultural domination'. This insistence on an identity based on a distinctive culture presents Afro-American 'culture' to the public as unproblematic; thereby, the autonomous slave culture is 'mystified and romanticized' so that the real horrors of slavery are 'minimized by the representation of resourceful slaves using successful cultural resources' (Handler, 1989: 25).

Although Handler would certainly applaud the contemporary movement to try to include ethnic minorities in mainstream museums, he raises an intriguing hypothesis that deserves more attention. The display of ethnic culture in museums, Handler (1989: 19) suggests, 'reproduces an ideology of culture which homogenizes and domesticates rather than enhances cultural diversity'. In a sense, argues Handler, all such groups are being more or less identical (doing the same thing) in such self-conscious claims for uniqueness based on so-called authentic culture. The metaphor of 'cultural property' may function to prove minority existence but, more importantly, gives these same groups social recognition.

Due to media homogenization and support, then, ethnics are becoming more alike even while many such groups continue to identify as 'different' in certain expressive domains of their lives (a need for diversity in face of homogenizing media 'unity'). A paramount concern for formerly 'under-classed' groups is surely 'self-esteem', or the attempts to gain recognition and respect as values in and of themselves. Royce (1982) has hypothesized that people identify as 'ethnics' today because such groups offer extended-family functions in a time when family has diminished as a major force in people's lives. Ethnogenesis seems to be one path to this end. The influence of the media on achieving such reconstructed ideologies is enormous.

An interesting example of how the press has helped to create sympathies for a group's *identity symbols* is illustrated in the recent attempted sale (in London) of a preserved and tattooed head of a Maori warrior. The case squarely raised the thorny issue of human remains as 'cultural property', whether belonging to the Maori of New Zealand or to archaeological science. The 'Maori warrior' incident drew international media attention. Because of a sympathetic press, the head was eventually returned to New Zealand (Keefe, 1989: 4).

Besides seeking material goods, ethnic groups are clearly seeking recognition, respect and self-esteem. Roosens (1989: 159), however, reminds us that claims for material goods and resources are often intimately related to the process of gaining recognition and respect since

our culture largely equates the two. Thus, some form of 'positive discrimination', he argues, may be a necessary way of recognizing certain groups as worthy members of society (e.g. Afro-Americans).

It would appear that the upsurge of ethnicity (ethnogenesis) is only related to the perceived socio-economic gains it allows individuals whose identities have been submerged or whose status has been denigrated in the past. In such a case, identity functions as a political assertion of pride in what the minority regards as its rightful heritage, in spite of any considerations of cultural authenticity.

Metaphors, media and social change — second-generation Cook Islanders in New Zealand

Ethnic identity, however, can be a good deal more than merely economic advantage-seeking. This was certainly the case in my study of second-generation Cook Islanders in New Zealand.

In 1985-6, on a Fulbright travel grant, I returned to New Zealand on my third research trip to investigate aspirations of second-generation Cook Islanders born and/or reared in New Zealand.⁹ Ethnic pluralism is a familiar characteristic of modern societies, and New Zealand is no exception. Under conditions of rapid social change, there is often intensification of ethnic identity at the same time that culture per se is diminishing. The present study, then, was an attempt to raise some theoretical questions about identity as it relates to migration, generational position and media influence.

Scholars, such as Bonnemaison (1985: 30), make a strong argument for cultural identity in the Pacific as essentially a *geographic identity*, one which 'flows from memories and values attached to places'. *Place*, or geographic residence, has been a dominant *metaphor* for definition of self in the Pacific.¹⁰ Certainly, an abiding anchor for many Pacific Island people, including migrants, has been a profound sense of land and place.

Bonnemaison's metaphor for this phenomenon is a tree rooted in the earth. Furthermore, he argues, there may not be authentic identity beyond places of memory. This line of reasoning raises questions about the maintenance of identity over time, especially as migration brings about shifts in place and subsequent shifts in the loci of identity. The critical issue for second-generation, New Zealand-born Cook Islanders is how to maintain identity over the generations.

Although identity for most Pacific Islanders is still forged in the relationship between person and place (island home), what about individuals who have only dim memories of the traditions their parents associate with the true homeland? As 50 per cent of those ethnically classified as Polynesians are today born in New Zealand, what are the

implications for such children born or reared in one place (New Zealand) but who still identify with another (in this case, the Cook Islands, 1600 miles from New Zealand)?

Important related questions: what happens when individuals have neither the skills nor the understanding to uphold the traditions of the parent generation? For the New Zealand-born Cook Islanders, what is the *place* to which they feel the greatest attachment? What is the primary locus of their identity? What has been the effect, if any, of the electronic media on identity for this generation? In this case, should one speak of 'identity of place' or 'mis-placed' identity?

This study looked systematically at *aspirations* and strivings of second-generation, New Zealand-born Cook Islanders who lived in Wellington, New Zealand.¹¹ Methodology included the usual anthropological participant observation as well as an extensive psychologically oriented interview schedule that probed for aspirations regarding language, marriage, church attendance, work habits, visits to the Cook Islands, community participation, and even 'hopes and fears' for their children's futures. As the theoretical perspective conceptualized identity as personality adjustment within specific social contexts, individual choice became a significant factor. Earlier analyses, by contrast, have tended to slight cognitive and affective dimensions of identity. People do make conscious decisions about the importance of ethnic origins and the relevance of their cultural heritage. Thus, following Brim (1960), Turner (1987) and Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1983), who view personality differences as primarily characteristics expressed in social roles, major explanatory variables were, not only *motivation* — the much over-used explanation for personality — but also *knowledge* of role demands and the *ability* to perform these roles. Aspirations of second-generation Cook Islanders, then, were examined considering these three factors: *motivation, knowledge and ability (performance)*.¹²

The data suggested that identity, for the New Zealand-born, was often situational, more often symbolic than 'real' (based on authentic culture); certainly, at minimum, bicultural if not multicultural; and choice was dependent on more than mere sentiment about place. Despite its limitations, I too used the contemporary 'building' metaphor of self, identity being seen as something potentially negotiated or created within specific social contexts. It is possible that such an instrumental metaphor is a peculiarly American way of looking at this complex reality.

First, 'place' was obviously complicated by the migration process itself. In New Zealand, though, there were attempts made by Cook Islanders to recreate substitute *places* — mini-Cook Island environments that symbolically bolstered and reinforced identity and affiliation with 'things Cook Island' (for example, *tere* [dance] parties, *uapou* [religious] celebrations, or hair-cutting ceremonies at the Cook Island community hall).

Thus, one did not completely lose 'memory of place' because of several overlapping factors: a strong parental socialization, which included images of a nostalgic 'island paradise'; the Island Church's continuous reinforcement of symbolic links between New Zealand and the homeland; possible periodic visits to the Cook Islands; and finally renewed aspects of the 'expressive culture', including language, music and dance still 'alive' in the New Zealand context.

Research results suggest that identity, for this sample, takes on an optional, almost voluntary ('multiple-choice') quality, often more symbolic than 'real' if one considers ethnicity solely in terms of authentic cultural tradition. This conclusion is essentially the same debate over cultural content in ethnic identity discussed earlier. Interview questions, however, were aimed at measuring *actual* cultural participation (*cultural performance*). In communication parlance, good communication equals appropriate performance which involves more than mere motivation if identity is to have validation from outside the group (person validation or media validation). One essential question asks whether performance is compromised by generational status, migration, or media.

Identity becomes an individual's strategic choice in a multicultural context, a kind of 'situational selection'. Within certain obvious limits, a Cook Islander may select identification in a more or less self-conscious way. This model is in line with Roosens's (1989) notion of 'ethnogenesis', or the development and public presentation of a self-conscious ethnicity — perhaps a world-wide phenomenon attributable to media influences. Although 'ethnic identity' can stand for almost anything, covering an entire range of entities from 'symbolic identity' to radical 'cultural revivals', Cook Islanders in this sample did not manifest 'radical' cultural revivalism as described by Roosens (1989) for the Canadian Indians.

To return to the theoretical variables outlined above: the data suggested strong *motivation* to identify as some form of 'Cook Islander'. This motivation was not, however, primarily *culturally* inspired. The present research documents a case where ethnic identity is still alive in a modern, urban setting although identity, in this case, does not necessarily involve the maintenance of a separate culture. Ethnic identity can be distinguished from objective culture even though there are sometimes gaps between social realities and everyday discourse about 'culture'.

To the extent that identity was grounded in 'place' (Islands), the migrant was by circumstance dis-placed, and the New Zealand-born generation found its memories of the original place shifting and rapidly growing dimmer with time. Eventually the identity became 'mis-placed' when most day-by-day experiences were firmly New Zealand-based with symbolic identity focused on a largely imaginary island culture.

There was evidence that the New Zealand-born Cook Islanders are becoming assimilated into their country of birth, with some primary

commitment to New Zealand, yet without totally repudiating all things Cook Island. When asked, 'What is Cook Island culture?', few were very articulate about its essence. Most, nonetheless, had strong and positive feelings about this 'culture'. Cook Island culture, it was felt, places a high regard on all human beings and human relationships, despite differences in social class, age or wealth. This was, at least, the cultural ideal.

For almost everyone, the essence of this 'Cook Island way' was the family, or kinship ethic. 'With the Cook Island family', explained one man, 'you never feel alone'. Coupled with this generous spirit was the notion of a people who are basically happy, friendly and outgoing, perhaps less intense than the Samoans, more casual than the Europeans, often characterized by a marked sense of humour. Being fundamentally a 'religious' people, it was felt that they could teach Europeans a bit about 'caring, friendliness, and showing one's emotions', in short, about 'being happy'. There are often discrepancies between public and private conceptions of what 'culture' should be like. This was especially true in the present study.

At the core of identity, then, lay the *issue of self-esteem* (self-affirmation providing feelings of pride in the group). This sense of self-esteem is often spoken of, in everyday discourse, as if it were a 'culture' element. There was observed, then, a strong sentiment (motivation) for affiliation with 'things Cook Island' (this being the closest 'emic' equivalent of the concept of 'culture' among these respondents). But, in the Cook Island scheme of things, *culture* was primarily identified with the extended *family*. Note that this observation is essentially Royce's (1982) discovery. People identify today as ethnics because such groups offer stable extended-family functions in an age of the declining family.

Identity surely is related to strivings for acceptance and 'belongingness'. This factor may account for the strong sentiment (motivation) for affiliation with 'things Cook Island'. The essence of the Cook Island way (culture) in the 1980s was, first and foremost, family, respect for the elders, a sense of community (albeit restricted) and a continuing link with an idealized island paradise.

Although the motivation to identify with 'things Cook Island' was not absent with this generation, knowledge of Cook Island culture, or actual participation in Cook Island activities in New Zealand (i.e. cultural domains such as language, food, dress, naming, ceremonies), was much less obvious — in fact, statistically weak in this sample. There was passing mention of the need to maintain or revive aspects of 'our culture and traditions', especially Cook Island Maori language; but there appeared to be little concrete knowledge of what these customs were and how they would be revived. Cultural erosion, then, was well documented by this study. Roosens's (1989) claim that the second generation, being a 'true cultural mutation', cannot return to a traditional culture that it never had in the first place is a claim that would not be challenged by this research.

Motivation to identify with a particular group or even fair knowledge about this 'culture' did not assure the ability to perform appropriate role behaviours in a New Zealand context. The second generation of Cook Islanders has had to choose new ways of life, linked not necessarily to the Island culture, but to their own semiology of place.

Performance of role behaviours was complicated by place being primarily, if not exclusively, New Zealand-based. Even with knowledge of the Cook Island heritage, there were relatively few 'places' in New Zealand to act out this knowledge (i.e. the more restricted contexts for cultural elaboration somewhat analogous to those of American Indians 'isolated on Indian reservations'). Certainly, for this generation, economic rewards are more often New Zealand-inspired. This fact would seem to lend full support to Roosens's hypothesis that ethnicity may be obtained only through sacrificing what the group calls its 'culture'. Economics surely has a lot to do with cultural choice. Economics were fundamentally important in this equation, but psychological (existential) factors may be of equal significance.

Ethnic identity is, at all times, a powerful psychological reality whether based on authentic culture or not. Identity is something which lies on a continuum marked by both negative and positive poles; this group recognized both the negative as well as the positive aspects of cultural retention and identity maintenance.

On the positive side, a major function of any ethnic identification is surely the anchoring of personality in smaller, more personal units as culture change renders role expectations more impersonal or problematic. Social changes, however, rather than detracting from ethnic self-awareness, often enhance identities. This was essentially the scenario for the first generation, thrust into a strange and unfamiliar environment as migrants. To some extent, the same may be true for these children of immigrants: not fully integrated into New Zealand society, yet sometimes too shy to venture out of the more restricted places of cultural security. This conclusion adds confirmation to Meyrowitz's (1986) brilliant observation that minorities espousing separate identities do not actually want to be in a separate culture. Identity, in this framework, functions as a kind of 'face saving' device until the group is psychologically ready to proceed along the path to integration or accommodation.¹³

It is well to remember that identity often combines self-interest (the economics of identity maintenance) with strong affective ties (the *affective component* which is so often persistent, even when obvious changes in both culture and role behaviour have already occurred).

Identity can touch the very core of self, an existential quality metaphorically described by one scholar as 'the taproot to the unconscious'. For many Cook Islanders, then, the foundation of identification is less 'Culture with a large C', or even 'status politics' (the 'new ethnicity's'

emphasis on economic and political gains). Rather, identity is more a fundamental sense of belongingness based squarely on kin relationships (family). Functionally speaking, identity for this group offers a kind of 'psychic shelter' in times of stress and rapid change.

Too much concern with culture, cultural revivalism, and exclusive identity may have negative implications for these locally-born children of immigrants in New Zealand. To insist on a cultural identity that only partly 'fits', as Lowenthal (1985: 318) has stated the case, may be 'a kind of patronizing colonialism dressed up as liberal social science', or even a kind of psychological compensation for economic inequalities. Such revivalism, rather than helping this generation solve its problems of identity, can only intensify identity conflicts. At least a certain portion of the sample studied elected to abandon ethnic attachments altogether as a rational choice of action.

Research that over-concentrates on the replication of island culture in New Zealand will by design tend to exclude individuals who have become assimilated into the larger New Zealand culture and who no longer identify with the Islands. One of the fascinating discoveries of the present study was the numerous examples of individuals who had already made such cultural shifts. About 16 per cent of the sample had no interest whatsoever in maintaining cultural affinities. They did not participate in ethnic associations, politics, or cultural events. A study of these 'lost' Islanders may be as crucial as studying only those who have remained within the cultural fold.

Although some groups no doubt find it more interesting to appear as 'cultures' rather than be regarded as an 'underclass' or a 'race', it may be insulting to suggest that they can't or shouldn't participate in the present world arena which has become instantly accessible through the electronic media (the 'natives' of Melanesia and South Africa, in fact, have sometimes accused anthropologists of adhering to a 'zoo theory': the accusation that scholars want to keep an area and its people underdeveloped so as to have 'pure cultures' to study!).

This generation of Cook Islanders has been marked by the disappearance of many island symbols of distinctiveness, and many had only dim memories of the traditions that their parents associated with the 'true' homeland. Any over-emphasis on cultural identity (based on authentic culture), may in fact be counterproductive. A good example would be language loyalties. What was the 'first' language for this generation? Language used in the home was predominantly (79 per cent) English; the 'mother tongue' for the majority of these Cook Island New Zealanders was clearly English. In New Zealand there were, in fact, special difficulties involving different dialects and a high rate of intermarriage. If the language (Cook Island Maori) were to be taught in the schools, for example, which version of the language would be chosen?

Two media outlets for Cook Island news in Wellington are the 'Pacific

Island News' on radio and *Tangata atu motu*, a television programme. These young people were asked if they listened to either regularly. The distinction between 'ability' to perform roles and 'knowledge' or 'motivation' to do so became even clearer. Only 10 per cent mentioned listening to either news event and then only 'occasionally'. The vast majority (90 per cent) did not. A typical reply was: 'No, can't understand it when in Maori language.' Ethnic consciousness, then, based on language loyalty is a short-sighted strategy unless it is certain that the next generation will be motivated to follow.

In a rapidly changing world, Pacific Islanders are concerned with who they are and where they are going. What did this research have to say about the future of identity for second-generation Cook Islanders in New Zealand? The majority of the New Zealand-born still preferred to identify as some type of 'Cook Islander'. To reiterate a major theme of this paper, *identity may have important functions that transcend culture as such*. It seems possible that Cook Islanders may not need any inflated Pacific Island 'culture' to establish their identity. With or without culture, identity persists.

Increasingly, however, this generation of Cook Islanders has been combining *places* — island and New Zealand — in dynamic ways. In so doing many have become 'hyphenated New Zealanders': 'Cook Island New Zealanders' or 'New Zealand Cook Islanders', depending on the emphasis. Certainly, many individuals in this sample have considered both the costs and benefits of 'cultural exclusiveness'. A substantial number have chosen between ethnic identification and national identity and have decided on the latter.

One neglected aspect of the ethnic equation, then, is the response of the dominant society. Identity persistence can be explained, to some extent, by a weak opposition from the largely European majority in New Zealand. The climate today is definitely more accepting of minority aspirations, and this acceptance is nowhere more apparent than in media coverage.

The communications media bear a special responsibility because they are potentially able to educate the general public about ethnic issues. Although they often treat the smaller ethnic minorities as fringe audiences, the media in New Zealand seem to be responding positively to racial/ethnic diversity. It is now the goal and policy of the New Zealand news media that, ideally, there should be integrated news coverage. The lack of opposition to 'cultural' aspirations, then, has been fundamental to the legitimization of ethnicity in New Zealand.

Furthermore, access to media and technology, with the power that is associated with this technology, prevents any real turning back for this generation. There is slim chance that the second or third generations can ever return permanently to the Cook Islands, homeland of their parents or

grandparents. No matter how this generation may feel about its socio-economic position in New Zealand, there is effectively no going home again.

For one thing, the media have changed the locus of the former 'identities of place'. Merging social spheres and severing the traditional links between physical and social space, the media result has been, as Meyrowitz predicted, a diffusion of group identity yielding a more or less 'placeless culture'. Even individuals in the first generation are no longer likely to identify themselves in New Zealand as 'Rarotangans', or 'Aitutakians' (from one of the specific fifteen islands within the Cooks), but rather simply 'Pacific Islanders'. Those in the second generation carry the diffusion even further, identifying as 'New Zealand Cook Islanders' or 'Cook Island New Zealanders'. The electronic media have changed the social rules of behaviour. Neither generational position nor the fact of migration fully accounts for these differences between generations.

Roosens (1989) has argued that it is exceptional for people to lock themselves voluntarily into traditional cultures when there are economic incentives to participate in a larger technology. Economic factors were indeed important with second-generation Cook Islanders in New Zealand. Television, for example, has made the mass influence of material products significant in ways unheard of a few years ago. It is generally recognized that the young universally are attracted to Western material goods advertised through the media, for these products symbolize personal freedoms over restrictive parental controls. In addition, no generation today can totally ignore the work demands of a modern economy and remain successful within it. There are also limits — despite the present academic emphasis on 'romantic racialism' — to how far a power majority can be asked to adapt to the needs of an underclass minority (Roosens, 1989).

This study demonstrates that self-affirmation is related to social, economic and psychological interests. Although there are surely complexities in trying to organize bicultural — in this case, *multicultural* — education for children of immigrants, this research strongly suggests that a vibrant and peaceful ethnic identity is possible in a multicultural society. Ethnic identity would seem to have important psychological functions, hence should be nurtured, without falling into the trap of assuming there must be a corresponding, separate culture. The challenge is how to nurture a strong *national identity*, yet still recognize a variety of different interest groups, ethnic styles and the persistent need for minority identities which carry with them a degree of self-esteem, dignity and pride. This pattern of recognizing 'cultural' identities without separate cultures fits the official, though at present unrealized, goal of an emerging multiculturalism in New Zealand.

Notes

1. Cf. the 'geography of Indianness', when the reservation itself becomes a significant place for self-definition.
2. Cf. the predictions of unity and diversity in *Megatrends 1990* (Naisbitt and Aburdene, 1990).
3. Echoing this position is the amusing Ford Motor Company's English School Melting-pot ceremony for foreign-born employees (1916) who would undergo a ritualistic rebirth especially designed by their employers. During the graduation exercise, they were led down into a symbolic 'melting pot', emerging fully dressed in American clothes and carrying an American flag! (Sollors, 1986: 89-90).
4. In defiance of all anthropological common sense, today we speak of 'cultures' of men and women; youths and elderly; gays; corporations; media; the work place; Blacks and Whites; 'cognitive', 'symbolic', and even 'subjective' cultures. Many anthropological studies perpetuate the trend started by Montegu (1972), i.e., substituting the term *ethnic group* for the more emotionally loaded label *race*; others followed with the substitution of *ethnic group* with the very elastic term *culture*, eventually resulting in confusion of the constructs of race, ethnicity and culture.
5. Some would argue that Hanson's law ('What the son wishes to forget, the grandson wishes to remember') proves that assimilation does not occur in a predictable way, but Herbert Gans (quoted in Sollors, 1986: 216) says that this so-called 'law' applies only to academics and intellectuals; in fact, he argues convincingly that the whole 'ethnic revivalism of the 1970s' may be mainly a revival limited to intellectuals. There is little empirical evidence for such a 'law'.
6. Consider the novel conclusion of a Canadian Indian writer that the historically documented custom of 'scalping' was, after all, not really an Indian practice but one which came from the Europeans (Roosens, 1989: 68).
7. Communication scholars who misuse the constructs of 'cognitive' or 'subjective' cultures to justify Black-White differences in social behaviour demonstrate the subjective, cognitive power of 'romantic racialism'. While communication patterns between Blacks and Whites are consistently observable, there is the real possibility that such differences are more attributable to social position than to either ethnicity or culture. Research that controls for social class differences (rather than labelling such differences *cultural*, 'ethnic' or 'cognitive cultural styles') is needed to validate the numerous ethnographically based communication studies that posit a 'Black culture' versus a 'White culture' as reality. See Hanna's (1986) suggestion that 'body in motion' behaviour for Black Americans has its roots in Africa and the experiences of slavery; Ting-Toomey's (1986) contention that Blacks retain a distinctive *subjective culture* of values and norms of interaction in the context of the White culture's influence; and Kochman's (1986) more serious claim that many communication problems between Blacks and Whites result from differences in their 'cultural frames of reference'. All such studies cry for empirical challenge, especially when the examples given in the literature are so patently *non-cultural*!
8. '[A]n Afro-American and the grandson of a Polish immigrant will be able to take more for granted between themselves than the former could with a Nigerian or the latter with a Warsaw worker' (Sollors, 1986: 14).
9. Much of this research summary is taken from my monograph, Fitzgerald, 1988.
10. 'Spatial identity' is similar to 'identity of place'. A specific example might be the 'geography of Indianness', where the *reservation* itself becomes a significant

place for self-definition: 'Despite the persistence of native traits, theirs is not the aboriginal culture, but a "reservation culture", a distinct and novel form, adapted to their peculiar mode of existence. It is the groups with these "reservation cultures" that constitute what is referred to as the "Indian problem"...' (Wax et al., 1989: 2).

11. The Cook Islands are now independent although migrant Cook Islanders in New Zealand hold dual citizenship somewhat in the way Puerto-Ricans do in the United States. The second generation, caught between two countries, makes for an interesting social and political subject for anthropological investigation.

12. The fact that this model treats ethnic groups as categories of interaction examined in a framework of 'social role behaviour' in no way precludes analyses based on broader, structural variables which obviously set limits to personality. The present theoretical frame is extended by the addition of questions about media influence, à la Meyrowitz (1986).

13. Stone (1989) makes the point that family stories, though not always factual or true, are central to our individual identity, often 'nudging and pushing' immigrants (or children of immigrants) in the direction of assimilation. She does not, however, see this process as 'bad'. Like identity itself, family stories are, metaphorically speaking, 'blueprints' of reality guiding the individual in times of stressful change, or social/personal dislocations.

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