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Article abstract

Given the relative paucity of Marxist analysis of ethnicity, non-Marxist social science has provided the dominant perspectives on the relations between class and ethnicity. An important concern of much of this research and writing has been to prove that ethnicity is predominant over class as the source both of social conflict and of social cohesion. In this paper current weberian perspectives on class and ethnicity, perspectives which, while paying some attention to social class, generally accord primacy to ethnicity in organizing social relations within and between ethnic groups, are critically examined. Evidence against such a view is presented, based on research conducted among Korean immigrants in Edmonton. Our research suggests that social class is a primary factor both in the formation and growth of the Korean community as well as in structuring social relations within the community.

Class Dismissed: A Critique of Weberian Perspective on Class and Ethnicity

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In the last two decades, ethnic studies have undergone a remarkable growth and have become institutionalized in the social sciences. At the same time, there has been a notable lack of internal debate on the theory and practice of ethnic studies. We think it is fair to say that van den Berghe's statement that

It is still premature to speak of a "theory of pluralism", [here we can substitute ethnicity for pluralism, for van den Berghe, correctly, sees ethnicity as a sub-order of pluralism] and indeed it is doubtful that any such distinct body of theory will ever emerge, for pluralism is nothing more than a set of basic characteristics common to a great many of the world's societies (van den Berghe, 1973: 961)

is a tacit assumption of the majority of writers in the field.

You may ask, "Well, what is wrong with that assumption?" We contend that it is at the root of the failure, or at least is the verbal expression of the failure of ethnic studies to reformulate the task of social science and its failure to significantly address very real social issues, to the surface of which ethnic studies attaches itself.

If we detach ourselves from the naive view expressed by van den Berghe, i.e., that ethnicity simply exists and therefore we have no need or claim to examine its validity in social theory and in social reality, we can reconstruct the historical development of ethnic studies and engage in a critique of ethnic studies as such. That this is not generally done is clearly evidenced in practically all the writings on

ethnicity: the most that is done is a descriptive catalogue of various writings and case studies, as if ethnicity always existed and all we had to do was open our eyes to it.

Indeed, ethnicity is introduced into the anthropological corpus as if this were the case. For it really develops with Redfield's observation that the anthropological model of the culturally homogeneous, self-contained and isolated community was no longer, if it ever had been, an accurate reflection of reality (Redfield, 1960). From that point on, a major trend in anthropology has been the search for models which would describe culturally heterogeneous situations.

One of the underpinnings of the development of ethnic studies may have been the questioning of traditional social theory, but we cannot escape the fact that this was directly related to the social world and changes occurring here. To claim, as did Redfield and as does the field of ethnic studies generally, in fact the whole discipline of anthropology, that culture is the mechanism that creates culturally heterogeneous situations and that culture, or its derivative, ethnicity, is the primary organizing principle of such societies in the present epoch, is, at best, naive. The social context in which ethnic studies arose in the 1960's and 1970's was one of continued and intensifying uneven development on an international scale as the result of the capitalist division of labour, combined with the growth of struggles by exploited and oppressed groups in the colonial and semi-colonial countries as

well as in the advanced capitalist countries for political, economic and cultural rights.

During this period, mainstream social science proved itself woefully inadequate, not just to explain inequality and social conflict, but to defend itself in the most elementary ways from political critiques by those groups that saw social science as being an integral part of the political and economic forces that were exploiting them. However, we have to grant social science a certain power of adaptability. If it could not critically examine its own privileged relation to the class structure, or that class structure as such, it could at least grasp the obvious manifestations, at the superstructural level, of those contradictions and tensions at the base.

Such is the essence of ethnic studies. However, the field has found itself increasingly running up against its own contradictions. By generally refusing to recognize the structural bedrock of social relations and the division of labour predominant at a given time, ethnicists have been forced, to a considerable extent, to concentrate on cognitive categories (Barth, 1969; De Vos and Romannucci-Ross, 1975), or normative behaviour patterns (Cohen, 1974). Ethnicity as a social phenomenon remains obscure and abstract, assumed, by and large, to be the aggregate of individual behavioural or cognitive patterns. As such, ethnic studies have had a difficult time explaining social change, both within and between ethnic groups.

Given this characteristic weakness, and the growing efficacy of class analysis in the social sciences, there is a trend in ethnic studies to take a more radical posture and to deal with the relationship between class and ethnicity. At the forefront of this trend is the American sociologist Michael Hechter (Hechter, 1975, 1978). It is worthwhile spending a short time analyzing his writings because they have had a large impact on this branch of social science and have, at least until recently, appealed to left-liberal and Marxist scholars because he apparently situates ethnicity in the division of labour spawned by imperialism.

Hechter's model of inter-ethnic relations was initially developed in his book, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development, 1536-1966* (Hechter, 1975). William Sloan (Sloan, 1979) has written a trenchant critique of this work, in which he points out that Hechter's simplistic model of imperialism as the opposition of a national core to a group of national peripheries leads him to focus on ethnicity itself, more or less ignoring class relations within the oppressed national groups and between these groups and the so-called English core. As such, Hechter is unable to consider the class nature of contemporary ethnic or nationalist struggles.

In an article entitled "Group Formation and the Cultural Division of Labour" (Hechter, 1978)

Hechter develops the themes of his earlier book, but applies them to a social formation which has a more complex ethnic map. In this article, Hechter attempts to discover the basis for group formation and social stratification in the United States. Unfortunately, the way he poses the question and the methodology he employs negate any clarification of the issue that the article could contribute.

Hechter begins by introducing Weber's notion of stand or status group, and counterposes this to the Marxian notion of class, claiming that class "bonds individuals into groups only on the basis of their common position within the existing relations of production", while stand or status groups individuals on the basis of "some kind of cultural commonality" (1978: 293). He seems to be unaware that during the mid-nineteenth century, scholars referred to stand as a social stratum organized in a juridical relationship to the state, or, apart from their political status, to socio-economic classes in civil society. As early as 1849, Marx had said that in bourgeois society there are classes but no longer estates or stands (Draper, 1977). Marx of course did not posit that class was the only basis for social organization, but he believed that it was the primary one in capitalist epoch.

Hechter attempts to incorporate class and *stand* in what he calls the cultural division of labour, which he says "occurs whenever culturally marked groups are distributed in an occupational structure" (1978: 296). However, the whole tenor of the paper is hostile to the Marxian conception of class. Following a rather simplistic sketch of Marx's theory of class, in which he implies, among other things, that Marx thought of capitalist society as being only a two-class system, he asks, "What can the class approach make of the abundant evidence that group formation in mature capitalism persists on another basis entirely, that of cultural similarity?" (1978: 294). This statement could be dissected for the type of ideological hocus-pocus that it is, a kind of sociological sleight-of-hand that says, referring to class, now you see it, now you don't. Suffice to say, Hechter never indicates, in any defensible way if class was the most important organizer of social relations in early capitalism, what transpired to raise cultural similarity to that rank at the present time.

Furthermore, Hechter states that class analysis of ethnicity is only meaningful if all members of the group occupy the same class position (1978: 294). He offers no evidence to support this claim, and we hope to show later, that in the case of the Korean immigration in Edmonton, Hechter is very mistaken.

Of course, having introduced class, Hechter cannot be rid of it so easily, for he recognizes that:

Status group sentiments such as ethnic identity cannot be usefully conceived to be universal and ahistorical imperatives of social organization in general. Little can be gained

by the invocation of primordial sentiments to account for changes in the salience of ethnicity in industrial societies (1978: 295).

However, predictably Hechter deprives class of any critical content. It too is approached in a narrowly Weberian way, as the manifestation of social interaction of the market, an occupational structure, without fully incorporating differential location in the division of labour based on ownership and control—or the lack thereof—over the means of production. This is ironical, given the fact that at the beginning of the paper he acknowledges that Weber's conception of class was inadequate. Worse still perhaps, Hechter is unable to develop the theme of ethnicity as a status group phenomenon, and returns to the traditional formulations of ethnicity as consisting of behavioural interaction and shared sentiments. The most benevolent conclusion we can make is that by the time Hechter is finished defining and describing class, ethnicity and the cultural division of labour, he has very little to say about how any of them operate or interact. However, he does seem to pose at least one tentative conclusion: he implies that ethnicity has greater salience in the United States and other industrial societies in the twentieth century than in the nineteenth because international migration promoted ethnic stratification and that ethnic stratification has both muted class cleavages and promoted intraethnic interaction. The upshot of this is that a society with strong ethnic cleavages should have weak class cleavages. We shall discuss the content of this proposition later.

To examine the further application of this type of model and Weberian methodology of the study of class and ethnicity, we turn to Edna Bonacich, who has played a leading role in the development of the notions of "split labour markets" (Bonacich, 1972) and of "middleman minorities" (Bonacich, 1973; Bonacich, Light and Wong, 1976). Unlike Hechter, Bonacich is not intent on dismissing the saliency of class analysis. She acknowledges that much ethnic antagonism within ethnically split labour markets in advanced capitalist countries expresses class conflict (Bonacich, 1972: 553). She also situates the persistence of modern middleman minorities (minorities highly represented in trade and small business) in the uneven development of monopoly capitalism (Bonacich, Light and Wong, 1976: 447-448).

Nevertheless, there remain problems with both the notion of a split labour market and of middleman minorities. While there is a co-relation between the development of split labour markets and the requirements of capital for cheap supplies of labour (Bonacich, 1972, little indication is given as to the relation between the development of split labour markets through large-scale labour migration and changes in the international division of labour, particularly the

internationalization of labour markets, or of changes in the labour process itself (we return to this in the conclusion). Moreover, Bonacich presents differential prices of labour as being determined by different resources and motives of groups on the labour market (Bonacich, 1972: 549). But such differences in resources and motives are themselves grounded in differential location in the division of labour, some groups owning the means of production and others not. Her notion of two classes of labour, one higher paid and one lower paid (Bonacich, 1972: 553), which stems from the Weberian notion of the interaction of classes in the market, is better expressed by a conception of internal differentiation and fragmentation within a single working class.

Middleman minorities are defined as ethnic minorities occupying intermediate economic positions as traders and small business owners (Bonacich, 1973: 583). Central to the theory is the idea that such minorities begin as sojourners and often retain a significant sojourner orientation (Bonacich, 1973). Yet, of the groups considered middleman minorities there is little evidence that a majority of East European Jewish immigrants in America between the 1880's and the First World War intended either to return to Eastern Europe or move elsewhere (Howe, 1976). Likewise, Korean immigration to North America in the 1960's and 1970s appears, for the most part, to be permanent (Teal, 1979).

However, the key problem in the theory of middleman minorities is its downplaying of class and class conflict within these groups. Although exploitation and inequality are recognized to exist (Bonacich, 1973: 588; Bonacich, Light and Wong, 1976: 444), such conflict and sources of conflict are said to be drastically reduced by a commonality of interests:

The principle non-economic result of sojourning is a high degree of internal solidarity... (this is not to say that sojourner communities are completely unified. On the contrary, they are often riddled with division and conflict, based on regional, linguistic, political or religious differences found in the homeland. But in relation to the host society, these differences fade before an overriding "national" unity) (Bonacich, 1973: 586).

It is curious that "division and conflict" based on class differences doesn't appear in this formulation. Jews, concentrated in the clothing trade in New York and Koreans in Los Angeles are discussed as two middleman minorities (Bonacich, 1973: 586; Bonacich, Light and Wong, 1976). Yet, particularly in the first three decades of the twentieth century, the clothing trade in New York was full of class conflict between the largely Jewish owners and their Jewish (and other immigrant) workers (Howe, 1976). As we discuss below, the Korean community in Edmonton, which apparently has a much smaller percentage of its members in business than the Los Angeles community,

nevertheless has a significant degree of class conflict.

What is the source of this theoretical negation of the importance of class and class conflict within the theory of middleman minorities? It is the acceptance of a Weberian form of class analysis. Having stated that middleman "economic behavior is closely akin to preindustrial capitalism" (Bonacich, 1973: 588), Bonacich goes on in the next page to say:

Max Weber... contrasts pre-modern capitalistic forms (including the economic behavior of Jews and Parsis) with modern industrial capitalism. The distinguishing feature of the latter is "the rational capitalistic organization of (formally) free labour"... The modern industrial capitalist treats his workers impartially as economic instruments; he is as willing to exploit his own son as he is a stranger. This universalism, the isolation of each competitor, is absent in middleman economic activity, where primordial ties of family, region, sect, and ethnicity unite people against the surrounding, often individualistic economy.

To conclude this part of the paper, if we can take the writings under review as representative of a current trend in ethnic studies, we can say that Weberian perspectives on class and ethnicity fail to elucidate relations between class and ethnicity. Specifically, they often seem to support the view that in advanced capitalist society ethnicity is a predominant organizing principle, and that within ethnic minorities that are concentrated in particular spheres in the labour market, ethnicity overrides class relations.

The representatives of the Weberian approach fail to indicate that in the advanced capitalist countries as well as in underdeveloped countries, contemporary ethnicity and ethnic relations, while perhaps resulting partially from numerous cultural and historical factors, are largely by-products, sometimes intentional, sometimes unintentional, of imperialism. To characterize imperialism simply as unequal relations between nations, between different ethnicities as it were, removes the possibility of elucidating the economic and political forces behind imperialism, and hence, those forces that create ethnic relations and facilitate interethnic hostilities. If we accept this kind of formulation we are left with little choice but to attempt to explain social relations and social change by referring to sentiments, traditions and the aggregate of individual behaviour patterns.

It is notable that, with the rather ambiguous exception of Hechter, imperialism is entirely left out of the majority of writings on ethnicity. Yet, imperialism is the wellspring of much of the immigration between underdeveloped and advanced capitalist countries and hence, of the formation of ethnic groups.

Such is the case, for example, with regard to Korean immigration to North America. The pre-condition for the formation of a Korean community in Edmonton—the immigrant population—existed be-

cause the uneven development of Korea, resulting from its incorporation into the capitalist world economy, motivated those who could to emigrate in order to escape economic, social and political hardship or suffocation. Their pre-existing subordination to capital at the international level, the particular requirements of the capitalist division of labour and production process in Edmonton and the conduct of Canadian immigration policy in serving the interests of capital accumulation were responsible for a certain number of Korean émigrés reaching Edmonton (Teal, 1979: 93). Immigration is thus a class phenomenon from start to finish, and this even includes many of the subjective reasons for moving that the individual immigrants have: for the most part they emigrate in order to secure better conditions for the sale of their labour power.

However active cultural variables may have been in the formation of the Korean community in Edmonton, the capitalist division of labour and class relations arising from it were the primary determinants both of the formation of the community and its fragmented character. The concentration of the majority of Korean immigrants in a few economic sectors (steel fabricating, garment making, and nursing homes), and their isolation from other workers in the workplace established the conditions for their general social isolation. Their involvement in the production process was the primary source and location of their interaction with Canadians and other immigrants. Yet the social relations of production were structured in such a way as to ensure either minimal interaction with other workers or competitive and antagonistic relations between workers, not just as individuals but as members of particular ethnic groups or nationalities. Koreans, as well as other immigrants, were often concentrated by nationality in particular shops or work groups in the steel fabricating plants, and several informants who worked at a garment factory said that management tacitly encouraged inter-ethnic competition (Teal, 1979: 104). Largely unable to establish genuine social relations with other workers in the workplace, they were even less likely to be able to establish such social relations with Canadians outside the workplace, where most social interaction between Korean immigrants and non-Koreans was of a commercial and formal character.

The concentration and isolation of Koreans in the workplace thus encouraged them to establish and maintain links with other Koreans. Nevertheless, the social division of labour was also a centrifugal force, fragmenting the community and setting various elements of it at odds with each other. This fragmentation and social conflict resided first in the presence of different social classes in the Korean community. Working class informants held ambivalent attitudes toward the established professional strata (engineers,

architects, doctors), on the one hand complaining bitterly that they jealously protected their privileged position and used their political dominance in the community to guard their social status (and vice versa) and on the other hand showing deference toward them for having successfully established themselves. Several informants from the professional strata maintained the position that new and/or working class immigrants should find their own way in the new society and should not expect the community organizations to act on their behalf (Teal, 1979: 112).

These very different sets of attitudes were representative of distinct social classes and of the non-complementary and often contradictory relations between them, and helped to perpetuate such forms of social distance. The second source of community fragmentation and social conflict lay in the production process itself. Even though most Koreans were concentrated as workers in a few industrial and service sectors, there were occupational distinctions between them which tended to create hostility between workers in different occupational categories. This was the case for men working in the steel fabricating plants much more than for women working in the nursing homes or in a garment factory. In the workplaces where women were concentrated, there was a smaller range of job categories and much less mobility between them. In the larger steel plants there were several Korean men working as general helpers or fitters helpers. Many of these informants complained that Koreans in the more skilled positions refused to teach them about their jobs or advise them about various work-related issues. Even though skilled and unskilled Korean workers were often grouped together in the same shop, relations between them were formal, their differential status establishing marked social boundaries between them. A few skilled workers stated that they preferred work situations where they did not have to interact with other (unskilled) Korean workers because they did not want Canadian workers to associate them as members of a particular immigrant group. In one of the smaller plants the Korean work-team was supervised by a Korean foreman, and relations between him and the labourers were strictly formal if not antagonistic.

The result of such class and occupational distinctions arising from the division of labour and the production process was that Koreans were bound together into a community in a fragmented and segmented manner. The social club that ostensibly united all Koreans did so in a way that reinforced class differentiation within the community. Members of the professional strata generally believed that the club should do little more than co-ordinate occasional social events and make representations, when necessary, to the government. Such activities, while allowing a minimal level of interaction within the commu-

nity and between it and outside agencies tended to reaffirm the power and prestige of the professional strata because they were in the best position to make such representations and to sponsor and organize social events (Teal, 1979: 114).

Although the formal community structures allowed some interaction between different social strata, social interaction occurred for the most part within rather than between classes and occupational groups. The group of professionals which had formed an informal association among themselves in the mid-1960's continued to interact primarily with each other. They still held informal monthly parties just as they had done in the early years. Few professionals had close friendships with working class immigrants. Working class Koreans in Edmonton formed small friendship circles among themselves. These friendship circles appeared to be based to some extent on occupational criteria—there was a tendency for skilled workers to associate with other skilled workers outside the workplace and for unskilled workers to associate with each other.

Primary class and occupational positions established secondary reinforcements, such as residential patterns or language proficiency, for intraclass association and antagonistic or restrained relations between classes. Many of the women who worked in the garment plant lived with their husbands and families in a neighbourhood of walk-up apartments near the plant. The majority of the garment workers' husbands were steel workers. Hence, residential patterns, while reflecting class position—in this case the working class family's need for inexpensive housing located near the workplace—reinforced social interaction among garment workers and steel workers and reduced the possibilities for interaction between themselves and the professionals, who almost invariably lived in a suburban single-family house. Moreover, there was a certain social prestige to living in a suburban house and a stigma attached to living in a walk-up apartment in an industrial district.

Proficiency in English was also conditioned by class and occupational position. Because of the nature of their work and their social situation members of the professional strata were generally more proficient and comfortable with English than were working class immigrants. Working class Koreans definitely associated proficiency in English with occupational mobility and social status. Several informants remarked bitterly that the professionals as a whole had an unfair advantage over other Koreans by being more fluent in English. Informants from the professional strata, on the other hand, often stated that those Koreans who didn't learn English couldn't expect to advance their social position (Teal, 1979: 116-118).

Patterns of social interaction within the Korean community in Edmonton were not based exclusively

on class criteria. Friendship, kinship and common cultural background often blurred class distinctions and established a degree of inter-class social relations. Cultural factors were also important in relations between Koreans and non-Koreans. In the workplace and in social situations where they were in contact with Canadians and other immigrants, their fellow workers, bosses and acquaintances related to them—or related to them in a discriminatory manner—in part on the basis of their cultural or national distinctiveness. In addition, the Korean association represented the community as an ethnic or national minority.

Nevertheless, social class was the primary determinant of social relations within the Korean community and between the community and the larger urban social formation. Capitalist enterprise in Edmonton required the reproduction of its labour force. Korean immigrants not only filled labour shortages in nursing homes, garment manufacturing and steel fabricating, but did so in ways that allowed capital to increase the rate of relative surplus value: (1) they performed jobs which would probably require higher wages if Canadian workers were to perform them; (2) their isolation and vulnerability due to their status as immigrants and their ignorance of English and of prevailing social and legal conditions in Canada made them susceptible to speedups and other forms of work intensification without being in a position to demand commensurately better wages or working conditions, and; (3) it is likely that their concentration and isolation in particular sectors weakened the position of labour as a whole in those sectors *vis-à-vis* capital by segmenting the work force and aggravating competition between workers.

It was their subordination to capital in the particular ways outlined above and in the preceding discussion that allowed such factors as ethnicity to have some degree of influence in the Korean community formation, that is, in the patterns of interaction between Koreans and between Koreans and non-Koreans. Their economic isolation and concentration set them apart as a distinct group and encouraged them to establish relationships primarily among themselves. Their isolation and particular placement in the production process also hindered the learning of English and thus reinforced their separateness from non-Koreans (Teal, 1979: 118-121).

Nevertheless, it is clear that in the case of Korean immigration and the formation of a Korean ethnic community in Edmonton, ethnicity is not an independent form of social organization. The neo-Weberians who assume that ethnicity has such an independent existence are granting it a status that it does not merit. For in conditions of advanced capitalism, ethnicity, ethnic group formation and interethnic conflict are not generally independent of social class. Even less

can it be maintained that ethnicity is predominant over social class as a mechanism of social organization.

Having discovered that the occupational structure in what they call industrialized societies is generally ethnically diverse and stratified, Hechter and Bonacich seem to attempt to transform ethnicity into a primary determinant of social relations. Hechter argues that international migration has promoted ethnic stratification across the occupational structure and that social groups who are variously situated in this structure relate to one another and organize themselves primarily on the basis of cultural or ethnic similarity and difference. Bonacich claims that within economically specialized ethnic groups, a shared ethnic identity overrides and displaces class antagonisms between owners and employers.

Both of these writers by and large ignore the fact that in the present epoch immigration is largely spawned by imperialism and hence is based on a pre-existing division of labour and serves to reproduce existing class formations and class relations. Corporations' imperialist policies can be felt through both capital export and labour import. Since 1960, in their pursuit for profits many corporations practised the first alternative by exporting their capital to Third World countries to establish manufacturing centres there. Ostensibly this was to take advantage of a tax holiday and favourable currency exchanges, but in reality it was the intent of corporations to cash in on cheap labour, low wages and minimum industrial standards (safety and pollution control). As many of these countries had abundant labour forces with no minimum wages or strong labour unions to promote and protect the workers' interests, they were ripe for this exploitation. These actions have been hailed as major stimuli to Third World industrialization and are witnessed by the rapid development of free trade zones established by such countries as Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Singapore and the Philippines (AMPO, 1977).

However, in recent years it has become increasingly evident that industries which exported capital to the Third World were trying to prolong their own productive lives through diffusion instead of modernization of plants and factories in their traditional locations, which would have involved very high capital costs. In reality what is happening is that these corporations are often exporting technological obsolescence to the Third World and at the same time taking advantage of a situation which will realize for them a tremendous surplus value in the form of profits.

The other alternative that corporations exercised, not necessarily exclusive of the first one, was to take advantage of immigration laws within advanced capitalist countries to employ immigrant workers in their industries there, as we have discussed above.

A second crucial element that is largely missing

from the Weberian perspective on class and ethnicity, despite efforts to incorporate it, is a conception of class and class structure as the totality of the social relationships within and between groups that are differentially situated in a division of labour according to their ownership and control, or lack thereof, over the means of production. Occupational structure is determined by the underlying relations of production characteristic of a particular division of labour. Because Hechter and Bonacich have a Weberian conception of class as being determined by market interaction, they essentially reduce class and class relations to occupation and relations between and within occupational groups. Having done this it is easy, if not imperative for them to locate the source of occupational concentration and segmentation and group formation not in the underlying production relations but in one of the effects—ethnicity—of a division of labour based on imperialism and capitalist production relations.

This is not to imply that all aspects of contemporary ethnic group formation and inter-ethnic relations can be explained directly at the level of class formation and class conflict. It is, however, to state that neither social class nor ethnic group formation can be analyzed primarily by referring to ethnicity. Rather, what is required is an understanding of the underlying relations of production characteristic of the capitalist mode of production and how these condition the production and reproduction of other social relations.

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