Arguments

I have been working on matters to do with social identity in general, and ethnic identity in particular, for nearly thirty years. As a social anthropology student, a post-doctoral researcher, and subsequently as a university teacher in sociology and anthropology, I have always been keenly aware of the intellectual and political importance of these topics, and the difficulties which one faces in trying to research and teach about them adequately, openly, and even-handedly.

The questions and issues that I have encountered during this time are not, however, important only in my professional, academic life. These attempts to understand better social identity – and more specifically ethnicity – are part of an ongoing dialogue with my own history and biography, and are the product of personal experience. Coming from a family that, according to researches of my amateur genealogist sister, mixes English, Welsh and Irish 'blood', I was born in Liverpool, moving as an infant to a middle-class suburb of Rotherham, in Yorkshire. From there, at the age of eight, I was brusquely transported to a respectable working-class housing estate on the hilly fringes of Larne, a small Northern Irish town. Identified by my peers as English, in the years between eight and twenty-five I had to learn to understand, if not actually fully participate in, the ethnic subtlety and bluntness of Northern Ireland. On the one hand, to negotiate the boundary between English and Northern Irish; on the other to negotiate the distinction between Protestant and Catholic. While it has been very many years since I have been able to see myself as English, I am not, in any straightforward sense, Irish either. And being Protestant in Larne was a very different thing than it had been in Rotherham.

But Larne eventually became – and remains – home. Northern Ireland is certainly where I feel most 'at home'. My children were born there: half me, half their Dutch-Indonesian mother. In the peregrinations that followed, they eventually came to call Swansea, in South Wales, home (and I have come to support the Welsh rugby team). In the court of final demands, they continue to call themselves Irish, by dint of place of birth and sentiment, but they do 'being Welsh' in many important everyday respects. And as their home, and as the home of some of my dearest friends, Swansea has become in large part home to me also. To add to the personal tale, I now live within ten miles of my childhood Yorkshire home; but I have definitely not 'come home'. I could add in further complexities – not least with respect to my relationship to a small town in Denmark, where I have spent a great deal of time over the last ten years – but these are perhaps sufficient to show why I am interested in identity, and ethnicity in particular.

There is another kind of genealogy too, which emphasizes two particular moments, one longer-term engagement, and a consistent thread of indebtedness. The first occasion was in the early 1980s. The SSRC Research Unit on Ethnic Relations in Birmingham, where I was a researcher at the time, was running a taught Master's degree and I ended

up doing a few lectures on anthropological approaches to ethnicity. This made me look at issues, concerning anthropology as well as ethnicity, to which – perhaps paradoxically, given the research I was doing at the time and had already done in Belfast – I had hitherto given insufficient attention. Some of what I say in later pages was first said then. The second occasion was ten years on, in March 1992, when I was Visiting Professor in the Institute of Ethnography and Social Anthropology at the University of Aarhus, Denmark. A very great deal of the thinking that has gone into Chapters 5 and 6, in particular, dates from then. More generally, over the last ten or more years I have spent a good deal of time as the guest of colleagues in Scandinavia, particularly the anthropologists at the Universities of Aarhus, Bergen, Copenhagen and Oslo. I cannot adequately acknowledge the importance of this 'secondary socialization' into another, perhaps more congenial, anthropological tradition. In all of these contexts I have been enabled – or required – to revisit, and to engage at close quarters with, the work and thought of Fredrik Barth. The subsequent intellectual debt runs throughout this book.

1 Anthropology and Ethnicity

In this book I am trying to better understand how ethnicity works, taking as my
starting point an approach that I call the 'basic social anthropological model of eth-
nicity'. The value and potential of this social constructionist model, which is prob-
ably most often identified with the work of Fredrik Barth, have not always been
acknowledged as widely as they deserve to be. Many of the discussions of ethnic-
ity under the various signs of postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-
colonialism, for example, appear to draw on core themes of this anthropological
model, not least its insights that ethnic identifications are negotiable and the
boundaries of ethnic groups imprecise, with little or no acknowledgement, or per-
haps even knowledge, of their intellectual genealogy. The sound of a wheel being
reinvented, often to the accompaniment of vigorous claims to intellectual novelty
and radicalism, has been unmistakable. Nor, in fairness, is it the first time that
these particular 'new' ideas have been rediscovered. The anthropologists them-
selves also have a case to answer in this respect, in that their social construction-
ist model is itself rooted in an earlier sociological literature, particularly Weber and
Hughes, that they rarely mention. So there is a lineage to be traced.

As the title suggests, however, I also argue that this basic anthropological
approach to understanding ethnicity requires – still, some ten years after the first
edition of this book appeared – some rethinking. In particular, we need to recog-
nize, first, that ethnic categorisation – the identification of others, in contrast to
self- and group identification – is fundamental to how ethnic identification, or
indeed any kind of identification, works, and, second, that power and authority are
completely basic to how categorization works. Similarly, there is a need to think
through ideologies of ethnic identification, and the relationship of ethnicity to cog-
nate identifications such as 'race' and national identity.

There is also something to be said about anthropology. Mine is an approach to
social anthropology that would probably be understood by many of my discipli-
nary colleagues – even at a time when anthropology, certainly in the United
Kingdom, may be becoming less narrowly disciplinary – as somewhat heterodox.
In fact, I know, because some of them have told me, that my *identity* as an anthro-
pologist is suspect in their eyes. Although formally qualified as a social anthropol-
ogist, I have spent most of my teaching career identified – by job title and by most
significant others – as a sociologist. I have spent much of that career exploiting and
enjoying the creative ambiguities of the intellectual borderlands, doffing and don-
ning disciplinary caps as it suited me. Much of my research has been about topics –
class, the labour market, racism – which have been claimed by sociologists and, if
they think about them at all, disavowed by most social anthropologists.
Theoretically, I owe huge debts to the writings of Max Weber and G.H. Mead, the
two great classical theorists who have been most conspicuously neglected by social

anthropology. Yet despite this history, and despite occasional moments of irritation with anthropology's intellectual and professional border police, I have never seen myself as anything other than an anthropologist-doing-sociology (and always doing anthropology too). Fortunately sociology is a sufficiently catholic discipline to tolerate this degree of agnostic pluralism (or, to put it another way, sociology has always allowed me to have my cake and eat it).

If the arguments that I offer in this book are plausible, then the anthropological approach to ethnicity – if nothing else – requires rethinking. Or, rather, because in the ten years since this book's first publication its impact has probably been greatest outside anthropology, *still* requires rethinking. Rethinking the topic also might suggest some rethinking, at least, of the discipline. Echoing Edmund Leach's words in his 1959 inaugural Malinowski Lecture (1961: 1), calls to rethink on a disciplinary scale are vulnerable to interpretation as arrogance. They certainly need to be justified. So, first, a few words about anthropology.

Locating social anthropology

The disciplinary question has two dimensions: the intellectual content of social anthropology and its relationship to cognate disciplines. One matter on which I am not going to dwell is the conventional distinction between social anthropology (largely British) and cultural anthropology (largely American). In the first place, the study of ethnicity is one of the areas in which that distinction has been of least moment. In the second, American anthropology has become more complex and diverse, and more difficult to characterize monolithically. In the third, there is every reason to believe that a new global domain of socio-cultural – or, indeed, culturo-social – anthropology is emerging, in which this fault line has ceased to be of particular importance. This is a development in which European scholars and anthropological traditions have been conspicuous. Although my own background and training are in British *social* anthropology, and what I have to say is likely to reflect that in places, too much should not be made of this.

With respect to intellectual content, the primary emphasis in anthropology is still, as it has been since the discipline's inception, upon understanding the cultural Other (defined, historically, from a European or North American cultural viewpoint). Historically, this fascination with the absolute elsewhere is one aspect of the discipline's roots in the colonial encounter. More interestingly, it has always called for an imaginative leap, and an epistemological daring – which some might, ill-advisedly, call a conceit – that is not always present in its nearest intellectual neighbours.

This, perhaps more than anything else, underpins the anthropological emphasis on the personal experience of ethnographic field research. Every academic discipline is grounded in ontological and epistemological axioms that allow knowable *objects* of inquiry, and *how* they are to be known, to be taken for granted as the bedrock of disciplinary reality. The basic epistemological premise of social anthropology is that to understand Others they must be encountered. If the *sine qua non* of history is engagement with primary sources, the equivalent for anthropology is fieldwork. Long-term participant observation is the source of anthropological

epistemological authority. An anthropologist's claim to know about her research site and the people who live there is typically, in the first instance, personal and experiential: 'I know because *I* was there'. Her knowledge is grounded in an ordeal of sorts; fieldwork is a professional *rite de passage*, a process of initiation. Without the 'extremely personal traumatic kind of experience' that is ethnographic field-work (Leach again, ibid.), she is unlikely to be recognized by other anthropologists as a full member.

This practical ethnographic emphasiz on 'seeking quietly the local terms of life', during a 'patient engagement' with the everyday lives of others (Dresch and James 2000: 2) has inclined the discipline towards a focus on the details of face-to-face life. 'Big pictures' may thus be elusive. How to extend the ethnographer's view beyond the immediate realities of everyday social settings has probably been a concern for fieldworkers since Malinowski. During the 1990s this concern hardened up around two issues: how to deal with history, and how to grasp globalization. Each had roots in earlier debates about how, ethnographically, to document social changes that play out over longer periods than fieldwork allows for and are rarely specifically local. With respect to history, anthropology long ago abandoned the notion of an 'ethnographic present', within which non-modern peoples and communities waited patiently to enter modernity. We no longer believe that there are 'peoples without history'. The contemporary ethnographic challenge is how to enter into and understand those ongoing histories from the vantage point of everyday life. With respect to globalization, anthropology has moved away from the notional isolation in which it located the people that it studied, towards an appreciation of physical and virtual interconnections and interdependence that is more appropriate to the age. The challenge for the fieldworker has become how to see the global in the local, and vice versa.

Engagements with history and globalization – and this book is concerned with both – have encouraged new reflections on the pragmatics of fieldwork, in a lively literature about 'anthropological locations', 'shifting contexts' and the 'construction of the field' (Amit 2000; Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Strathern 1995). Placing ethnography firmly in the 'wider world' (Dresch *et al.* 2000), a central theme of these discussions has been how anthropology should respond to a world in which the time-space coordinates of fieldwork are no longer fixed in settled, bounded communities, in which change, if it happened at all, only happened very slowly. The object of anthropology has, it seems, changed (Fog Olwig and Hastrup 1997).

In fact, there are good reasons for insisting that not much has changed at all. It is not, for example, clear that the small communities and 'traditional' cultures of the heroic era of anthropology were, actually, settled, bounded and slow to change. History and archaeology tell us a tale that does not quite match the stereotype. And the modern world is characterized by continuity as well as change, settlement as well as mobility. Perhaps even more to the point, most anthropologists – certainly the overwhelming majority of anthropology graduate students, for whom the ethnographic *rite de passage* remains the passport to professional employment – continue to do something that resembles 'traditional' fieldwork: short- to medium-term participatory engagements with people in relatively compact settings. In other words, anthropological research remains typically 'local'. And two of the most important distinguishing features of the discipline remain that it is empirical, and that data collection is usually done in the first person.

A comparative, essentially relativist perspective on socio-cultural diversity is also central to anthropology. But perhaps the most important foundational assumption of modern anthropology – its crucial ontological premise – is that human beings, regardless of cultural differences, have more in common with each other than not. This 'psychic unity' of humankind allows for the possibility of sufficient cross-cultural understanding for the interpretive and comparative ethnographic enterprises to be epistemologically defensible. Despite a minor failure of epistemological nerve during the last couple of decades, inspired by critiques of ethnographic research practice (e.g. Bourdieu 1977, 1990) and apparently sophisticated engagements with self-consciousness and postmodernism during the 1980s – particularly the debate about the (im)possibility of representation (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986), most anthropologists continue to do their field research in the belief that it *can* be done, however imperfectly. Grimshaw and Hart (1995) may have been correct to diagnose a collapse of faith in *scientific* ethnography, but faith in ethnography – as method and as data – remains.

With respect to theory, social anthropology, in addition to its own specialized theoretical concerns, such as kinship, has always participated in general social theory (although, as I have already suggested, the traditions deriving from Weber or Mead have attracted relatively few anthropological adherents). At the beginning of the twenty-first century, anthropology is more theoretically heterogeneous than at perhaps any point in its history: interactionism, culturalist interpretion, structuralism, post-structuralism, feminism, post-colonialism, and postmodern critique all twinkle in the current disciplinary firmament. Although Marxism seems to be in the same regrettable post-1989 quarantine as in other disciplines, there are signs of positive re-engagement with biology and evolution (e.g. Boyd and Richerson 2005; Richerson and Boyd 2004). However, at least one remnant of the structural functionalism that dominated the discipline during much of the twentieth century remains at the heart of the anthropological enterprise. This is the emphasiz – which is no bad thing – upon methodological holism: the *aspiration* to study all aspects of a situation or a group's way of life, or as many aspects as possible, in the belief that they are all *potentially*, at least, interrelated.

Allowing for this holistic aspiration – because it is never more than that, if only because of the practical demands of field research – anthropologists have always specialized in studying particular aspects of the human world: symbolism, ritual and religion, myth, kinship and the family, morality, custom and law, micropolitics, and ethnic and communal identification are perhaps the most conspicuous and characteristic. These interests derive partly from the engagement with Other cultures, partly from the experience of data gathering within the give and take of face-to-face interaction, and partly from anthropology's nineteenth-century origins in a fusion of romanticism, exoticism and evolutionism, in the context of European and North American colonialism (Kuper 1988). Taken as a whole, this constellation of interests may be characterized as a bias in the direction of the *cultural* and the *everyday*:

> Anthropologists … have always derived their intellectual authority from direct experience of life … That is, they knew the exotic Other and their readers did not. Within that framework of bridging the gap between civilized and primitive, they emphasized the salience of the everyday, the ordinary. (Grimshaw and Hart 1995: 47–8)

The world is, however, changing, as it has always done – if nothing else, that 'gap between civilized and primitive' no longer seems obvious or defensible – and anthropology has, to some extent, changed with it. Additional subjects and issues have been gradually taken on board during the last three or four decades, including urbanization, socio-economic change and 'development', health care and illness, new reproductive technologies, nutrition, tourism, literacy, forced and voluntary migration, nationalism, and even the virtual realities of cyberspace. Allowing for this, however, and as already suggested, a holistic emphasiz on understanding local meanings (culture) using data (about everyday life) gathered via participant observation remains characteristic of the anthropological point of view.

A further important development within the discipline has been a modest shift in its relationship to the exotically Other. This occurred in three phases. First, from as early as the late nineteenth century, and more routinely from the mid-twentieth century onwards, the metropolitan peripheries offered accessible and relatively exotic alterity, in the shape of residual hunters, fishers and nomads, or peasants. Subsequently, second, the exotic Other migrated to the metropolitan homelands of anthropology to become ethnic minorities; anthropologists followed them home. Third, and perhaps most radically, anthropologists have begun to pay more attention to their own ethno-cultural backyards (Forman 1994; Jackson 1987).

These trends – theoretical and topical diversification and a widening of cultural and/or geographical scope – reflect anthropology's attempts to negotiate the post-colonial world and globalization. They have brought with them, however, problems in disciplinary boundary maintenance. It is, for example, not as easy as it might once have been to distinguish anthropology from sociology, its closest sibling and most obvious rival, by reference to method or area. In terms of method, ethnography is a long-standing sociological research tradition – remember the Chicago School? – albeit as part of a varied portfolio of research methods. On the other side of that coin, some anthropologists have been using quantitative and other non-ethnographic methods since at least the 1950s (e.g. Epstein 1967; Pelto and Pelto 1978). And the comparative method – witness Max Weber if no one else – has always been as sociological as it is anthropological.

With respect to area and setting, sociologists have been working in the 'developing world' for a long time, and the two disciplines have always competed in the rural areas of industrial societies. What's more, industrialization and globalization have, between them, conspired to produce a degree of convergence: in some sense *all* societies must now be thought of as industrial societies. Anthropology no longer has a territorial preserve that it can unambiguously call its own (a situation which has been further encouraged by the post-colonial disrepute in which anthropology is held in some places). On top of this – in part in response to it, indeed – anthropologists are, as I have already mentioned, 'coming home' to look at 'their own' societies.

This particular institutional and intellectual fault line has become further confused as sociology, moving now in a fully global arena, has itself engaged with a widening topical agenda. The sociology of culture, in particular, deserves mention in this respect. The blurring of boundaries has been further encouraged by the development of interdisciplinary feminism as a unifying intellectual field of critical discourse, and the debate about, and influence of, postmodernism. Nor is sociology the only problematic boundary: social psychology, social geography and social history might also be mentioned here.

In some other respects, however, anthropology has been moving steadily further away from sociology. As a consequence of the institutional specialization that has encouraged the growth of separate departments within universities and colleges, heightened competition for dwindling resources, the partial abandonment by both disciplines of the shared theoretical heritage of structural functionalism, and the perceived threat posed by the modest convergence of the disciplines in terms of field and topic, boundary maintenance has become more assertive. Competitive or entrepreneurial assertions of the distinctiveness and virtue of anthropological approaches to topics outside the traditional disciplinary spheres of competence have become ever louder. The difference between anthropology and sociology seems to matter more than it did in the 1960s and 1970s (and most anthropologists even then thought that it mattered, and mattered a lot). Despite the fact that personnel and, even more important, *ideas* do cross disciplinary boundaries – most usually, at least in Britain, from anthropology into sociology – those boundaries remain. Sociology – bigger, less specialized, more intellectually promiscuous and pluralist, recruiting from and training within less elitist social and institutional fields – may not be not as sectarian as social anthropology, but *both* disciplines are intellectually impoverished by the communication gap that has opened up between them.

So, where does this leave social anthropology? One analogy which has been used with some success to understand relationships between disciplines – and which is peculiarly appropriate to this discussion – is that of 'academic tribes' (Becher 1989). In this view social anthropology and sociology can be seen as two neighbouring and historically related academic 'tribes' (or, indeed, ethnic groups). With environmental change they are increasingly competing – with respect to limited research and teaching opportunities – in and for the same ecological niches. Bearing in mind that anthropological studies suggest that ethnic identity is often hierarchically segmentary, it is plausible to argue that while social anthropology excludes sociology, sociology includes social anthropology; while sociology embraces all of the methods and many of the concerns of anthropology, the reverse is not true. Social anthropology can thus be analogized as an exclusive and specialized sub-section or clan of the greater tribe that I have elsewhere called 'generic sociology' (Jenkins 2002a: 22–7).

Lest this view be thought too provocative, consider the following definition of sociology, offered by the late Roy Wallis, writing in the *The Times Higher Education Supplement* on 18 April 1986, a time when sociology was having to justify itself in an altogether hostile British political climate:

> Sociology is not only about translating the manners and mores of alien life and sub-culture into the language and sensibility of the rest, it is about making strange and problematic what we already know, questioning the assumptions long held in our community deriving their strength from prejudice and tradition rather than open-minded observation. And making the strange, the foreign, obvious, enabling us to see how reasonable people starting from the point they do, could come to live and think this way; and making what has hitherto seemed obvious in our own society problematic, to question how and why it is done, providing the opportunity for reappraisal or greater understanding of our own behaviour, seems to me a socially and morally worthwhile purpose.

This is, admittedly, only one view of sociology, and from 20 years ago. Any such definition, in a discipline famous for differences of opinion, if not discord, must expect to be contested. But it sketches out a broad intellectual enterprise with which most, if not all, social anthropologists would feel utterly at home. In the context of the present discussion, it eloquently emphasizes the essentially sociological character of social anthropology.

This doesn't mean, however, that sociology and social anthropology are the same thing. They clearly are not (quite). The differences of emphasiz between them, when taken together, constitute a specifically anthropological point of view:

> Our emphasis on pluralism, our understanding of culture, our appreciation for the informant's perspective ... add up to a distinctive perspective. (Blakey *et al.* 1994: 302)

A minimalist disciplinary model of this kind is what I have in mind when I persist in seeing myself as an anthropologist: comparative, epistemologically relativist, methodologically holistic, focusing on meaning, stressing local perceptions and knowledge, and documenting the routines of everyday life. This is the specifically anthropological version of the sociological imagination.

However, if the notion of anthropology as a segment of sociology is right, its continuing vitality will not be nurtured simply by putting sufficient water between sociology and social anthropology to allow the latter a distinct intellectual identity. Despite recent moves in what I think is the right direction, anthropology faces a problem, which the following summarized nicely, more than ten years ago:

> it is not a crisis of *representation* which now threatens our discipline but a problem of *relevance*. Social anthropology as we know it is in danger of becoming marginalized and redundant unless it adapts to the changing world which now threatens to undermine its cherished theories, methods and practices. This means, above all, re-evaluating its conventional objects of study and developing new domains and methods of inquiry that are commensurate with the new subjects and social forces that are emerging in the contemporary world ... anthropology's image as a discipline still primarily concerned with exotic, small-scale disappearing worlds must be complemented – perhaps even supplanted – by greater concern with 'emerging worlds', the culture of the 'colonizers' as well as those of the colonized, and on subject areas that cannot be defined by traditional fieldwork methods alone. (Ahmed and Shore 1995: 14–16)

Apart from wanting to insist that the problem of anthropological relevance is not new or even particularly recent – a minority of anthropologists, some of them eminent within the discipline, have been pursuing the approach advocated by Ahmed and Shore for many years now – this, it seems to me, still hits the nail on the head.

The rest of this book should be read, therefore, not only as a rethinking of ethnicity, but also as a contribution to the ongoing rethinking of anthropology. To the development of an anthropology that is unapologetically at home in large-scale, metropolitan, industrialized societies. An anthropology that is sure of its epistemological ground when using survey methods, archival sources, relying on secondary material, or whatever. An anthropology that is not put off its stride by history and globalization. A discipline that is no longer defined by its methods or by its places of work, but by its *concerns* and, above all, by its *point of view*.

Locating ethnicity

So, what do anthropologists mean when they talk about ethnicity? What does anyone mean when they talk about ethnicity? The word comes from the ancient Greek *ethnos*, which seems to have referred to a range of situations in which a collectivity of humans lived and acted together (Østergård 1992a: 32), and which is typically translated today as 'people' or 'nation'. As Ruane and Todd have recently put it, ethnicity is a matter of 'peoplehood' (2004: 216). Since the early decades of this century, the linked concepts of ethnicity and ethnic group have been taken in many directions, academically (Hutchinson and Smith 1996; Stone 2004) and otherwise. They have passed into everyday discourse, and become central to the politics of group differentiation and advantage, in the culturally diverse social democracies of Europe and North America and, increasingly, globally. With notions of 'race' in public and scientific disrepute since 1945, ethnicity has obligingly stepped into the gap, becoming a rallying cry in the, often bloody, reorganization of the post-Cold-War world. The obscenity of 'ethnic cleansing' stands shoulder to shoulder with earlier euphemisms such as 'racial hygiene' and 'the final solution'.

So it is important to be clear about what our subject – ethnicity – is and what it is not. An early and influential sociological reference to ethnic groups, and the ultimate rootstock of the argument that I develop in this book, can be found in Max Weber's *Economy and Society*, first published in 1922 (1978: 385–98). Allowing for infelicities of translation (Brubaker *et al.* 2006: 11. fn), an ethnic group is based, in this view, on the *belief* shared by its members that, however distantly, they are of common descent. This may or may not derive from what Weber calls 'anthropological type' (i.e. 'race', embodied difference or phenotype):

> race creates a 'group' only when it is subjectively perceived as a common trait: this happens only when a neighbourhood or the mere proximity of racially different persons is the basis of joint (mostly political) action, or conversely, when some common experiences of members of the same race are linked to some antagonism against members of an *obviously* different group. (1978: 385)

From my perspective, perhaps the most significant part of Weber's argument is that:

> ethnic membership does not constitute a group; it only facilitates group formation of any kind, particularly in the political sphere. On the other hand, it is primarily the political community, no matter how artificially organized, that inspires the belief in common ethnicity. (1978: 389)

Weber seems to be suggesting that the belief in common ancestry is likely to be a *consequence* of collective political action rather than its *cause*; people come to see themselves as *belonging* together – coming from a common background – as a consequence of *acting* together. Collective interests thus do not simply reflect or follow from similarities and differences between people; the active pursuit of collective interests does, however, encourage ethnic identification.

In terms of collective action, this sense of ethnic communality is a form of monopolistic social closure: it defines membership, eligibility and access. Any 'cultural stuff' in common can provide a basis and resource for ethnic closure: language,

ritual, kinship, economic way of life, lifestyle more generally, the division of labour, are all likely possibilities in this respect (cf. Ruane and Todd 2004). Shared language and ritual are particularly implicated in ethnicity: mutual 'intelligibility of the behaviour of others' is a fundamental prerequisite for any group, as is the shared sense of what is 'correct and proper' which constitutes individual 'honour and dignity'. By this token, an ethnic group is a particular form of *status group*. Finally, Weber argues that since the possibilities for collective action rooted in ethnicity are 'indefinite', the *ethnic group*, and its close relative the *nation*, cannot easily be precisely defined for sociological purposes.

The next significant sociological contribution to our understanding of ethnicity came in an undeservedly neglected short paper by the Chicago sociologist Everett Hughes, first published in 1948 (1994: 91–6). Hughes had clearly read Weber, and he rejected a commonsensical or ethnological understanding based simply on distinctive 'cultural traits':

> An ethnic group is not one because of the degree of measurable or observable difference from other groups: it is an ethnic group, on the contrary, because the people in it and the people out of it know that it is one; because both the *ins* and the *outs* talk, feel, and act as if it were a separate group. This is possible only if there are ways of telling who belongs to the group and who does not, and if a person learns early, deeply, and usually irrevocably to what group he belongs. If it is easy to resign from the group, it is not truly an ethnic group. (1994: 91)

Hughes's argument can be paraphrased thus: ethnic cultural differences are a function of 'group-ness'; the existence of a group is not a reflection of cultural difference. Furthermore, ethnic groups imply ethnic relations, and ethnic relations involve at least two collective parties, they are not unilateral. Identity is a matter of the *outs* as well as the *ins*. A concomitant of this point of view is the injunction that we should not, for example, study a *minority* group – which is, after all, a relational notion – without also studying the *majority*:

> if the groups in question have enough relations to be a nuisance to each other it is because they form a part of a whole, that they are in some sense and in some measure members of the same body. (1994: 95)

In Weber and Hughes we can see the early sociological emergence of the social constructionist model of ethnicity which anthropologists have so strikingly made their own. From this point of view, ethnic groups are what people believe or think them to be; cultural differences mark 'group-ness', they do not cause it (or indelibly characterize it); ethnic identification arises out of and within interaction between groups.

The notion of ethnicity did not, however, come into widespread anthropological use until the 1960s, beginning in the United States. Within American anthropology, the increasing use of an ethnicity model was part of a long-term, and gradual, shift of analytical framework, from 'race' to 'culture' to 'ethnicity' (Wolf 1994). It can also be interpreted as a change – about which more in Chapter 2 – in the conceptualization of one of the basic units of anthropological analysis, from the 'tribe' to the 'ethnic group'. More recently, the unit of analysis in this respect has widened further, to reflect a growing concern with the 'nation' and the processes whereby

ethnic groups and categories are incorporated into states (Baumann 1999; Eriksen 2002; Verdery 1994; B. Williams 1989). It is now anthropological common sense to consider ethnicity and nationalism in the same analytical breath, although 'race', as we shall see, is more problematic. The study of ethnicity – and nationalism – has become one of the major growth areas within the discipline, 'a lightning rod for anthropologists trying to redefine their theoretical and methodological approaches' (B. Williams 1989: 401).

Being a growth area has encouraged a healthy diversity: the anthropological model of ethnicity is a relatively broad church, which allows a wide range of phe-nomena under its roof. What is more, it remains firmly grounded in empirical research. In this field as in others, social anthropologists remain most concerned to get on with writing in detail about everyday life in specific local contexts. This is what most anthropologists see themselves as doing best (and in this they are prob-ably right). At the level of meta-theory, however, it is perhaps worth noting that these detailed ethnographic texts about particular places and people contribute, even if only by default, to the perpetuation of an axiomatic view of the social world as a mosaic of discontinuous and definite cultural *difference*, rather than a seam-less web of overlapping and interweaving cultural *variation*.

The empirical ethnographic tradition notwithstanding, there is social anthropo-logical theory and there are definitions. Perhaps the most general is the notion of ethnicity as the 'social organization of culture difference' originally proposed by Fredrik Barth's symposium *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969b), the seminal text from which stems much current anthropological conventional wisdom about ethnicity. In his 'Introduction' to that collection, Barth (1969a) outlined in detail a model of ethnicity that was intended as a corrective to the structural functionalist understanding of the human world – which was at that time still dominant within anthropology – as a system of more or less unproblematic, more or less firmly bounded societies or social groups, which existed as 'social facts', and were, *pace* Durkheim, to be treated or understood as 'things'.

Barth began with what actors believe or think: ascriptions and self-ascriptions. He focused not upon the cultural characteristics of ethnic groups but upon relationships of cultural differentiation, and specifically upon contact between collectivities thus differentiated, 'us' and 'them' (Eriksen 2002: 11–13). Barth's emphasiz was not so much upon the *substance* or *content* of ethnicity, what he called the 'cultural stuff', as upon the social processes which produce and reproduce – which organize, if you like – boundaries of identification and differentiation between ethnic collectivities:

> we can assume no simple one-to-one relationship between ethnic units and cul-tural similarities and differences. The features that are taken into account are not the sum of 'objective' differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant ... some cultural features are used by the actors as signals and emblems of differences, others are ignored, and in some relationships radical dif-ferences are played down and denied. (Barth 1969a: 14)

In emphasizing boundaries between groups, and their production and reproduc-tion, Barth immediately shifted the analytical centre of gravity away from this or that settled, bounded group – or 'society' – and towards the complex universes of relationships between groups and their members.

In doing so, Barth emphasized that ethnic identity is generated, confirmed or transformed in the course of interaction and transaction between decision-making, strategizing individuals. Ethnicity in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* is, perhaps before it is anything else, a matter of political manoeuvring, and individual decision-making and goal orientations. This has provided the ammunition for the consistent criticism that Barth's view of humans is materialistic, individualistic, narrowly instrumental and neglects 'structural constraints' (Evens 1977; Kapferer 1976; Paine 1974; for a response, see Barth 1981: 76–104).

Shared culture is, in this model, best understood as generated in and by processes of ethnic boundary maintenance, rather than the other way round: the production and reproduction of difference *vis-à-vis* external others is what creates the image of similarity internally, *vis-à-vis* each other. Barth and his collaborators ushered in an increasing awareness on the part of many anthropologists that 'culture' is a changing, variable and contingent property of interpersonal transactions, rather than a reified entity, somehow 'above' the fray of daily life, which produces the behaviour of individuals. As Barth has more recently suggested, this point of view can be seen to anticipate the postmodern view of culture (Barth 1994: 12). Whatever one might make of that idea – and, as I have already implied, it is not absurd – his understanding of ethnicity has been central to pretty much all subsequent anthropologizing about ethnicity.

Like Hughes, Barth had clearly read Weber. Having been a student at the University of Chicago in the late 1940s, he was probably also familiar with Hughes's work (and he acknowledges the influence of Erving Goffman, one of Hughes's students). Whatever the source – because intellectual lineages are never straightforward – the above quotation from Barth illustrates the striking affinities between the model of ethnicity that was elaborated in *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* and earlier sociological discussions of ethnicity. It can, in fact, be understood as their development and elaboration.

Barth's arguments had more strictly anthropological antecedents, too. Leach (1954), for example, talked about Kachin identities in Highland Burma as flexible rather than fixed over time, questioning the general utility of the notion of the 'tribe'. Later, Moerman's (1965) discussion of the situational variability of ethnicity in Thailand implicitly anticipated much of Barth's model, and Yehudi Cohen's apparently independent discussion of 'social boundary systems' (1969) is a good example of the extent to which the contributors to *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* were part of a wider intellectual *Zeitgeist*. Thus, although his was arguably the most systematic model in depth and detail, the most securely grounded in wider theoretical arguments about social forms and social processes (e.g. Barth 1959, 1966, 1981), and has certainly been the most influential, Barth was not alone in establishing the current anthropological understanding of ethnicity.

And Barth's is not the only influential anthropological model of ethnicity to have been influenced by Weber. Reflecting, on the one hand, the practical ethnographic concern with the everyday lives of real people – their 'actually existing' social relationships (Radcliffe-Brown 1952: 190) – and, on the other, the pursuit of *verstehen* ('understanding') advocated by Weber and Simmel, Clifford Geertz has elegantly defined ethnicity as the 'world of personal identity collectively ratified and publicly expressed' and 'socially ratified personal identity' (1973: 268, 309). In this view, which does not clash with Barth's approach at all, ethnicity has to mean something – in the sense of making

a difference – not only to *the people* one is studying, but also to individual *persons*. I will return to Geertz in subsequent chapters.

What I have called the 'basic social anthropological model of ethnicity' can be summarized as follows:

- Ethnicity is a matter of cultural differentiation – although, to reiterate arguments I have explored in detail elsewhere (Jenkins 2004), identification always involves a dialectical interplay between similarity and difference.
- Ethnicity is centrally a matter of shared meanings – what we conventionally call 'culture' – but is also produced and reproduced during interaction.
- Ethnicity is no more fixed or unchanging than the way of life of which it is an aspect, or the situations in which it is produced and reproduced.
- Ethnicity, as an identification, is collective and individual, externalized in social interaction and the categorization of others, and internalized in personal self-identification.

Some cautionary words about 'culture' are appropriate before going further. First, the implicit understanding of culture upon which this model of ethnicity depends is considerably narrower than the general-purpose model of culture – as the definitive characteristic of human beings, the capacity for which unites us all in essential similarity – to which neophyte anthropologists are quickly introduced, often in the shape of Tylor's famous and time-honoured omnibus definition. Here, instead, is a model of different *cultures*, of differentiation based in variation of language, religion, cosmology, symbolism, morality, ideology, and so on. It is a model that leads occasionally to the problematic appearance that culture is different from, say, politics or economic activity (when, in fact, they are all 'cultural' phenomena in Tylor's sense). In this, the model is revealed as the analytical analogue of everyday notions of ethnic differentiation. This should be borne in mind in reading the discussions of the 'cultural stuff' in subsequent chapters.

A second, more awkward, point about the notion of culture follows from this. 'Culture' is, at best, a cumbersome concept, difficult to define in any rigorous manner and difficult to distinguish in any sensible fashion from its conceptual close cousins 'society' and 'the social' (Jenkins 2002a: 39–62). Ideally, I would like to discard these words altogether. However, not only is 'culture' a lively presence at large in the human world, but the entire social science debate about ethnicity is couched in terms that, explicitly or implicitly, refer to it. So consigning it to the bin is not an option. The reader should, therefore, bear in mind that the notion of 'culture' in what follows is at best a general-purpose and somewhat vague word drawn from the social science vernacular, referring to equally vague analogous notions in the everyday conversations of the human world.

Returning to ethnicity, the general model that I have outlined above is accepted, to some degree, by most social anthropologists who work with the topic. I will elaborate upon it in subsequent chapters, and introduce some important qualifications and modifications. However, it is not my intention to provide a comprehensive survey of the enormous anthropological literature about ethnicity. Several, generally complementary, essays into this territory are already available (Banks 1996; Baumann 1999;

Cohen 1978; Eriksen 2002; B. Williams 1989) and little would be served by repeating, or competing with, them. However, the fact that lots of anthropologists are talking to each other about ethnicity, combined with the disciplinary enthusiasm for prioritizing detailed ethnographic studies, may lead to some things being taken for granted. Among these things are the definition of anthropology, and, more important, the definition of ethnicity, both of which have already been discussed.

A further problem, however, is the perpetual need to struggle against our tendency to reify ethnicity (and, indeed, 'culture'). Although they are talked about endlessly in these terms, neither ethnicity nor culture is 'something' that people 'have', or, indeed, to which they 'belong'. They are, rather, complex repertoires which people experience, use, learn and 'do' in their daily lives, within which they construct an ongoing sense of themselves and an understanding of their fellows. Ethnicity, in particular, is best thought of as an ongoing *process* of ethnic identification.

One possible consequence of this reification, particularly given anthropology's history, is the construction of ethnicity as typically – or even only – an attribute of the Other. Ethnicity thus becomes a phenomenon on that characterizes other people rather than ourselves. We need, however, to remind ourselves all the time that each of *us* participates in an ethnicity – perhaps more than one – just like *them*, just like the Other, just like 'the minorities'. Some of us, members of those 'ethnic minorities', perhaps, or who come from ethnically marked peripheries – such as, in the British Isles, Wales, Ireland, or Scotland – may know this only too well. However, for others it can be difficult to appreciate. Yet its appreciation is arguably the first step towards understanding the ubiquity and the shifting salience of ethnic identification. Recognizing that ethnocentrism is routine and understandable, as routine and understandable as the invisibility of one's own identity, does not absolve us from the need either to struggle against it, or to make ourselves more visible (to ourselves).

Although, as good social scientists, we may, and probably should, pooh-pooh its reality, or distance ourselves from it by recourse to irony, our national identity or 'national character' may be easier to perceive than our ethnicity. Nationalism and the construction of national identity are, after all, explicit projects of the state. If nothing else, we have passports. The contours and contents of national identity are likely to be more visible, as are the contexts of its uses and justifications. And even if, as good anthropologists, we may not have to remind ourselves of the socially constructed character of national identity and sentiment, there is certainly a job to be done in keeping that idea as firmly in the public eye as possible.

And that idea is undoubtedly important. Although it is welcome, we should not really *need* Eric Wolf's reminder (1994) that 'race', 'culture and 'people' are 'perilous ideas'. We *should* know this. Newscasts if not history should have taught us it long ago. Which makes anthropological research and teaching about ethnicity both urgent and troublesome. Because of its combination of a comparative global reach and a local-level research focus, its emphasiz upon shared meanings as well as social construction, and its capacity to see individual trees as well as the collective wood, anthropology offers a promise to the world beyond the academy: to relativize notions about ethnicity and to resist the naturalization or the taking for granted of ethnic identity and nationalist ideology.

No less than when I wrote the first edition of this book, more than ten years ago, there is still some way to go, however, and some conceptual clarification, before we can live up to that promise. This book is offered as a contribution to that clarification. It should be read as part of an ongoing enterprise. It is, hence – and perhaps all theoretical texts should declare themselves in this way – self-consciously provisional (which doesn't mean that it is merely tentative). I hope that the fact that it is a computer-age *bricolage* – a rewriting and collage of an existing body of papers – has not resulted in too much repetition or overlap in the arguments, and that the reader will bear with me where they occur.