

SYMPOSIUM

ETHNIC BOUNDARY MAKING: INSTITUTIONS, POWER, NETWORKS BY ANDREAS WIMMER (O.U.P. 2013)

Beyond ethnicity

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The ‘comparative analytic of ethnic forms’ developed in Andreas Wimmer’s *Ethnic Boundary Making* makes a major contribution towards specifying why ethnicity matters to different degrees and in different ways in differing social and historical contexts. My comment raises two issues for discussion. I question whether nationhood can be fully subsumed under the overarching rubric of ethnicity. And I suggest that there may be a certain cost to stretching the undeniably fruitful boundary metaphor too far. I conclude by noting that the processes analysed in the book are in no way specific to ethnicity, and that the book points beyond ethnicity to a broader theory of the making and unmaking of groups.

Keywords: boundaries; categories; ethnicity; homophily; nationhood; citizenship

Andreas Wimmer’s distinctive trajectory – moving from anthropology to sociology, from a Germanophone to an Anglophone environment, and from a focus on Indian Mesoamerica to a broader concern with Europe, the Middle East and North America – meant that his work has come to the attention of a broad Anglophone social science audience only recently. Within the space of just a few years, however, Wimmer has been widely recognized as one of the most fertile and interesting sociologists of his generation. And the present book – together with its companion volume *Waves of War: Nationalism, State Formation, and Ethnic Exclusion in the Modern World* (2013) – will confirm Wimmer’s standing as the leading figure in the theoretically informed comparative study of ethnicity and nationalism.

Wimmer’s characteristic intellectual virtues were already evident in his first two books (1995a, 1995b), based on his PhD dissertation and Habilitation, which developed a theoretically informed comparative account of large-scale, long-term social transformations in Indian Mesoamerica. These closely related books were remarkable for integrating in a sophisticated way different levels and scales of analysis, ranging from the overall structure of world economy to the cognitive schemas and routine practices of the individual person. And they were deeply Weberian in their consistently multidimensional mode of theorizing, tracing the complex intertwining of economic, political and cultural processes. These and other qualities of mind – the remarkably wide range of reading that spans several languages and disciplines; the cogent argumentation and elegant writing; the talent for addressing complexity without losing the thread of an argument – characterize all of Wimmer’s work, and they are much in evidence in the present volume.

The multilevel theory of the making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries developed in *Ethnic Boundary Making* represents the most theoretically sophisticated synthesis of

constructivist scholarship on ethnicity. At the same time, Wimmer articulates a cogent critique of that scholarship. The point is not simply that constructivism has lost its force and freshness as it has become taken for granted as an often clichéd and intellectually slack academic lingua franca (Brubaker 2004); it is also that prevailing forms of constructivism are sometimes just plain wrong in overemphasizing the fluidity, contingency and instability of ethnic identifications. Wimmer's 'comparative analytic of ethnic forms' makes a major contribution towards specifying why ethnicity matters to different degrees and in different ways in different social and historical contexts.

Ethnic Boundary Making construes ethnicity broadly in a manner that includes race and nationhood; identifies and criticizes the persistent 'Herderian' legacy that takes culturally distinct and solidary ethnic groups and nations as fundamental units of analysis; defines boundaries in terms of the intersection of social classification and differential treatment of persons so classified; constructs a systematic typology of 'modes' and 'means' of boundary making; identifies four dimensions of variation in the nature of ethnic boundaries (political salience, social closure, cultural differentiation, and historical stability); develops a multilevel processual theory to explain this variation, focusing on institutions, power hierarchies and political networks and highlighting in a Bourdieusian manner classificatory struggles over different modes of categorization; and cautions against building ethnicity into the foundations of our research designs.

On these and other matters, Wimmer's views are so close to my own that raising critical questions about the argument risks indulging in the narcissism of minor differences. But dwelling on the large areas of agreement would be dreadfully dull – and would amount to an abdication of my responsibility as a commentator. I will therefore raise two issues for discussion.

1. Like Wimmer, I have argued for treating ethnicity, race and nationhood as a single integrated family of forms of cultural understanding, social organization and political contestation (Brubaker 2009). But I cannot follow Wimmer fully in treating nationhood simply as a subtype of ethnicity. In a world of nation states, the category of the nation is *intrinsically* bound up with the workings – and the legitimation – of an actual or prospective state (or autonomous polity) in a way that is not true for ethnicity or race. To claim nationhood – to put on a 'we are a nation' performance, in Tilly's (1996) terms – is *ipso facto* to claim political autonomy; it is not simply to claim resources or recognition. In a world in which polities are legitimated only by claims to nationhood, the category nation does different sorts of organizational work than the categories race and ethnicity. I am deliberately exaggerating this point here for the sake of argument: there are of course deep commonalities. But the nation state is an organizational matrix for 'nation-talk' and 'nation-work' in a way that cannot be fully subsumed under the overarching rubric of ethnicity.

Throughout the book Wimmer rightly insists on distinguishing between ethnic and non-ethnic processes; but the two are blurred in his reference to the 'ethnic logic of the nation-state' (p. 91; see also Wimmer 2002: ch. 3). Having criticized at length the traditional distinction between civic and ethnic forms of nationhood and nationalism (Brubaker 1999), I have no desire to reintroduce it here. But the logic of the nation state is not necessarily ethnic. True, nation-state formation has historically been deeply (though variably) intertwined with ethnicity. But the logic of the nation state is in the first instance a *statist* logic. Nation states draw sharp and consequential distinctions between those who belong to the state (citizens) and those who do not (foreigners).¹ Citizenship is itself of course not just an instrument but also an object of closure (Brubaker 1992); and understandings of race or

ethnocultural nationality have been used in many contexts to exclude entire categories of people from citizenship. But social closure based on formal citizenship or *state* membership differs in principle and mode of operation from social closure based on informal understandings of ethnicity or *nation* membership. Notably, since almost all contemporary nation states have ethnically heterogeneous citizenries that include large minorities whose membership of the nation is contested despite their formal citizenship of the state, closure along the lines of citizenship does not follow an ethnic logic. I agree that such closure follows a *national* as well as a *statist* logic; but I do not see this kind of nation-statist exclusion as a subtype of ethnic exclusion. Rather, I would stress the analytical autonomy of the workings of formal citizenship (and with it the legal and organizational dimension of the nation state) vis-à-vis the workings of ethnic categories.

2. Ever since the path-breaking work of Barth (1969), the notion of boundaries has been a key conceptual tool in the study of ethnicity. It has helped combat the tendency to think about ethnicity in substantialist, groupist or (in Wimmer's idiom) Herderian terms. And this book amply demonstrates the fruitfulness of a focus on boundaries. But I found myself wondering at times whether the boundary metaphor was being overworked. The 'spatial and physical overtones' (Jenkins 1997: 21) of the term make it easy – perhaps too easy – to visualize processes like strengthening or weakening a boundary, erecting or removing a boundary, or crossing, policing or shifting the 'location' of the boundary. The same associations, however, make the language of boundary less well suited to describing other processes, such as shifting from one *level* of categorization to another (which Wimmer describes as boundary expansion or contraction), or shifting from one *axis* or *domain* of categorization to another (which he describes as boundary blurring). The spatial and physical associations also suggest that boundaries are (relatively) enduring, trans-situational and objective (i.e. belief-, position- and perspective-independent); these everyday associations of the term fit some ethnic configurations described by Wimmer better than others.

The stretching of the boundary metaphor was particularly evident in the chapter on homophily in Facebook friendship networks. Here homophily in social networks – a preference for maintaining ties with persons who are similar in some respects – is treated as a strategy of boundary making. But do we really want to interpret *any* pattern of differential association – so long as this results from a genuine preference rather than merely from opportunity structure or other mechanisms – as evidence of a strategy of boundary making? Both 'strategy' and 'boundary' seem problematic here. Homophily is a universal and pervasive phenomenon: it is hard to imagine patterns of association that are *not* guided by homophily of one kind or another. To conceptualize all homophily as strategic is problematic: surely much homophily is entirely unstrategic, driven by a tacit sense of comfort, style or pleasure. And since homophily, and the resultant patterns of differential association, are a matter of degree, it seems forced to sweep all homophily under the rubric of boundary making. The language of boundary making seems better suited to *categorical* prescriptions or proscriptions about who can or must or must not associate with whom than to ubiquitous *gradational* differences in patterns of association. It applies well, for example, to strict regimes of endogamy or socially enforced segregation (whether self- or other-imposed), or to serious efforts made by conservative Christian families to control the social environments of their children through home-schooling (or private religious schooling) and participation in the parallel world of expressly Christian spaces and activities. But gradational homophily – again, above and beyond what is attributable to opportunity structures – may arise without any category-

based scripts of action specifying proper relations between ‘us’ and ‘them’, and therefore without boundaries or social closure. The originally sharp exclusionary meaning of ‘social closure’ on Weber’s ([1922] 1978, 43–46, 341–348) account is lost if the term applies to all patterns of differential association that cannot be explained by opportunity structures or other mechanisms. Extended too far, the concepts of boundaries and closure risk losing their analytic sharpness and usefulness.

One could argue that Wimmer’s central object of enquiry is not *boundaries* but *categories*: the former remains a metaphor, while the latter does the analytical work. This was true for Barth, for whom boundaries were simply categorical ethnic distinctions that were socially effective in organizing interaction. It was also true for Bourdieu, for whom the most fundamental divisions of the social world – as well as the everyday play of distinction – turned on acts of classification and categorization. And it seems true for Wimmer as well. Boundaries, on Wimmer’s account, involve ‘both a categorical and a social or behavioral dimension’ (9). But the social or behavioural dimension also, and crucially, involves categories: cognitive schemas or ‘scripts of action’ that specify what kinds of persons can do what sorts of actions with what other kinds of persons. And the key questions that Wimmer addresses are questions about categories. Who has the power to impose one set of categorical distinctions – in Bourdieu’s terms, one principle of vision and division of the world – rather than another? What institutionalized incentives favour the activation of one categorical cleavage rather than another? What axis or level of classification will be most salient in different contexts? How do networks of political alliances determine where fateful and consequential categorical distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’ will be drawn? To be sure, questions of terminology are peripheral to the substantive agenda of the book. The book is compelling precisely because it is resolutely concerned with large and important substantive questions, not with the concept of boundaries as such. Ultimately, on my reading, Wimmer has little invested in the analytical language of boundaries *per se*; he could have written essentially the same book without mentioning boundaries at all.

Ethnicity is a chronically unsettled and ill-defined field of inquiry. Already a century ago, Max Weber concluded his brief but remarkably rich discussion of ethnicity with the self-subverting observation that a precise and differentiated analysis would ‘surely throw out the umbrella term “ethnic” altogether’, for it is ‘entirely unusable’ for any ‘truly rigorous investigation’ (Weber [1922] 1964, 313; cf. Weber [1922] 1978, 394–395). As a student of Weber, and of ethnicity, I have shared this self-subverting concern about the field, and I have argued that the most fruitful ways of studying ethnicity are likely to call into question the domain of ethnicity itself as a bounded field of study (Brubaker 2004).

Ethnic Boundary Making is a deeply Weberian book, not only in its core concern with social closure, but also in its panoramic breadth of vision and its integration of multiple levels and strands of analysis. It is therefore fitting that the volume comes to a similarly self-subverting conclusion about ethnicity as a field of study. As Wimmer notes, his model ‘could easily be applied to other social cleavages as well, to class, gender, professions, subcultures, age groups, and the like’ (213). The processes that one studies when one studies ethnicity – processes of self- and other-categorization; collective claims making; social closure; differential association; cultural differentiation; clustering in geographic, social and economic space; and so on – are in no way specific to ethnicity. So while this book develops a powerful synthetic argument about ethnicity, it points at the same time beyond ethnicity to a broader theory of the making and unmaking of groups. It

thereby contributes to the blurring of the boundary that has long defined ethnicity as a special field of study, performatively enacting a boundary-making strategy of the sort so brilliantly analysed in the book.

Note

1. This is obviously a drastic oversimplification. The most consequential distinction may lie, as in the USA, not between citizens and foreigners, but between citizens and permanent residents on the one hand and other non-citizens on the other. Or on a global scale, if we focus on the single greatest good that is distributed on the basis of citizenship, namely access to the territory of a prosperous and peaceful state, the most consequential distinction lies between those who hold 'good' and those who hold 'bad' citizenships, the latter being those that do not permit visa-free access to the territory of any prosperous and peaceful state

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Time to move beyond boundary making?

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Wimmer's *Ethnic Boundary Making* is a major contribution to constructivist thinking about how ethnicity works. However, it is time to move beyond the default focus on differentiation, and to think more critically about a number of important issues. These include the unclear ontological status of boundaries, and the importance of affect and identification with co-ethnics in the generation of ethnic solidarity.

Keywords: ethnicity; boundaries; social construction; difference

In *Ethnic Boundary Making*, Andreas Wimmer asks why ethnic boundaries are more or less important or visible in some places and at some times, and why and how they are constructed differently depending on where and when we look. Arguing that 'ethnic studies' assumes what should be explained, he wants to quash the notion that ethnicity works and has effects, in much the same imperative fashion, everywhere. At a time when the political rights and privileges of 'identity', particularly those varieties of identity wrapped up as ethnicity, race or nation, have in many parts of the world become axiomatic – doxic, if not actually toxic (although sometimes also that) – Wimmer's questions are important. He is to be congratulated for tackling them in a thoroughgoing and forthright fashion, and for doing so empirically as well as theoretically.

He begins, sensibly enough, with Fredrik Barth's original discussion of ethnic boundaries – although his intellectual foundations also owe a good deal to Weber – and asks how these boundaries emerge: what kinds of processes are at work? Second, Wimmer takes inspiration from Bourdieu in order to emphasize 'boundary work', the political struggles over which boundaries are more or less salient, and what the consequences of being this, that or, indeed, the Other, might be in any field. Third, he seeks to put ethnicity in its appropriate place analytically, to avoid the pitfalls of taking for granted an 'ethnic lens' that might lead one 'to see ethnicity, race or nationhood wherever one looks' (Wimmer 5). What other kinds of boundaries are important, he asks, and what are their relationships to the ethnic? Finally, if a general theoretical statement about ethnic boundaries is to be within his grasp, he recognizes the need to take in as much as possible of the global variation of ethnic phenomena; this is a comparative project that seeks to identify and understand 'recurring processual patterns' (7).

In a series of chapters that move from relative abstraction to substantive discussions grounded in comparative material drawn from a wide array of sources and data from his own empirical research, Wimmer demonstrates convincingly – it convinces me at least, but then I was convinced in the first place – that cultural values are not the fundamental determinants of what many individuals actually do; that ethnicity is not the be all and end all of many people's lives; that ethnic identification is as much an individual as a collective phenomenon; and that a proportionate view of ethnicity's place in the world

has to set it alongside other principles of identification such as class, gender and generation and then discover empirically what people's relationships and priorities are in practice. This is all extremely valuable (and the research-based chapters are extremely strong statements of the case).

Despite its many virtues, the book is not, however, completely unproblematic; few if any books are, of course. The most significant problem is Wimmer's relative neglect of ethnic solidarity: the emphasis is on perceived differences, rather than solidary perceptions of similarity. Given the focus on boundaries, this is probably only to be expected, but it is a fundamental weakness of that focus – Barth had the same problem – and it deflects us away from another important question: why, in some places at some times, do some people seem to feel powerfully the ethnic ties that bind? Why do ethnic issues sometimes arouse authentic emotions? To argue that solidarity of this kind is a consequence of boundary making and differentiation is perhaps part of the truth – that is true in some cases – but it does not begin to get at how, for some people, in other situations, powerful feelings and emotions emerge from shared histories and symbols, for example. There is an issue here about the emotional dimension of identification *with* others that this book, along with many other social science treatments of ethnicity, completely misses. Not everything can be reduced to an epi-phenomenon of boundary making and maintenance.

The opportunity to ask another question that is no less important is also missed: what exactly are boundaries? Throughout this book, and without any further reflection, Wimmer talks about 'the boundary metaphor'. If, as this suggests, the notion of an ethnic, or other, boundary is a metaphor, a little unpacking is required. For example, what exactly is 'boundary' a metaphor *for*? Is it, indeed, a metaphor at all, in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary's* sense: 'the application of a name or descriptive term... to an object or action to which it is imaginatively but not literally applicable'? To what, in the literal everyday human world, does Wimmer's metaphor imaginatively apply? He describes boundaries as 'categorical' (classificatory and symbolic) and 'behavioural' (processual and interactional); both of these are concrete, definite practices, and, literally, very real. When he typologizes 'modes of boundary making' as 'expansion', 'contraction', 'transvaluation', 'positional moves', 'blurring', 'political mobilization', 'coercion and violence' and so on (Wimmer 61–72), he is talking about things that are, in the here and now and historically, substantive and substantial practices; they are literal realities, not imaginative simulacra.

In other words, Wimmer, despite his understanding of 'boundary' as a metaphor, describes 'boundary making' as something that people in the human world actually do, and 'boundaries' as actually existing and consequential: boundaries have differing degrees of political salience, are variably inclusionary or exclusionary, have stronger or weaker implications for cultural differentiation, and may or may not be stable over time (Wimmer 79). However, if the notion of a 'boundary' is simply a metaphor – which, by definition, is constructed and mobilized analytically by social scientists, for their own explanatory purposes – what is it that the people whom Wimmer writes about are actually doing and making, and what do they think they are doing? When he talks about 'blurring', for example, is it the metaphor that is being 'blurred', or something else, something more literal than imaginative? Surely a boundary cannot be simultaneously real (literal) *and* a metaphor (imaginative); if it could, what would be the point of the metaphor? Wimmer owes us an account of the epistemological and methodological consequences of conceptualizing 'boundary' as a metaphor, and the ontology – beyond

the metaphor – of whatever is being viewed through its lens. The word ‘metaphor’, as it is used here, without further explanation, confuses the issue unnecessarily and adds nothing.

Another problem, which I suspect Wimmer has inherited from Bourdieu, is the tension between the centrality to his argument of ‘the assumption that individuals behave strategically’ (Wimmer 44) and the persistent references to structure that are utterly at odds with that assumption. This is one of the problems created by the fact that ‘structure’ is a metaphor (Jenkins 2010): there is a contradiction between the agency that Wimmer ascribes, quite correctly, to individuals and the powers that he attributes, wrongly in my view, to social structure (which, as a metaphor, a way of talking about pattern, can do nothing in the literal, real world). Determinism is the almost inevitable consequence: ‘the institutional framework determines which types of boundaries... can be drawn in a meaningful and acceptable way in a particular social field’ (80). Marx understood this better when he said that people make their own history, but only in circumstances that they inherit from the past. In a move that strikingly echoes Bourdieu, Wimmer deals with this tension by positing the emergence of consensus – the source of ‘ethnic bonds’ – which means that individual agency gradually comes into line with structural realities (and of course reproduces them).

The emphasis on consensus looks like exactly the same trap that Parsons fell into; to paraphrase Bourdieu himself, it is the unavoidable consequence of confusing a model of reality (in this case the metaphor of ‘structure’) with the reality that is being modelled. In the process, a degree of determinism seems to be unavoidable. Nor is determinism the only issue here; Wimmer treats ‘the emergence and diffusion of specific institutional arrangements as exogenous’ (Wimmer 90), and in one move creates a machine for the suppression of history, if not a *deus ex machina*.

I suspect that I am in a minority in caring about the issues outlined in the two paragraphs immediately above. I may be in less of a minority when it comes to the next matter. As part of his project, Wimmer seeks to ‘systematize’ the constructivist consensus that characterizes the work of most contemporary social scientists interested in the topic, as a prelude to heading off in a direction that constructivism has so far apparently not much charted – namely explaining why ethnicity organizes the distribution of social and economic resources and penalties in some places, but not so much, or even at all, in others. During this discussion, he regularly dramatizes a distinction between the primordialist legacy of Herder, on the one hand, and what he calls ‘radical constructivism’ on the other; the middle ground between these is, it seems, is the terrain of reason.

This is more than a little problematic. First, although Herderian essentialism has long been normalized in common-sense discourses (and, regrettably, as Wimmer points out, in many departments of ‘ethnic studies’ in universities in the USA), there are very few serious social scientists studying ethnicity – very, *very* few – who could be said to espouse it. He himself seems to admit this (Wimmer 2) when he alludes to the ‘routine beating of the dead primordial horse’. Given this comment, it is hard to see why he devotes so much of his own critical fire to the same deceased equine quadruped. Second, he describes radical constructivism as arguing that ‘no systematic relationship between ethnicity and cultural values exists’ (175) and that ethnic or racial groupings only exist as a consequence of strategies of domination and exclusion on the part of ‘dominant majorities’ and the states that they control. If not a dead horse, this is, at best, a steed made of straw: it is a caricature that I do not recognize as the position of anyone whose

current work I know (which includes some of those that he that he identifies as radical constructivists on p. 180).

What is more, there is a degree of confusion about this point that over 200 pages of closely reasoned argument does nothing to resolve. At the beginning of the book, he appears to identify the mainstream 'constructivist consensus' and its 'assumptions and achievements' as the soil in which he wishes to root his project to 'move beyond it' (Wimmer 2). At the end of the book, in chapter eight, he returns to his attack on the Herderian legacy, which he characterizes as a belief in 'three Cs': close-knit communities, clear-cut cultures, and commonly shared categories of identity. This time, however, he sets the Herderian heresy up in opposition, not to *radical* constructivism, but to the general constructivist *consensus* that ethnicity is constructed, contextually variable, contested, and contingently eventful. Against these 'four Cs' of constructivism, which are 'shared by most authors writing on ethnicity', he argues, clearly believing that he is offering a new perspective, that 'not everything is possible, not all ethnic boundaries are fluid and in motion, not all are cognitively and emotionally unstable, contextually shifting, and continuously contested' (204).

This is yet more argument by caricature, and another windmill against which to tilt. It is all the more surprising given how close Wimmer's own position is to what Barth actually said in 1969: while he usefully develops the constructivist approach, he says nothing in this book that can be described as stepping beyond constructivism, broadly defined. And the shame is that he does not need to make exaggerated claims to theoretical innovation or radicality in order for *Ethnic Boundary Making* to be welcomed as a significant contribution to (constructivist) thinking about ethnicity; this is particularly true with respect to his empirically based analyses chapters, his 'comparative analytic'. For example, Wimmer's (80) claim that his 'multilevel process model of ethnic boundary making represents... the first attempt at systematically explaining the varying character and consequences of ethnic boundaries' is modest and does have some merit. It is to be hoped that his inflated sense of his own intellectual novelty will not put off, or irritate, too many readers; that would be a *real* shame. At which point, it should be added that, in fairness to Wimmer, sociologists and anthropologists, in their constant pursuit of something new and different from the rest of the herd, have long been enthusiastic reinventors of the wheel; after all, even Barth was recycling Everett Hughes, and without any acknowledgement at that. Perhaps we all need to take a long, hard look at what we do in this respect.

As a final point, throughout the text the reader bumps into infelicitous, perhaps even careless, writing. This gets in the way of actually reading it. I shall offer three examples. First, a footnote tells us: 'The title of this chapter is inspired by Claude Lévi-Strauss' "Les structures élémentaires de la parenté"' (Wimmer 45). The chapter's title is 'Strategies and Means' and its relationship to Lévi-Strauss's elementary structures is not obvious; it is only when we get to the end of the chapter that the mystery begins to reveal itself in the idea – which is a very interesting idea – that there are only so many possible 'elementary strategies of boundary making'. Second, Wimmer (79–80) offers an argument in several steps; however, he proceeds from the first step (79) to the third (80) without introducing a second step. I spent more time than I should have done doing over this section, in the belief that I had missed something. As a final example, in chapter seven, following a detailed and rewarding comparative analysis of sources of cultural distance and social closure, using European Social Survey (ESS) data, Wimmer engages in a thought

experiment, informed by the conclusions that he drew from the ESS analysis. Over two paragraphs he speculates about what might have happened to the Chinese in Guyana since Patterson wrote about them in 1975. The next paragraph begins: ‘These findings offer interesting implications for a series of debates in the social sciences and humanities’ (Wimmer 201). What ‘these findings’ refers to is not clear. It probably refers to the ESS analysis; however, coming immediately after two paragraphs talking about Guyanese Chinese – and in terms of what they ‘will’ do or ‘will’ happen to them, rather than ‘may’ or ‘might’, as would be more appropriate – any reader might be excused for thinking that it is they to which ‘these findings’ refers.

To close, this is a really good book that substantially advances our discussions about how ethnicity, and ethnic identification, works. Andreas Wimmer is to be congratulated. Some of the criticisms that I have made can be screened out, or allowances made, and the book enjoyed accordingly. In the case of at least one of them – my point about structure and determinism – I am resigned to the fact that most people will either disagree with me or not really get the point. However, the comments about the focus on difference, and the notion of the ‘boundary metaphor’, are, in my view, of another critical magnitude. What boundaries are – and they must be something in the world of observable realities, otherwise there would be no point in talking about them – is no minor matter. Nor is the fact that constructivism needs to take identification *with* a group as seriously as identification of and *against* an Other. We also need to pay proper attention to the affective dimensions of identification, where they are part of the ongoing action. It is not time to move beyond constructivism; it may, however, be time to move beyond constructivism’s focus on boundary making and boundary maintenance.

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Reflections inspired by *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks* by Andreas Wimmer

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This essay engages with Wimmer's *Ethnic Boundary Making* to consider how cultural processes feed into inequality. It describes the strengths of the book, relates it to my early work, and draws on Lamont, Beljean, and Clair (forthcoming), to describe two types of identification processes (racialization and stigmatization) and two types of rationalization processes (standardization and evaluation) that contribute to an understanding of the relationship between symbolic and social boundaries. It stresses similarities and differences between approaches and suggests possible points for convergence.

Keywords: boundary making; classification; social process; inequality; misrecognition; evaluation

Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks (Wimmer 2013) has the makings of a classic. The author takes on a vast and important topic, provides a bold and ambitious theoretical agenda, and engages in theory development by convincingly confronting his hypotheses with data of various kinds. As he goes along, he explains the implications of his findings for a wide range of theories and debates in sociology and beyond, and thus demonstrates the significance of these findings. The result is impressive because of Wimmer's mastery of American and European literature from various fields, his encyclopedic knowledge of ethnic group composition and differentiation from around the globe, and his ability to use new statistical techniques to establish empirical patterns of group cohesion, differentiation and boundary work.

One of the many theoretical contributions of the book is its presentation (in chapter three) of a broad typology of boundary changes, which appears to apply to all configurations possible. This is followed by another more elaborate typological analysis in chapter four that discusses the conditions that help us predict boundary work (with a focus on the institutions, power and networks singled out in the title of the book). The theoretical generativity of the analysis, and its wide applicability to fundamental sociological questions, are simply remarkable.

Wimmer's focus on the making of groupness (and more specifically, ethno-national groupness) shares much with my own work on boundaries and classification, from its insistence on not predefining the categories through which individuals self-identify. Indeed, this is precisely the inductive approach that I used in *Money, Morals and Manners* (Lamont 1992) and *The Dignity of Working Men* (Lamont 2000), where I asked professionals, managers and workers to produce boundary work in the context of interviews – that is, to describe who they feel similar and different from, inferior and superior, and so on – so as to tap where they draw lines and what criteria they use to draw such lines. The conclusion of *Money, Morals and Manners* opened up the question

of the relationship between symbolic and social boundaries (the former being defined as a necessary but insufficient condition for the latter). This insight was further elaborated in Lamont and Molnár (2002: 169), where we pointed to similarities in boundary processes ‘across a wide range of social phenomena, institutions and locations’ such as social and collective identity, class, ethnic/racial and gender/sexual inequality, professions, science and knowledge and community, national identities and spatial boundaries. We also called for a more general sociology of the properties and mechanisms of boundary processes, including how these are more fluid, policed, crossable, movable, and so on. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, scholars interested in ethnicity, nationality and race converged in their interests around such questions, with milestone articles such as Zolberg and Woon (1999), Brubaker and Cooper (2000), Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov (2004), and Alba (2005) (plus, of course, Wimmer 2004, which makes up the bulk of chapter five in the book). A convergence of focus on the work of Bourdieu on classification struggle and the legacy of Fredrik Barth empowered this shift. Wimmer’s book builds on this budding tradition and extends our understanding of boundary changes in significant ways. At the present juncture, I find his book particularly useful as a tool for thinking more systematically and comparatively about groupness and responses to stigmatization by blacks and other groups in the USA, Brazil and Israel, and the effects of responses on group boundaries – a topic that I have been pursuing since 2006 in collaboration with a group of Brazilian, American and Israeli sociologists (for more information, see Lamont and Mizrahi 2012). Instead of finding fault in a work with which I am largely in agreement, I take this opportunity to initiate a dialogue between Wimmer’s perspective and my own recent efforts to contribute to a sociology of inequality that is focused on fundamental cultural processes grounded in classification and the production of group boundaries – processes that I have been studying through my work on evaluation (Lamont 2009, 2012) and stigmatization (e.g. Lamont, Welburn, and Fleming 2013).

In a paper written jointly by myself, Stefan Beljean and Matthew Clair, we provide a framework for understanding the ways in which specific types of fundamental processes produce social inequality (Lamont, Beljean, and Clair *forthcoming*). Specifically, we focus on cultural processes that have received limited attention in the literature. We argue that much of the literature on inequality has focused on the actions of dominant actors and institutions in gaining access to material and non-material resources, or on how ecological effects cause unequal access to material resources. In contrast, we highlight identification and rationalization as fundamental types of micro-cultural processes feeding into inequality and we describe four significant analytical exemplars of these two types: racialization and stigmatization (for identification) and standardization and evaluation (for rationalization). These processes all involve classification and the production of symbolic and social boundaries – the production of groupness of sort, including the types of groups that Wimmer is concerned with: ethnicity, but also racial and national groupings. While space limitation prevents a full explication of our argument, we provide a few key elements and point to convergence and divergence with Wimmer’s approach.

First, as compared to social processes that concern control over material resources, cultural processes are centrally constituted at the level of meaning making: they take shape around the creation of shared categories or classification systems through which individuals perceive and make sense of their environment.¹ They all involve a sorting out of people, actions or environments that requires the creation of group boundaries and the creation and relative stabilization of hierarchies, objectively and intersubjectively. These

boundaries and hierarchies are typically a collective accomplishment that requires *de facto* the use of shared conventions and the coordination of action between various actors and institutions. Thus, cultural processes are not necessarily oriented towards ultimate instrumental goals such as gaining resources or exercising power. Instead, they are primarily shared frameworks that are constitutive of reality, as documented by cognitive sociology (e.g. DiMaggio 1997) and by the recent literature on semiotic practices (Sewell 2005). While our analysis emphasizes the symbolic aspects of these processes, the conclusion of *Ethnic Boundary Making* reveals that Wimmer (2013, 208) is more of a social structuralist, ultimately interested in power and *Realpolitik*, as his analysis forefronts strategies as they are shaped by 'institutional incentives, ... positions in hierarchies of economic, political and symbolic power, and existing social networks'. In contrast, our approach is more inductive throughout, including concern for the variable frames that guide human actions (as elaborated in Lamont 2009).

Second, while much of the literature on inequality is concerned with the distribution of material resources (income inequality in particular), cultural process concerns the distribution of both material and non-material resources *as well as* recognition. The dual focus on the distribution of resources and recognition is crucial because we understand inequality as operating at the level of the distribution of legitimacy as much as the distribution of material and social resources. Recognition is central in establishing groups as worthy and valued members of the community, as individuals endowed with full cultural membership (Taylor 1992; Honneth 2012). This is particularly crucial in dynamic struggles around the meanings associated with individual and collective social identity (Jenkins 2008). While identity and identification figure centrally in Wimmer's argument, he does not give the quest for recognition its due as a motivation for human action or a dimension of inequality. He acknowledges that a multiplicity of motivations feeds the creation of group boundaries (Wimmer 2013, 5), but he does not delve into how group formation is dependent on the quest for cultural citizenship and dignity, especially in the face of racialization and stigmatization. This is one aspect where our approach diverges from and complements his. Considering such questions can illuminate Wimmer's analysis of the dynamics of boundary change described in his chapter three.

Third, in our paper, cultural processes do not solely depend on the actions of dominant actors: subordinates often participate in the elaboration of cultural processes as much as dominant agents do, and the sorting can be described as an unintended consequence of their (intentionally or not) coordinated action. Thus, the intention of the dominant is not a necessary condition for producing these outcomes as it is the case in traditional approaches to inequality that focus on the monopolization of material and non-material resources by dominant parties. One could ask Wimmer to more systematically spell out the interaction of dominant and dominated parties in the creation of group boundaries – the extent to which their coordination may or may not lead to symbolic or social boundaries (tied to the distribution of resources). While one finds illustrations throughout the book, Wimmer does not explicitly theorize this question or, more broadly, the issue of coordination of action between groups.

Finally, our paper shows that the fundamental cultural processes that concern us operate continuously and in a routine fashion. Individuals do not aim to consciously deploy one system of symbolic boundaries over another, as they are rarely conscious that they inhabit categorization systems. Instead, they tend to use schemas that are largely taken for granted and made available by the national cultural repertoires that surround

them (Lamont and Thévenot 2000). Thus, while considering cultural processes, we move from a focus on discrete, instrumental actions aimed at monopolizing material and non-material resources, to a focus on a range of ongoing, routine relationships that enable and constrain social action (Giddens 1984; Sewell 1992). In this way, our approach resembles the ecological effects literature, which considers processes to be durable and self-replicating. Yet, we understand these cultural processes to be the result of the actions of individual and group actors and the systems of meaning in which they operate, as opposed to the outcome of a diffuse ecological environment. In this way again, our approach is slightly at odds with Wimmer's in that we systematically consider whether and how such processes may feed into inequality, while considering this outcome as open-ended and indefinite.

To recap, we conceptualize cultural processes as ongoing actions/practices that feed into structures (organizations, institutions) to produce various types of outcomes, including inequality, in a process akin to that described by structuration theorists (cf. Giddens 1984). These processes shape everyday interactions and result in an array of consequences that may feed into distribution and recognition. Through processes such as racialization, stigmatization, standardization and evaluation, individuals sort and are sorted out on an ongoing basis. These processes open and close opportunities, and enable and constrain individuals' life-course trajectories. The outcomes of such processes are open-ended or uncertain, as opposed to *always* resulting in exploitation, exclusion or isolation.

Such observations need to be more systematically situated in relation to Wimmer's approach to the making and unmaking of group boundaries, so as to contribute to our understanding of the causes of inequality. Wimmer is deeply influenced by Bourdieu, and is concerned with the institutionalization (and non-institutionalization) of collective identity. Yet, despite his sustained interest in the study of mechanisms (he claims an affiliation with analytical sociology), one is left with the impression that he has yet to fully develop an analysis of fundamental cultural processes operating at the micro level – and this, despite having his intellectual roots in the field of anthropology. This is another point of divergence. However, much more could also be said on the points of convergence between our approaches, and this would require more space than we have here. But I can mention one such point: the role of institutions in mediating the creation of inequality. For example, even in the 1990s, eligibility in the mortgage lending industry depended on apparently neutral rationalized evaluative practices that led to unequal access to resources for African Americans. Similarly, there are many other institutions that allocate resources based on taken-for-granted rules that depend on the activation of 'neutral' classification systems, but which systematically privilege some groups over others. It is the case for access to higher education in American colleges (Lemann 2000; Karabel 2005) and the determination of salaries for working mothers (on the motherhood penalty, see Budig and England 2001). Along the same line, social scientists have shown how the recent increase in wealth inequality in the USA has resulted from small, but incremental political-legal changes (Hacker and Pierson 2010) and staggering 'performance base' increases in executive compensation that advantage the rich. While these studies concern *distribution* as a dimension of inequality, a parallel analysis needs to be conducted on how institutions feed *misrecognition* (through stigmatization and racialization). At a time when a growing number of social scientists aim to better understand the relationship between symbolic and social boundaries, it has become imperative to

examine such questions, so as to be able to develop an approach to such issues that matches Wimmer's book in sophistication. Much of his work shows us the way and invites us to build on his many insights. This attempt to create a dialogue between *Ethnic Boundary Making* and Lamont, Beljean, and Clair (forthcoming) should be only one step in this direction.

Note

1. Tilly (1998)'s *Durable Inequality* has done much to bring to light the role that categorization processes play in the production of inequality. As we have noted, categorization is central to the cultural processes that we identify as missing in the literature on inequality. While Tilly's (1998: 10) work explicates how exploitation and opportunity hoarding 'establish systems of categorical inequality' both intentionally and unintentionally (through emulation and adaptation), our approach envisions a systematic explication of the way in which group classifications are negotiated intersubjectively by dominants as well as subordinates. Moreover, we argue for an analytic approach that specifies how *specific types* of classificatory processes employ categorization at the meso level.

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Ethnicity everywhere and nowhere: a critical approach towards parsing ethnic and non-ethnic processes

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This article has two parts. First, it presents Andreas Wimmer's framework for comparative ethnic boundary making as a way of disentangling ethnic and non-ethnic processes. Wimmer's framework helps avoid the persistent tendency among researchers to attribute ethnic causes to ethnic patterns of inequality. Second, it focuses on how these insights can be applied to the US case, a nation that arguably pays a lot of attention to ethnicity and where ethnic cultures are often seen as the driver of differences in educational success and mobility between ethnic groups. The article sheds light on how this understanding can be complicated through existing and further research along Wimmerian lines.

Keywords: ethnicity; boundary making; inequality; exclusion; migration; culture

Andreas Wimmer's (2013) book *Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks* offers a fascinating and much-needed window into an element of human life that has proven to be both a unifying and deeply divisive force, namely, the nature of ethnicity and where its power lies. Wimmer (2) illuminates this puzzle by showing us 'how and why ethnicity matters in certain societies but not in others'. In the case of the former, ethnicity is strongly experienced by individuals and can be linked to between-group inequality and exclusion, while in the latter, ethnicity is weakly or tangentially felt and not a line of inequality. In this essay, I will focus on a danger that Wimmer notes, namely, to see ethnicity everywhere, and attribute ethnic *causes* to demonstrated ethnic patterns of inequality. Instead, Wimmer calls for 'a more systematic disentangling of ethnic and nonethnic processes to avoid an all-encompassing "ethnic lens" of interpretation' (6). In the rest of this comment, I will first briefly lay out the book's empirical findings, which illustrate what can be learned with the disentangling of such complex processes. I will then focus on how these insights can be applied to the US case, a nation that arguably pays a lot of attention to ethnicity and where ethnic cultures are often seen as the driver of differences in educational success and mobility between ethnic groups.

Wimmer draws on three studies to illustrate his analytical framework for comparative ethnic boundary making. First, he discusses case studies of three urban blue-collar neighbourhoods in Switzerland, home to many immigrants of diverse national origins (e.g. southern and eastern Europe), alongside longtime Swiss residents. Interestingly, the social boundary in these neighbourhoods does not involve national or ethnic origins. Rather, the social boundary involves a perceived norm of social order – the 'we' are 'established, decent, inconspicuous and self-controlled' (Wimmer 2013, 124) – that exists across ethnic lines and is agreed upon by both the old-timers and immigrants. Thus, being an outsider here does not mean having 'foreign' or non-Swiss roots, as one might expect.

Second, he draws on a data set that charts the Facebook friends of 1,640 students at a private college in the USA. Consistent with extant research, these social networks tend to be racially homogeneous. However, Wimmer's analysis illuminates the pathways informing a student's choice of Facebook friends, which do not have much directly to do with race, as one would suppose. There is instead much more ethnic affinity (e.g. in the case of children of Korean parents finding commonality with one another along those lines rather than being Asian American); reciprocity (to befriend someone who is already part of a friend's network), which magnifies any racial effect in boundedness; and, perhaps most interesting for research purposes, in a point I will return to later, the students found something in common along other dimensions, such as socio-economic status, where they live and cultural habits. The latter brings attention to shared activities, or the 'propinquity mechanism' (Wimmer 2013, 147). In short, people are more likely to form ties when they are doing something together, whether working, volunteering or living in the same neighbourhood.

Third, Wimmer analyses European Social Survey (ESS) data and finds that variance in value orientations among individuals are not mostly influenced by their ethnic cultural backgrounds. However, ethnicity does matter. Divergence among the first generation from the mainstream arises mainly because they do come with different cultural values from 'back home'. In the case of the second generation, however, it is exclusion in their home country, or social closure, that fosters divergence from the mainstream (Waldinger 2007). If they are politically excluded, the second-generation individuals are more likely to hold different values.

Now, I turn to the US case to highlight puzzles that would benefit from a more nuanced Wimmerian understanding of what might actually be ethnically related or not about a particular phenomenon.¹ This is not to deny the need for a comparative metric to more fully understand ethnic boundary making and why and how it varies. Wimmer's stunning breadth of analyses across the globe makes a strong case for this approach and is especially timely, given that people are migrating in all continents, both internally and across nation state borders (Suárez-Orozco-Orozco, Louie, and Suro 2011). Rather the choice of the USA pays attention to the dramatic boundary blurring that has occurred with the opening of the opportunity structure resulting from the civil rights movement and the resumption of large-scale immigration with the Immigration Act of 1965 (Alba and Nee 2003). Yet it is not the boundary blurring alone that invites this attention, but rather that notwithstanding such shifts, the American folk understanding and many scholarly accounts of how success happens or does not happen still remains centred on ethnic groups, specifically the cultures they hold (Louie 2012). The goal of this comment is to shed light on how this understanding can be complicated through existing and further research along Wimmerian lines.

In the USA, the last several decades have ushered in newcomers with striking diversity of ethnic and social class origins. Unskilled labour – the dominant pattern of past immigration to the USA – is now joined by the highly educated who replicate their class status in the USA along with the downwardly mobile (e.g. newcomers who cannot translate their previous educational and professional credentials and work in lower-status jobs there) (Gans 2009). (The latter, as Wimmer notes, are deserving of more scholarly attention than they have received.) Further, due to changes in immigration law, for the first time in American history, there are also substantial numbers of the undocumented, who face particularly daunting challenges with incorporation, ranging from labour

exploitation to few legal rights (Kwong 1998; Waldinger 2007; Menjívar 2008; Massey and Sanchez 2010); and for those who came as young children, challenging transitions to adulthood, as they grow to recognize how illegal status limits their life chances (Perez 2009; Gonzales 2011). The effects extend to the American-born children of undocumented immigrants, who have lower cognitive skills in early childhood, due to their parents' anxiety about their legal status, combined with harsh working conditions, low wages and lower access to child-centred base day care (Yoshikawa 2011).

The arrivals of so many newcomers have mapped on to typical American concerns about ethnic differences in academic achievement, in this case, among the 1.5 and second generations² – and typical American explanations point to ethnic cultural values. Much of the public and scholarly attention has focused on the contrast between Asian and Latinos – for example, the high rates of academic success among Asian immigrant groups as compared to their Latino counterparts. Indeed, Asian Americans, broadly speaking, are typically regarded as the quintessential immigrant success story, supposedly due to having ethnic cultures that promote achievement – and other groups, notably Latinos, are held up unfavourably to them in this regard (Louie 2004, 2012). A clear caveat is that given both groups' aggregated nature, much in-group variation in educational outcome is hidden from view. Yet, even with that said, Latino/Asian differences exist – so how do we account for them? On the one hand, the existence of such gaps should not surprise us, as the socio-economic gulf between Asian and Latino immigrants is even greater than that between native whites and blacks (Rumbaut and Komaie 2010). On the other hand, as Wimmer would remind us, ethnic differences *per se* do not explain how such differences come to bear or the role of ethnicity in these processes.

Two regionally based and comparative studies with contrasting analytic approaches shed light on what might be going on beyond ethnic cultures. Analyses of the Longitudinal Immigrant Student Adaptation (LISA) study, based in Boston and San Francisco, emphasized patterns of achievement across country of origin (e.g. Central America, China, the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Mexico) (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova 2008). In contrast, analyses of the Immigrant Second Generation in Metropolitan New York (ISGMNY) were mainly structured as comparisons of ethnic groups (e.g. both native and immigrant-origins with a focus on whites, blacks, Latinos and Asians³) (Kasinitz et al. 2008). Despite the different approaches, both studies found evidence of 'Chinese exceptionalism' (Suárez-Orozco rez-Orozco 2011, 189). The exceptionalism, however, did not have a lot do with ethnic culture,⁴ but rather that the Chinese had more family resources, indicative of the especially diverse class dynamics involved in Chinese immigration (Kwong 1987; Zhou 2001; Kwong and Mišičević 2005).

But even looking at the working-class and poor Chinese, some did well in school, better than their Latino counterparts with similarly low levels of family human capital. In both studies, they were more likely to attend more integrated and higher-performing public schools. The Chinese immigrant families in the LISA study drew on their prior home-country understanding of a testing culture to navigate the stratified and byzantine urban public school systems in the USA. And while both the Chinese and Dominicans in ISGMNY grew up in ethnically embedded communities with plenty of ethnic ties, a key difference was that the families of the Chinese had social capital linking them to the information of co-ethnics of higher social status, which the families deploy on behalf of the children, mainly in finding better schools. In contrast, ethnic social capital among the Dominicans links them to a 'homogeneously poor community' that does not prove as

helpful to families when learning about the American public educational system (Kasinitz et al. 2008, 363).

In my research, I have tried to further disentangle ethnic and non-ethnic influences with a focus on the contrast between Chinese/Latino and have found that access to different kinds of institutions can make the journey to academic success harder or easier for second-generation Dominicans, Colombians and Chinese from working-class families (Louie 2011, 2012).⁵ Contrary to conventional wisdom, the *similarities* across ethnicity were striking and numerous. Interviews with adult children, who had all transitioned to some form of higher education, highlighted the verbal and moral guidance around schooling that they had received from parents and the absence of the interventionist support (e.g. help with homework or the college application process) that is valued and demanded by schools. The immigrant parents could not offer this kind of help mostly because they were not fluent or even proficient in English, did not have much formal schooling, and did not know the mechanics of the American educational system (Turney and Kao 2009). The children shared their parents' message about the importance of education and valued their parents' care, but realized quickly that they were on their own with school.

In another critical similarity, the children of immigrants were able to access sources of institutional support that helped them navigate schooling, often at key turning points. These include referrals to a gifted class, a better middle school, after-school programmes, and quality college counselling. However, there was a key *difference* in how the immigrant families were able to access this much-needed support. Again, this difference did not have to do with ethnic culture *per se*, although it certainly could seem this way, given that the children tended to have grown up in vibrant, ethnic neighbourhoods. Many of the interviewees had grown up in New York City, a mecca for immigrants and home to several Asian and Latino communities, including Manhattan's Chinatown and its post-1965 satellites, Sunset Park in Brooklyn and Flushing, Queens; Washington Heights, with its Dominican character; and Jackson Heights, which many Colombians and other Latinos call home.

An important note about these communities: the Chinese tend to be less residentially segregated from whites, so they start off with an advantage over the Latinos just by having access to better public schools. However, it is not levels of segregation that might immediately come to mind to the casual observer. At first blush, rather, it seems that ethnic cultural differences abound around schooling. Unlike their Latino counterparts, the Chinese communities have ethnic media touting information about the SSHAT – the examination for the city's specialized high schools, which are very high performing – and the ethnic academic preparatory businesses that cater to co-ethnics, preparing children for those and other tests (Kwong 1987; Zhou 2001; Kwong and Mišcevič čević 2005). Not all families can afford to send their children to these so-called cram schools (Park 2012), but the messages conveyed through the ethnic media bear little or no cost and are part of the community ethos.

How much of this has to do with ethnic cultural values, though? A closer look reveals that cross-class ties and investments are a big part of the seemingly undifferentiated ethnic picture. Thanks in part to the influx of capital from abroad and transnational markets (Fong 1996; Zhou 1992; Lin 1995), the Chinese enclaves are significantly more diverse in economic scope from the Latino ones and just as important to note, from the traditional Chinatown economies of yesteryear. Today, the Chinese enclave economies

include the retail and service sectors, along with 'high-tech and durable goods manufacturing, communications, wholesale trade, FIRE (finance, insurance, and real estate), and professional services' (Zhou and Cai 2002, 425). The so-called cram schools and ethnic media are capitalist enterprises that require healthy doses of wealth, both domestically based and capital flows from East Asian investors. Access and even just exposure among working-class and poor Chinese families to this multifaceted set of ethnic resources around schooling, coupled with ties to middle-class co-ethnics (family and friends) sharing useful information about the American education system, further compounds the advantage that comes with living in less segregated neighbourhoods.

We see what can happen when those key elements are absent, in the case of the Latinos. Dominican families, already finding themselves in poorer, more socially isolated communities with little ethnic or transnational wealth and access to neither, have a double bind. Their neighbourhood schools are inferior. They, too, have co-ethnic friends and kin who tell them about the better schools, but these are Catholic schools charging tuition fees that the families cannot typically afford (Louie and Holdaway 2009). Better public school options and ways to access them are not known to them. Interestingly, the Colombians, like the Chinese, are less residentially segregated than the Dominicans and belong to a group with middle-class co-ethnics. Due to mistrust, though, borne of divisions back in Colombia, including the drug stigma, racism and regional factionalism, the working- and middle-class Colombians in the USA live, work and socialize in different spheres (Guarnizo and Diaz 1999; Guarnizo, Sanchez, and Roach 1999). The working-class Colombian immigrants are left on their own without the useful information and help of higher-status co-ethnics.

From where did the Dominicans and Colombians get the institutional support that they, along with the Chinese, were found to need? Consistent with the existing research on working-class and poor youth of immigrant and native minority groups, who managed to beat the odds to transition to college, their support tended to come from *non-ethnic* sources (Fernandez-Kelly 2002). This included a teacher, guidance counsellor or the Federal TRIO programme Upward Bound, a community-based organization that might have an ethnic orientation or not (Stanton-Salazar 1997; Fernandez-Kelley 2008; Portes and Fernandez-Kelley 2008; Smith 2008; Telles and Ortiz 2008; Itzigsohn 2009; Stepick and Dutton Stepick 2010). This is not to deny the value of ethnically based resources, but to say that non-ethnic ones matter too, especially when the former are scant.

These findings need to be brought into public policy debates and solutions about education. American debates of this nature typically involve claims that some racial and ethnic groups value education more and, thus, succeed. A rejoinder to such claims and the question that we should be posing is: are we content to leave an uneven playing field for immigrant and native minority groups that do not have racially or ethnically based wealth and strong cross-class ties and ask them to play catch-up on their own? Are we comfortable leaving behind another generation or two, even as we know how important schooling has become to individual upward mobility and in the aggregate, to the nation's well-being?

To end on a research note, clearly more enquiries are needed to understand how cross-class ties form and what they can foster. In the case of the Chinese, we need to ask how ethnic group members of different socio-economic, linguistic backgrounds come together and interact, giving rise to the propinquity mechanism. Certainly, we need to understand the economic motivations – who invests and works in ethnic businesses, especially people with the monies to invest outside of them and/or the skill sets to work as

professionals in the mainstream labour market. But we also need to delve into the cultural and social motivations – why would first- and second-generation upper- and middle-class Chinese Americans, living outside of the enclaves, choose to volunteer in social service agencies serving immigrants in the Chinatowns? How do these agencies, founded to help older waves of Toisanese and Cantonese immigrants, engage with new cohorts of Chinese immigrants, who come from other regions of Mainland China, speak different Chinese dialects, and are sometimes undocumented? And how do the new immigrants access and respond to both the services and the providers (Liang and Guest 2013)?

As Wimmer reminds us, this kind of enquiry is not about ethnic groups *per se*, but about uncovering the *recurring general mechanisms* that drive such phenomena. There are particular historical circumstances and conditions that intersect with such mechanisms. That said, it remains important to ‘isolate the recurring mechanisms from these contextual contingencies and thus arrive at some general insights into the workings of ethnic and racial boundaries’ (Wimmer 2013: 7). Towards that end, these kinds of questions cannot be directed solely at the Chinese; rather, comparative studies should be designed. Single-group case studies do provide thoughtful clues of what those studies might take into account. Jody Agius Vallejo’s (2010) qualitative research of middle-class Latinas (mainly Mexican Americans) in Southern California documents class processes that have some similarity to what the New York City Chinatowns have experienced. Vallejo analyses the building of ‘middle-class ethnic capital’ among Latinas through a professional organization designed to help fellow Latinas move up the ladder. In another study, Vallejo and Lee (2009) examines how Mexican Americans of diverse social-class origins understand ‘giving back’ to co-ethnics and the larger ethnic community. And there seems to be parallel processes of co-ethnic class diversification in at least one east Los Angeles long-time Mexican immigrant community. The return of affluent 1.5 and second generations to their parents’ old neighbourhood of Boyle Heights has led to new businesses, higher home prices and tensions with the working-class immigrants living there (*New York Times*, August 17, 2003). The answers provided by these kinds of comparative studies would help us to understand the processes underlying minority cultures of mobility across different groups (Neckerman, Carter, and Lee 1999), how they are informed by boundary making, and how they have the potential to contribute to key public policy debates about education and upward mobility. Andreas Wimmer’s (2013) *Ethnic Boundary Making* gives us exciting new ways to frame and empirically investigate such enquiries.

Notes

1. Specifically, Wimmer (2013) (5) asks that we disentangle ethnic processes that actually involve discrimination against others perceived as outside the group from institutional processes, such as the labour market, that ‘may produce an ethnic pattern in the aggregate’.
2. The 1.5 generation are typically defined as foreign-born children who arrive in the USA at an early enough age to be largely educated and socialized there – between the ages of six and twelve. The second generation are the American-born children of immigrants. For more discussion of the developmental implications, see Rumbaut (2004).
3. The immigrant-origin groups had parents who came from the Dominican Republic; the South American countries of Colombia, Ecuador and Peru; the Anglophone West Indies; China; Hong Kong; Taiwan; the Chinese diaspora; or the former Soviet Union. Native groups included whites, African Americans and Puerto Ricans.
4. Indeed, the decision not to focus on country-of-origin analyses with the LISA study was designed to tease out whether the sources of advantage belonging to particular groups, like the

Chinese, who along with other Asian Americans, are thought to have ethnic cultures that promote achievement (Suárez-Orozco 2001) are actually cultural.

5. The data for the second-generation Chinese study drew on interviews with sixty-eight respondents of diverse social-class origins. The respondents were enrolled at two colleges in New York City: Hunter, a public commuter college that is a member of the City University of New York (CUNY); and Columbia, an elite private university (see Louie 2004). The data for the second-generation Dominican and Colombian students drew on interviews with seventy-six second-generation respondents, who had transitioned to more than twenty colleges in north-eastern America, of different types and prestige levels; and thirty-seven immigrant parents (see Louie 2012).

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Raising the bar in analysis: Wimmer's *Ethnic Boundary Making*

Miri Song

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Most books on ethnicity and race purport to relate specifically to one country, for instance, the USA. So Wimmer's new book is highly ambitious in presenting a comparative analytical framework for understanding ethnic boundary making, which transcends the particularities of any one country. While stressing the many ways in which actors are strategic in their practices, assertions and affiliations, in *Ethnic Boundary Making*, Andreas Wimmer insists on avoiding the tiresome binaries of instrumentalism versus primordialism. Wimmer's comparative framework centres on a search for recurring processual patterns. The search for such patterns means that there are only a finite number of ways in which ethnic boundaries are made, redefined, demolished, and so on – even across quite disparate societies around the world. It is this dogged determination to be precise and comprehensive that marks this book from others.

Keywords: Wimmer; ethnic boundary making; radical constructivist; comparative; ethnic classification; insider/outsider

While stressing the many ways in which actors are strategic in their practices, assertions and affiliations, in *Ethnic Boundary Making*, Andreas Wimmer (2013, 5) insists on avoiding the tiresome binaries of instrumentalism versus primordialism (or the many other related binary ways of explaining the assertion and salience of ethnicity): 'It therefore makes little sense to debate whether ethnicity is mostly about "interests" or "identity", about "material" benefits or "ideals."' At the same time, Wimmer warns against a 'radical constructivist' position, in which ethnicity is said to be characterized as inherently fluid and situationally variable, or a relatively inconsequential dynamic concerning identity choices.

Wimmer claims that a key aim of the book is to determine under which conditions people can develop deep emotional attachments or moral concerns about their positioning in ethnic and racial classifications, while other conditions engender more superficially instrumental actions and feelings.

Most books on ethnicity and race purport to relate specifically to one country, for instance, the USA. So Wimmer's new book is highly ambitious in presenting a comparative analytical framework for understanding ethnic boundary making, which transcends the particularities of any one country. In fact, we are told early on that race is treated as a 'subtype' of ethnicity – which is bound to be contested by many North American analysts, who tend to distinguish clearly between the two. In this respect, Wimmer steadfastly refuses to buy into certain American orthodoxies around 'race'. This stance is interesting, not only for what follows in the book, and the salience of race in the USA, but also because of the recent resurgence in discussions about race and genetics (see e.g. Hartigan 2008).

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ways in which ethnic boundaries are made, redefined, demolished, and so on – even across quite disparate societies around the world. It is this dogged determination to be precise and comprehensive that marks this book from others.

Ethnic Boundary Making is timely, as it extends the argument made in previous years by Rogers Brubaker (2004) in *Ethnicity without Groups*. While quite different in content, Wimmer's book is also reminiscent of Cornell and Hartmann's (2007) widely read text, *Ethnicity and Race*, in which they take issue with the binaries of primordial and constructivist approaches, and in which they adopt a relatively global approach, drawing upon a wide variety of cases throughout the developed and developing world.

Wimmer's book is said to centre on four main characteristics:

1. Building on the Barthian boundary metaphor .
2. A Bourdieusian analysis of how boundaries are made and un made .
3. A determined effort to avoid the automatic privileging of ethnic and racial processes in social phenomena, or the widespread tendency to 'see' ethnic and racial processes at work, when in fact they may be deeply entangled with other processes.
4. A broader, more global perspective that avoids the hegemony of western models/ experiences generalized to the rest of the world.

In chapter two, the main factors that shape the dynamics of ethnic boundary making are identified: the distribution of power in a social field; the reach of established networks; and the institutional framework that encourages the drawing of certain kinds of boundaries over others. These variables are central to the way in which Wimmer weaves together his analyses, based upon quite disparate and interesting forms of data.

One key argument is that it is highly problematic to regard ethnic groups as self-evident units of observation, or to assume that dividing societies into ethnic groups necessarily illuminates their key structural features (in which ethnic groups are assumed to possess a distinctive culture, a shared identity and ethnic solidarity). This stance, on its own, is difficult to quibble with – especially as there have been many scholars, including many in Britain, who have argued against such a view of ethnicity and ethnic groups – Paul Gilroy, Floya Anthias, Nira Yuval-Davis, Claire Alexander, Les Back, Ali Rattansi – to name only a few.

Wimmer situates himself carefully in relation to other major frameworks, such as scholars employing theories of so-called segmented assimilation (e.g. Alejandro Portes, Min Zhou), who are characterized as (overly) privileging the solidarity and cultural coherence of ethnic groups and communities. According to Wimmer (2013, 19), segmented assimilation theory tends to assume, without empirical substantiation, 'that cultural difference and networks of solidarity cluster along ethnic lines'. Furthermore, *Ethnic Boundary Making* speedily dispenses with neo-assimilation theory, multiculturalism and ethnic studies as problematic paradigms (and even throws in a footnote on the study of whiteness). Also notable is Wimmer's dismissal of the 'race relations' approach said to be typified by Michael Banton, or theories that insist upon the fundamental structuring effects of race and racisms (e.g. some of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's work), and other work positing 'racialization'.

The ethnic group formation framework advocated in this book is often situated in opposition to 'radically constructivist' authors who argue that 'ethnocultural differences are relevant only in the eyes of policymakers and immigrant political entrepreneurs, but not in the everyday practices of immigrants or their working-class peers' (Wimmer 2013,

113). At times, this conceptual nemesis seems a bit strained, and I question how widespread such radically constructivist views on ethnicity are in the work of both North American and continental scholars. There is also the issue of interpretation, and whether the scholars named in the footnotes would agree with Wimmer's characterization of their arguments. Nevertheless, Wimmer is right to point to the very real possibility that phenomena often understood to be an outcome of ethnic and racial prejudice or inequalities are often a by-product of various other factors and processes.

Arguably, Wimmer's characterization of 'conventional' ethnic analyses, or of studies concerning 'racialization', can be rather simplistic. His characterizations of these strands of scholarship and thought end up homogenizing the considerable diversity of thought contained within such approaches, some of which do not take ethnic groups and ethnic solidarity as given. Furthermore, there is a large middle ground of studies between the two extremes of Herderian and radical constructivist approaches that are not unsophisticated.

And while Wimmer's emphasis on the often overlooked 'nested' character of ethnic classification systems is welcome, some of his observations are odd:

Some higher-level categories – such as the panethnic categories of “Asians” or “Hispanics” – might be relevant for politics (Padilla 1986; Nagel 1994; Espiritu 1992) but not for conduct of everyday life (Kibria 2002), such as finding a job, a house, or a spouse. (Wimmer 2013, 24)

Why would societal recognition of someone as 'Asian' or 'black' or 'Hispanic' not register in socially meaningful ways in a variety of interactions? For example, being stereotyped in a job interview (e.g. in how one may be assumed to be 'good at maths') has been documented in many studies of ethnicity and panethnicity. In fact, Mia Tuan (1998) found evidence of Asian Americans (regardless of specific ethnicity) relating to each other in friendships and intimate relationships as Asian Americans (and some of Nazli Kibria's (2002) work suggests this as well).

In chapter five, Wimmer points to the analytical strengths of employing the boundary-making approach in the interpretation of anti-immigrant politics and stances – as opposed to the lens of 'racialization' that has been 'exported' from America to sociologists on the European continent. In his study of three neighbourhoods in Switzerland, Wimmer (2013, 137) concludes that hostility towards new immigrants is driven more by 'perceived cultural distance' than racial difference *per se* – thus underlining the inadequacy of the concept of 'racialization' for understanding the dynamics of many European multi-ethnic societies. This finding certainly chimes with how some British analysts explain the hostility towards many Asian Muslims, as opposed to black Britons, who are not regarded as culturally that disparate to 'mainstream' Britons (see Tariq Modood's work, 1994). However, Wimmer (2013, 138) argues that we need to understand racialization primarily as an indicator (and not a cause) of high levels of closure and conflict.

It is argued that racial or ethnic divisions/categories used by these Swiss residents are secondary to those of 'insider' versus 'outsider' divisions/categories in specific locales that are based on shared norms of decency and order, so that even certain (white) Swiss exhibiting an 'alternative' lifestyle are deemed outsiders. For instance, Wimmer argues that the established Swiss in the three neighbourhoods viewed Tamil refugees, overall, as 'more able to fit in' than immigrants from the former Yugoslavia. This may be the case, but the perception that Tamils are more attune to maintaining social order in these neighbourhoods does not necessarily translate into more meaningful social interactions, such as friendships or relationships. In fact, Wimmer finds that despite the

many opportunities to befriend people from other ethnic backgrounds, the Swiss, ethnic Italians and Turks primarily associate with people of their own ethnicity. The key boundary to note is that these three groups have formed very few ties with new immigrant groups (such as those from the former Yugoslavia), and prefer to relate to each other (Wimmer 2013, 132). If neighbourhood civility of this kind is the central point of concern, such weak ties are not that surprising. Such good relationships between established Swiss and more established immigrants may be more discursive than real, as the data concern reported modes of contact rather than the actual behaviours of neighbourhood residents.

Thus, Wimmer's claim that the insider/outsider divide was necessarily the most salient in these neighbourhoods is not always convincing. For instance, while Back's (1996) study of South London did find a neighbourhood nationalism that cut across black and white working-class families on the housing estate, this did not necessarily mean (as it is implied) that it was the most 'pertinent social categorization and organization for neighborhood residents'. In fact, Back found that this neighbourhood nationalism was highly contingent and mediated by recourse to racial exclusions and marginalizations, some of which corresponded with the established versus newcomer distinction while others did not, and where racial divides and discourses coexisted with this neighbourhood nationalism in an often unpredictable and tension-filled way. So while I am sympathetic with Wimmer's recommendations, he can sometimes go too far in playing down the possibility of racialized dynamics and effects.

Chapter six constitutes the most important contribution of the book: by pointing to the specific level of differentiation at which social closure actually occurs in various types of social networks, this book achieves a level of concrete specificity (within a broader theoretical model) that aims to distinguish between ethnic versus non-ethnic processes. This chapter is convincing in criticizing analyses that point firmly to racial preferences in individuals. Wimmer argues that we must pay attention to the nested character of ethnic classification systems – so preferences for co-ethnics who happen to be of the same 'race' are not to be automatically read as racial closure. The importance of disentangling genuine racial or ethnic preferences from other processes that may explain the relatively high incidence of racially homogenous networks in many societies is clearly articulated.

I found many of the recommendations for how to de-ethnicize research projects/designs to be really stimulating and refreshing, including a focus on individuals, localities, class and institutional fields. All researchers know that there are significant limitations with snowball sampling. However, to suggest that we should avoid it altogether (see Wimmer 2013, 42) is rather unrealistic if we are to obtain informants/samples from certain populations, especially in highly sensitive or controversial areas of social research. Yet, rather surprisingly, in chapter five, we learn that snowball sampling was employed in the three-neighbourhood study in Switzerland.

Nevertheless, the use of a diverse range of data (the European Social Survey and the very interesting Facebook data) fits with the spirit and purpose of the book, and enhances the book's originality. This book raises the bar for how researchers should conceptualize their objects of study, and for how they should (more imaginatively) analyse their data and push for more layers of analysis, specificity and depth. In contrast to the now *de rigeur* (yet often vague) acknowledgement of the dynamics of intersectionality made by many contemporary scholars, *Ethnic Boundary Making* provides a precise and rigorous

approach to examining and differentiating between ethnic and non-ethnic processes and phenomena.

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Ethnic boundary making as strategic action: reply to my critics

Andreas Wimmer

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I am grateful to the five distinguished colleagues who took the time to read the book carefully and to offer insightful criticism and comments. Most of the points aim at definitional problems or matters of theoretical architecture. Perhaps I should therefore state at the outset of this reply that the book was written in the hope of going beyond discussing the abstract and general matters that have preoccupied the field in the past and of moving towards an empirically oriented, comparative analysis of the variety of forms under which the ethnic phenomenon appears. I am relieved to note that all five reviewers agree that the book has made some progress towards achieving this goal.

Of course I will engage my critics on the terrain that they choose, not only as a matter of conversational politeness, but because they indeed raise important and interesting issues, even though many relate only tangentially, as Brubaker notes, to the main themes and ambitions of the book. I will group similar comments together and respond as succinctly as possible. In the final section, remaining points raised by individual reviewers will be addressed in a more cursory way.

1. Does ethnic boundary making overlook the power of emotions and the universal quest for dignity?

Both Jenkins and Lamont ask how the theory of boundary making deals with emotions. According to Jenkins, the book ‘misses completely’ ‘the emotional dimension of identification with others’. Relatedly, Lamont deplores that it does ‘... not give the quest for recognition its due as a motivation for human action or a dimension of inequality’. It is certainly true that none of the empirical chapters focuses on emotions – and none of the research designs employed in these chapters is well suited to get at the notoriously difficult issue of how to empirically study emotions. I like to believe, however, that the general theoretical set-up is well equipped to analyse the emotional side of boundary making. In fact, the book offers a series of hypotheses that directly answer Jenkins’ question ‘why, in some places at some times, ...some people seem to feel powerfully the ethnic ties that bind’. These hypotheses derive the degree of emotional attachment from the structure of boundaries: whether they are consensually agreed upon, correspond to cultural difference, and are politically relevant. They read as follows (104–105):

Such effects of path dependency are reinforced through the sociopsychological process of identification. When members of an ethnic category self-identify and are identified by others as “belonging” to a “group” with little ambiguity, when they share easy-to-identify cultural repertoires of thinking and acting, and when they are tied together by strong alliances in day-to-day politics, we expect strong emotional attachment to such ethnic categories (Brubaker, Loveman, and Stamatov 2004, 46–47). Ethnic identity will be “thicker” than in other

contexts, and group members will be prepared to incur high costs to defend the culture and honor of their community and the authenticity of its culture, thus stabilizing a boundary even in situations of profound social change.

To put it differently, “thick” identities reduce the range of strategic options that actors have at their disposal. Thus, they will be more likely to choose the scheme of interpretation and the script of action that corresponds to their ethnic category, they will be more likely to define their interests in terms of those of the entire ethnic community, and they will be more likely to respond to group pressure from ethnic peers (Cornell 1996). Under these circumstances, “identity” may indeed assume primacy over “interests”.

It would have been interesting to learn whether Jenkins has overlooked these arguments or whether he thinks they are insufficiently developed (which I would agree with) or wrong for some identifiable reason? Similarly, and with regard to the quest for recognition that Lamont misses from the book, the introduction states, with explicit reference to Lamont’s work, the following:

Emphasizing the strategic nature of practices of categorization and association – a hallmark of the Bourdieusian and Goffmanian... traditions in sociology – does not imply an exclusive focus on economic gains or political advantage. The prizes in these struggles are diverse. They include the honor and prestige of belonging to a respected community recognized as a legitimate part of society (the “group honor” emphasized by Max Weber), the feeling of dignity that comes from seeing oneself at the apex of the moral history of mankind rather than in one of its shadowy valleys (the focus of Michèle Lamont’s work), and the personal security and psychological stability granted by a sense of belonging to a community on whose support one can rely and where one feels culturally “at home” (emphasized by many social psychological approaches). Group honor, moral dignity, and personal identity combine with more mundane preoccupations, such as access to pastures, professions, public goods, or political power. It therefore makes little sense to debate whether ethnicity is mostly about “interests” or “identity”, about “material” benefits or “ideals”. While these dichotomies resonate well with Western traditions of binary thinking, ethnic boundary making mixes these various resources into an intertwined struggle over who legitimately should occupy which seat in the theater of society.

This is not merely a theoretical declaration of principle, but is followed up in the empirical chapter on Swiss immigrant neighbourhoods. Much of the boundary struggles in these contexts are explicitly analysed as concerning dignity and recognition by the society at large, the honour of symbolically ‘owning’ the neighbourhood, and so forth. To be sure, recognition is not considered the sole goal that actors pursue and it is not the main focus, as it is in Lamont’s own work, richly summarized in her contribution to this symposium. But there is certainly space for its consideration and for empirically analysing the condition under which dignity is indeed the main concern of actors and under which this is less the case.

2. Can ethnic boundary making deal with gradual homophily and bonds of solidarity towards similar others that are unrelated to the dynamics of categorical differentiation?

A second point is raised by Rogers Brubaker and Richard Jenkins. They argue that the focus on boundaries comes at the prize of neglecting perceptions of similarity (rather than difference) and the bonds of solidarity that follow from such perceptions – as opposed to the discriminatory treatment of others associated with boundary making. As Brubaker notes, the book treats such feelings of similarity and solidarity, which in the literature sail

under the term ‘homophily’, as a case of boundary making, while Jenkins seems to have overlooked that chapter 6 is precisely dedicated to the study of how co-ethnics associate with each other. Had he noticed it, he would perhaps join Brubaker who questions whether homophily can be treated as a case of boundary making in the following, characteristically precise and elegant words:

To conceptualize all homophily as strategic is problematic: surely much homophily is entirely unstrategic, driven by a tacit sense of comfort, style, or pleasure. And since homophily, and the resultant patterns of differential association, are a matter of degree, it seems forced to sweep all homophily under the rubric of boundary-making. The language of boundary-making seems better suited to categorical prescriptions or proscriptions about who can or must or must not associate with whom than to ubiquitous gradational differences in patterns of association.

This is certainly a valid point, and I agree that not *all* homophily can be treated as a case of strategic and categorical association/dissociation. However, the book only speaks of boundaries if they espouse both a categorical component (distinguishing Swiss from Swedish, for example) and a behavioural component (privileging Swiss over Swedes in everyday associations). Mere behavioural, semi-conscious homophily, as described by Brubaker, would thus not qualify as an instance of boundary making because it lacks a categorical component.

But I wonder if such behavioural homophily, once it reaches a certain threshold, can be maintained without ‘tipping’ into categorical preference – thus indeed becoming an instance of boundary making. To illustrate the point with my own, admittedly rather trivial example: a speaker of a Swiss German, Alemannic dialect who lives in the USA is drawn to other Swiss German speakers – independent of their race, gender or religion. He enjoys the slow, singing melody; the quirky vocabulary full of diminutives that range from endearing to ironic; the subversive counter-intonations; the rustic gestural repertoire and intense facial expressions that go together with this language. The closer the dialect is to my own, the better, which is indeed a matter of degree. But does this attraction not quickly tip into a categorical preference for individuals in the same ethnic category? Do I not soon privilege a conversation with fellow ‘Swiss Germans’, especially since the population of Swiss German speakers who are not members of the ethnic category ‘Swiss German’ tends towards zero? And to address Jenkins concern directly: can I possibly privilege and be solidary to fellow Swiss German speakers – helping another Swiss Germans to find an apartment or a job in the USA – without dis-privileging others (Swedes, Swazilanders and Swabians), given that we can have conversations only with a limited number of individuals and help even fewer to find an apartment or a job? And if all Swiss Germans behave similarly, do we not then arrive, in the aggregate, at an ethnic boundary that separates Swiss Germans from all others? Confirming this intuition, recent research has tried to disentangle the homophily from the boundary making (or ‘repulsion’) mechanism and found that when it comes to race, religion, and ethnicity, rejection of dissimilar others fits observed network patterns much better than attraction to similar others (Skvoretz 2013).

3. Is the theory overly structuralist?

Both Jenkins and Lamont deplore the structuralist bent of the theoretical architecture. In Jenkins’ terms:

there is a contradiction between the agency that Wimmer ascribes, quite correctly, to individuals and the powers that he attributes, wrongly in my view, to social structure (which, as a metaphor, a way of talking about pattern, can do nothing in the literal, real world).

He also charges the book of being unable, similarly to Bourdieu, to account for change because ‘individual agency gradually comes into line with structural realities (and of course reproduces them)’. As to the inability of analysing change, Jenkins seems to have overlooked a section in chapter 4 (105–108) that deals with change. It identifies external sources of change (new actors, institutions, resources or strategic repertoires emerge on the scene) and internal ones (social movements as well as the accumulation of unintended consequences of boundary making practices). Chapter 7 on immigrants in Europe deals with generational change in the ways that cultural values and ethnic differentiation relate to each other. I do not think the charge of producing a static, Parson-style functionalism is all that well founded.

As to the structuralism that both Lamont and Jenkins deplore, the stated aim of the book is to develop a full explanation of the ethnic phenomenon, in the tradition of analytical sociology (Coleman 1990; Hedström and Bearman 2009). According to that tradition, a ‘full explanation’ goes from structural constraints of action to how actors operate within these constraints to how their actions aggregate back into the structural constraints that influence the next sequence of actions. If one wants to avoid radical emergentism à la rational choice theory, some social network analysis, or social contract philosophy, one needs to go through these three steps. Contra Jenkins’ anti-structuralism, I cannot see anything wrong in the idea that a census bureau has more influence on the dynamics of racial classification than a single individual (power differences), that it should be less legitimate to treat individuals differently on the basis of race in emergency rooms than when it comes to college applications (institutional incentives), and that individuals would rather have people they like being classified into the same ethnic and racial category as themselves (the third structuralist element in the theory). Unfortunately, Jenkins and Lamont do not give many cues as to why these ideas could be wrong or limiting.

4. Does the book overstate its claim to originality?

Both Jenkins and Song are concerned that the book is overstating its originality by positing to develop the middle ground between Herderian essentialism and radical constructivism. Song ‘question[s] how widespread... radically constructivist views on ethnicity are in the work of both North American and continental scholars’. According to Jenkins:

there are very few serious social scientists studying ethnicity – very, very few – who could be said to espouse [Herderian essentialism]. Second, [Wimmer] describes radical constructivism as arguing that “no systematic relationship between ethnicity and cultural values exists” (175) and that ethnic or racial groupings only exist as a consequence of strategies of domination and exclusion on the part of “dominant majorities” and the states that they control. If not a dead horse, this is, at best, a steed made of straw: it is a caricature that I do not recognise as the position of anyone whose current work I know.

Besides dead-horse beating and straw-man bashing, he also accuses the author of the book of ‘an inflated sense of his own intellectual novelty’ and sees him riding against

'windmills'. Perhaps the proposition to 'go beyond constructivism' must appear, in the eyes of one of its most successful exponents, as a rather misguided endeavour? I think that the position assumed by the book becomes more meaningful if we keep in mind that it is not written for the handful of scholars who write on ethnicity in mostly theoretical terms. Instead, the book seeks to address the broader audience of scholars engaged in empirical research. And as soon as we enlarge our horizon in this way, we can see that the book's claims make sense. As even Jenkins admits, straightforward Herderian essentialism dominates much of ethnic studies in the USA (with very notable exceptions). It is even more taken for granted, as the book discusses in chapter 6, in research on race in the USA. Immigration research suffers from the same problem – again with important exceptions noted in the book – of taking ethnic groups as self-evident units of analysis, as discussed in chapter 2, by comparing the assimilation trajectories of 'Russian Jews' vs. those of 'Chinese', 'Jamaicans' and so on. These three literatures are not straw men, but dominant trends.

The book does not claim much originality when critiquing these strands (and in doing so relies on well-established research, including Jenkins'), but it claims to offer a real alternative: a comparative analytic that can identify the conditions under which ethnic groups become cognitively taken for granted, internally solidary and bounded, and marked by shared culture – and under which they are *not*.

Constructivism, on the other hand, has not gone much beyond the critique of essentialism, groupism, reification, and the like, and has emphasized instead that ethnic groups are *in principle* imagined, unstable, situationally dependent, reproduced through ongoing acts of classification and discrimination rather than externally given, deeply influenced by relations of power and hegemony, and so on. Radical constructivists go beyond this basic position to claim that ethnicity is *always* empirically characterized by these features. They are extensively cited at the beginning of chapter 5 – and they dominate the European academic production especially in France and Germany – as well as at the beginning of chapter 7. In the USA, Nagel (1994) could be termed a radically constructivist sociologist; in political science, Chandra's (2012, ch. 2–5) combinatorial approach to ethnic categorization may count as an example of radical constructivism, as well as many rational choice theorists in political science and economics (e.g. Kuran 1998) and most contemporary anthropologists. These are not windmills, as far as I can see, nor dead horses.

In how far does the book go 'beyond' constructivism? First, I would like to remind Jenkins that the book explicitly states that it does *not* want to 'go beyond' constructivism when it comes to the ontological premises referenced above: everything is 'socially constructed' and therefore, in principle, possibly changing. But it does go *beyond* constructivism by attempting to identify, theoretically and empirically, the precise conditions under which constructed boundaries become essential, perceived as primordially given, trans-situationally stable, and the like – in other words, assume quite 'unconstructed' empirical features while, of course, remaining 'constructed' in an ontological sense. Jenkins somewhat reluctantly agrees that with regard to that comparative project, which forms the core of the book, its claim to originality has 'some merits'. If this meaning of 'beyond constructivism' is irritating, I recommend to readers with similar sensibilities to simply read over the two sentences in which the word 'beyond' appears together with 'constructivism'. Little in the book hinges on it.

5. Is boundary a metaphor or a reality?

According to Jenkins, 'Wimmer owes us an account of the epistemological and methodological consequences of conceptualizing "boundary" as a metaphor, and the ontology – beyond the metaphor – of whatever is being viewed through its lens'. Brubaker's interpretation of these matters conforms to my own: boundaries are a metaphor, as are other theoretically important terms such as 'social structure', 'field' and so on, because there are no boundaries in social life with a similar ontological status as the boundaries of bodies or countries. Ontologically 'real' are categories ('Swiss', 'Swedes') as well as the practices of association and dissociation based on these categories (privileging conversations with 'Swiss').

This brings me to Brubaker's suggestion that the book could do without the term boundaries since it is really concerned with practices of categorization. As the introduction states, however, the boundary metaphor is useful because it describes in appropriate terms what happens when modes of classification and manners of association and dissociation coincide (when all those categorized as 'Swiss' start privileging each other over all others). The boundary metaphor therefore usefully prevents us from thinking of ethnicity as a mere issue of cognitive classification, of 'imagined' communities, of discourses of belonging, or rational identity choices, as in (pardon!) more radically constructivist arguments. Obviously, the metaphor has its limitations, and Brubaker identifies many of them. However, given the variety of actions that it allows to be described (as discussed in chapter 3 on boundary-making strategies and means) and the considerable variation in ethnic configurations that it can capture (discussed in chapter 4), I like to believe that its advantages outweigh its disadvantages.

6. Additional points

This final section addresses additional points raised by individual reviewers.

6.1. *Is nationhood a subtype of ethnicity?*

Brubaker takes issue with my characterization of nationhood as one type of ethnic group, together with racial and ethnic categories proper. The book does not deal with any of the issues that Brubaker raises here. I would like to note, however, that his discussion slips from nationhood to the nation state to then argue that nation states are not exclusively based on ethnic membership criteria. I would of course agree. My encompassing definition of ethnicity referred to nationhood – a mode of categorizing us and them that is constitutively linked to claims to statehood – and not to the organizational form of the modern territorial state. Nations are imagined communities of common descent and shared culture, as are ethnic or racial groups – and many ethnic and racial groups have historically transformed into nations by developing a claim to independent nation statehood.

6.2. *Are ethnic categories constitutive of reality and unconsciously reproduced?*

Lamont argues that 'cultural processes are not necessarily oriented toward ultimate instrumental goals such as gaining resources or exercising power [as argued by Wimmer]. Instead, they are primarily shared frameworks that are constitutive of reality'. In a related,

Luckman-cum-Bergerian point, she assumes that individuals ‘are rarely conscious that they inhabit categorization systems. Instead, they tend to use schemas that are largely taken for granted and made available by the national cultural repertoires that surround them’. I think this is again a matter of empirical circumstances that need to be carefully specified, rather than a matter of theoretical principle to be posited *ex cathedra*. If ethnic boundaries are associated with high degrees of social closure, cultural differentiation, and widely agreed upon, chapter 4 argues, they indeed become taken for granted, routinized and ‘constitutive of reality’, à la Luckman and Berger. In other contexts, however, they represent classificatory elements to which individuals maintain considerable reflective distance and that are therefore not preconfiguring their everyday experience.

As micro-interactional research in the tradition of Goffmann shows, however, even when an ethnic or racial boundary has solidified into a taken-for-granted schema, as is perhaps the case with the black/white divide in the USA, individuals negotiate strategically what it exactly means, in each micro-minutiae of an encounter, to be black or white and what the proper associations and role behaviours should be (Lyman and Douglass 1973). The book argues that it is theoretically fruitful to see individuals even in these situations as strategically competent actors who aim to enhance their own moral recognition, prestige, power and command over resources, quite in line with Lamont’s own work on how stigmatized groups may emphasize universal categories and qualities. To see individuals as unconscious inhabitants and reproducers of a categorical grid into which ‘society’ has squeezed them seems, in my eyes and with apologies for turning the tables on Lamont, to be rather too structuralist.

Lamont also posits that:

cultural processes do not solely depend on the actions of dominant actors: subordinates often participate in the elaboration of cultural processes as much as dominant agents do... One could ask Wimmer to more systematically spell out the interaction of dominant and dominated parties in the creation of group boundaries... He does not explicitly theorize this question...

I am not quite sure how to respond to this comment since the entire theoretical framework, condensed in chapter 4, is precisely about the interaction between more or less powerful actors, the types of agreements about relevant boundaries that they can achieve, and the consequence of such a consensus for the nature of ethnic boundaries. On pages 94 and 95, I explicitly guard against ‘overstating the hegemonic power of dominant’ actors.

6.3. How does ethnic boundary making relate to racialization?

Song usefully reminds me and readers that in the London case described by Les Back, working-class ‘neighbourhood nationalism’ intertwines with racial categorizations in more complex ways than my summary of his work would suggest. While this is probably true for London and Britain, where racial terms form part of the common sense and are officially legitimized by the state, this is perhaps less relevant for a country like Switzerland (the focus of the chapter that Song refers to) that never had colonies, let alone slavery. Racial imaginations and stereotyping classifications certainly float around there as well, as they do almost everywhere else in the world, but they are much less relevant in

structuring collective classifications and everyday practices of association and dissociation. This has been shown again and again in research using social distance scales, intermarriage rates, or estimating discrimination on labour markets. In all three domains, some ‘white’ ethnics fare far worse than some ‘non-white’ immigrant groups.

The point, therefore, is that we should not assume that wherever there are somatic differences, ‘racialization’ will occur because ‘whites’ are universally and uniformly prone to stigmatize primarily and exclusively darker-skinned individuals and privilege fellow whites – an assumption often found in the ‘racialization’ literature. As Switzerland and many other European countries show, the most discriminated and stigmatized groups can be white ethnics, rather than racial others, while the experience in the USA (and perhaps the UK) is certainly different. ‘Racialization’ theory has so far not addressed this variation systematically by asking which groups are ‘racialized’ and which are not, and the book attempts, certainly not entirely successfully, to make progress with that regard by at least identifying some of the pitfalls that the study of ethnic and racial discrimination should avoid.

6.4. *Against snowball sampling?*

Song also reminds me that I should be careful in arguing against snowball sampling since the Swiss case study used this very technique. Good catch! I should mention, a certainly rather weak defence, that we did not snowball exclusively along ethnic lines (asking Turks to name other Turks), but asked our interviewees to identify neighbourhood residents of *any* of the three ethnic backgrounds of concern, which minimizes some of the selection-bias problems that the chapter criticizes. This should have been made clearer.

6.5. *Understanding Asian exceptionalism*

Louie helpfully outlines how the ethnic boundary-making approach could be applied to study second-generation success in the USA and, more precisely, how to deal with Chinese exceptionalism by looking at intra-ethnic class differentiation, levels of segregation from whites, and access to information and resources to navigate the school system – all factors that may or may not, I would like to add, vary systematically and primarily by ethnic group. Only a careful study of these factors (and perhaps others, such as migration pathways and the resulting selectivity) will allow us, as I read Louie’s contribution, to go beyond the ethnic lens in studying immigration trajectories and determine if what in the aggregate appears as ethnic difference, in reality results from the working of other, non-ethnic processes.

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