Redefining Ethnicity

Elliott D. Green[1]
E.D.Green@lse.ac.uk

Development Studies Institute
London School of Economics
Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE
UK

Abstract:

Ethnicity is as popular as it as ever been as a subject for study in the social sciences. However, due in part to its popularity ethnicity has become an unwieldy concept and currently suffers from both polysemy – whereby it has multiple definitions – and synonymy – whereby it is close in meaning to other terms like "nation" and "race." Here I propose a new definition of ethnicity that is based on three core elements, namely common descent, a common history and a common homeland. This definition both allows space for a variety of interpretations of ethnicity such as primordialism and constructivism and allows the scholar a means by which to differentiate ethnic groups from other communal groups like castes, nations and races.

1. Introduction

Ethnicity has been a major subject in the social sciences for the past several decades. First appearing in the Oxford English Dictionary in 1972, it has recently become a source of debate in the field of political economy, where many scholars have investigated the relationship between ethnicity and civil war, growth, institutions and violence using econometric tools. This recent spurt of activity has not, however, been accompanied by significant efforts in pinning down ethnicity as a concept. With the recent exceptions of Fearon and Laitin (2000) and Gil-White (2005), scholars have avoided asking hard questions about what exactly ethnicity is and how it is different from other terms in the social sciences like "caste" and "race." As it stands now ethnicity thus suffers from both polysemy – whereby it has multiple definitions – and synonymy – whereby it is close in meaning to other terms like "caste" and "race."

Here I propose a new definition of ethnicity that is based on three core elements, namely common descent, a common history and a common homeland. In defining ethnicity in this "minimal" way (Gerring and Baressi 2003), I therefore allow for a variety of interpretations of ethnicity such as primordialism and constructivism while also allowing the scholar a means by which to differentiate ethnic groups from other communal groups like castes, nations and races.

This paper is organized as follows. In section two I examine the ongoing diverse and controversial debates about the nature of ethnicity. In particular I discuss what Fearon and Laitin (2000) call the "interpretivist" and "quantoid" paradigms, where the latter can be divided into primordialist and constructivist approaches. In section three I build upon Fearon and Laitin (2000)'s previous attempt to define ethnicity through an ordinary language definition by basing a definition of ethnicity on a belief in common descent, a common history and a common homeland. I then

show how this definition allows for greater scope in allowing scholars to distinguish between ethnicity and similar concepts like castes, nations and races. Finally, in the conclusion I return to the two dominant paradigms of primordialism and constructivism and show how my definition can allow for both approaches while also curbing the excesses of both.

2. Defining Ethnicity

Defining ethnicity is a minefield, as many authors have recognized. As we shall see in this section, scholars have proposed a bewildering variety of approaches to ethnicity, all of which are currently in use. Much of the confusion stems from the fact that, as already mentioned, ethnicity is a new term in the social sciences, even though the word "ethnic" has been used in the English language since the mid-fourteenth century. Its meanings have changed radically throughout history: originally referring to heathens, pagans or gentiles, it acquired racial characteristics in the nineteenth century and was used in the twentieth-century U.S. as a way to refer to those immigrants of non-northern or western European descent (Eriksen 1993: 4). It first grew in importance in the social sciences as anthropologists tried to make sense of the emergent social and cultural formations within Africa and other parts of the Third World in the 1960s (Eade 1996: 58). Hence ethnic groups took on a new meaning, namely the idea of tribe, formerly used to refer to a sociopolitical unit whose members were related by kinship ties. This shift in meaning took place as many social scientists attempted to critique the eurocentric discourse in which the peoples of the developing world were referred to as "tribes" while those in the developed world remained "peoples" or even "nations." This latest incarnation of

ethnicity meant that, for the first time in the history of the word, it was – and continues to be – applied universally across the globe.

Yet if ethnicity has now become a universal concept, does it then follow that we should have a universal definition of ethnicity? In attempting to deal with the quagmire of defining ethnicity, scholars have largely adopted two strategies, which Fearon and Laitin (2000: 4) name the "interpretivist" and "quantoid" approaches. The former refers to the strategy of using a variety of situational definitions suitable to each case study, an approach used by a variety of scholars, especially anthropologists who are cautious in defining ethnicity outright and prefer to let their subjects define the term. Eller (1999: 7), for instance, claims that, rather than being "a single unified social phenomenon," ethnicity is actually a family of "related but analytically distinct phenomena." An "interpretivist" approach is also apparent in much postmodernist and post-Marxist work. Such authors as Stuart Hall, Etienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein claim that "ethnicity must be viewed as a plastic and malleable social construction, deriving its meanings from the particular situations of those who invoke it… Ethnicity has no essence or center, no underlying features or common denominator" (Smith 1998: 204; cf. Wallerstein 1987).

The "interpretivist" stance has merit inasmuch as it allows everyone who uses a concept to mold and modify its definition. In their desire to let non-academics define difficult concepts like "ethnicity" the "interpretivists" are therefore inherently democratic, unlike the "quantoid" social scientists who attempt to impose their hegemonic definitions upon others. However valid it may be in this regard, the "interpretivist" stance is nonetheless problematic for social scientists looking to compare ethnicity and ethnic conflicts in a variety of places and periods. Indeed, the result of this postmodern and "interpretivist" shift within the social sciences means that even within academia ethnicity has been expanded in its meaning to capture

identity groups formerly seen as separate entities: for instance, Connor (1994) cites examples in sociology where ethnic groups are taken to be synonymous with minorities and even all identity groups which are mobilized for political ends, whereby such indiscriminate application of ethnic group to numerous types of groups obscures vital distinctions between various forms of identity. If nothing else, Connor (1994: 101-102) notes, this use of "ethnicity as a cloak for several different types of identity... presumes that all the identities are of the same order." As Gerring and Barresi (2003: 202) note, this type of lexical confusion means that, as scholars "cannot achieve a basic level of agreement on the terms by which we analyze the social world, agreement on conclusions is impossible."

It is for this reason that the "quantoid" approach is more popular among political scientists and other non-anthropologists. This paradigm may be defined as a scientific attempt to precisely define ethnicity, no matter how it is used in common parlance.[2] This approach is to be distinguished from the way terms are defined in the dictionary and Fearon and Laitin (2000)'s ordinary language approach – which we will examine later – in that it allows the scholar to construct ethnicity according to his/her preference(s) rather than those of the masses. Scholars who follow this approach tend to situate themselves somewhere between two extreme camps, namely essentialism/primordialism and instrumentalism/constructivism.[3] The first school can best be described as that which is so prevalent in journalism and non-academic discourse today, namely the view that ethnic groups are ancient and immemorial kinship groups and thus given facets of social life. This paradigm was first expressed by German romantic philosophers like Herder and Fichte and has continued to be held to one degree or another by such writers as Basil Davidson, Clifford Geertz, Edward

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[2] Gil-White (2005: 4) is explicitly "quantoid" in this sense: "it does not matter to me what truck-drivers or lawyers etc. usually mean by 'ethnic group'."

[3] While some scholars might argue that constructivism and instrumentalism are different, I agree with Lustick (2001: 22) in his assessment of instrumentalism as one variety of constructivism.

Shils and Steven Van Evera (cf. Van Evera 2001). One variety of primordialism which holds some sway today is the sociobiology approach of Pierre van den Berghe, where ethnic groups are actual kinship groups and members use nepotism to propagate their line. However, such an approach necessarily includes groups based on common descent, i.e., castes in India and European aristocracies, that most scholars would not consider ethnic groups (Van den Berghe 1996, Vanhanen 1999, Whitmeyer 1997).[4]

The second paradigm, i.e., constructivism, is one used by most scholars today across the social sciences. It first overtook primordialism as the dominant paradigm in the 1960s and 1970s thanks to such anthropologists and sociologists as Fredrik Barth, Abner Cohen, Ernest Gellner, Aidan Southall, Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who all agreed, for one reason or another, that ethnic groups – and/or nations – are the artificial constructs of modern elites for their own purposes. In recent decades it has become widespread through the works of Benedict Anderson, John Breuilly, Rogers Brubaker and Eric Hobsbawm, among others. The central idea of constructivism is that ethnic groups are artificial and constructed rather than natural and eternal, and, just as they can be created, they can also be destroyed or, in the postmodernist vocabulary, fragmented and deconstructed.   In summarizing the various strands of constructivism, Chandra (2001: 7) claims that it holds that "ethnic groups are fluid and endogenous to a set of social, economic and political processes."

3. Redefining Ethnicity

3.1. Common Descent and Common History

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[4] See Smith (1998: 147-151) for a critique of Van den Berghe along these lines. We will examine castes and classes more in section 4.

While much has been achieved in debating the merits and demerits of both "interpretivist" and and "quantoid" interpretations and, within the "quantoid" camp, primordialism and constructivism, it is important to recognize that, perhaps, a moment has come for the field of ethnic studies to move beyond these simple dichotomies that have dominated the field for the past four decades. Such a task has already been undertaken by Fearon and Laitin (2000: 3-4, 20), who disagree with both the "quantoid" and "interpretivist" schools. They rather argue that social scientists should be concerned with using ordinary language definitions of terms, which are constructed by finding principles of attribution based on intuition and popular usage. In their attempts to cover the groups intuitively understood to be ethnic while excluding those groups not normally considered as ethnic, Fearon and Laitin (2000) eventually come up with a definition of ethnic groups as "groups larger than a family for which membership is reckoned primarily by descent, is conceptually autonomous and has a conventionally recognized 'natural history' as a group."

This approach is very similar to the "minimal" definition proposed by Gerring and Barresi (2003), whereby the definition uses the least amount of description necessary to cover all applicable cases but no more. As such, the ordinary language or minimal definition is more suitable for use in political economy than the "quantoid" or "interpretivist" approaches for three reasons. First, in relying upon popular usage to provide a definition, it makes it easy for academics to step down out of their ivory towers and discuss with policy makers and the general public, who tend to be unversed in theories of ethnicity and nationalism, the relationship between ethnicity and various political and economic factors without getting bogged down in explaining the definition of ethnicity. Indeed, Connor (1994: 91) has often remarked how debates over definitions have frustrated him and other scholars from progressing in their study of the subject, writing that such terms as "'nation' and 'nationalism'…

are shrouded in ambiguity due to their imprecise, inconsistent and often totally erroneous usage… The linguistic jungle that encapsulates the concept of nationalism has only grown more dense" over time. In being both precise and correlated with popular usage, the ordinary language approach is therefore more suitable for giving policy recommendations than the "quantoid" approach.

Second and as important, the ordinary language definition gives certain key qualities that must be present for an ethnic group to exist, thereby allowing researchers to construct data sets based on such a definition.[5] Indeed, some scholars do not give any such key qualities: Hutchinson and Smith (1996), for example, admit that not all of their six characteristics of ethnicity are essential for an ethnic group to exist.[6] However, many "quantoid" theorists already do list similar key qualities in their definitions – see for instance Nash (1996: 25), whose three essential criteria for the creation and maintenance of ethnicity are assumed kinship ties, commensality and a common cult. Yet one is struck by the technical nature of such a definition, relying on the rarely-used (and even less understood) concept of commensality; Nash's three criteria are unfortunately indicative of the "quantoid" approach to defining ethnicity using often obscure and complicated terminology. If the scholar is to use a set of criteria that clearly marks ethnicity, (s)he should rely upon criteria that correlate with popular usage.

A third reason for using the ordinary language definition is that it allows for conceptual clarity by eliminating the polysemy of the "interpretivist" approach. As noted, Fearon and Laitin (2000)'s definition relies on three aspects of ethnicity, namely a common descent, conceptual autonomy and a common history. The first and third qualities are, as noted above, relatively common among definitions of

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[5] For one example of such a data set based on Fearon and Laitin (2000), see Fearon (2003).
[6] Ethnic groups "habitually exhibit, albeit in varying degrees, six main features" (Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 6). It does not help matters that, almost alone in the field, Hutchinson and Smith (1996) write about *ethnies*, or "ethnic communities," rather than ethnic groups; similarly and equally unhelpfully, sociobiologists like Van den Berghe (1996) and Gil-White (2005) use the word "ethny."

ethnicity: while descent features most strongly in primordialist definitions, a common history is strongly emphasized by Smith and his fellow ethnosymbolists in their discussion of myth and memory. The element of common descent, for instance, allows for one to distinguish ethnic groups from groups of citizens who may share a common history. An obvious example here is the group of people known as Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies (CUKCs) from 1948 to 1983, who, while sharing a history of living in Britain or British colonies, were as varied as the British Empire itself.

3.2. The Importance of the Homeland

Fearon and Laitin (2000: 9)'s second category of conceptual autonomy comprises an attempt to exclude such groups as Indian castes and the British upper class, in that "an aristocracy cannot exist – conceptually – unless commoners exist, and the same applies for classes and castes. By contrast, the existence of an ethnic category does not depend conceptually on the existence of any particular other ethnic category." In other words, the conceptual autonomy roughly corresponds to whether a group is defined by its internal attributes or in opposition to another such group.

Yet there are several problems with the use of conceptual autonomy as a defining factor for ethnicity. First, as already noted in the case of commensality, it is hardly likely that conceptual autonomy is a criterion that would correlate with popular usage. Second, while Fearon and Laitin (2000: 9) agree that "it is an empirical fact that ethnic groups 'understand themselves' through contrasts with other ethnic groups," they fail to recognize that there are no ethnic groups (or nations) in recorded history that have not in some way defined themselves in opposition to another such group or groups. Indeed, along with the turn away from primordialism in the late 1960s came a further recognition that ethnic groups do not exist autonomously but are

constructed and defined through their boundaries with other ethnic groups (Barth 1969, Cohen 1978, Melville 1983).[7] Conversely, one cannot easily argue that castes and classes are not conceptually autonomous: members of high castes in India and the upper class in Britain can trace their ancestry back to invaders from central Asia and Normandy, respectively, who were, at the time, ethnically different from the resident population. Indeed, the same argument applies to the Tutsis and Hutus in Rwanda and Burundi, whom Fearon and Laitin (2000) nonetheless claim to be conceptually autonomous.

A better way to exclude classes and castes from a typology of ethnicity – while also including Hutus and Tutsis – is the notion of a homeland. Traditionally understood as the "original" home of an ethnic group, the homeland is much more readily used in popular discussion of ethnicity than conceptual autonomy. Smith (1998: 63) includes a homeland in his definition, noting that

> Ethnic nationalists… desire the land of their putative ancestors and the sacred places where their heroes and sages walked, fought and taught. It is a historic or ancestral 'homeland' that they desire, one which they believe to be exclusively 'theirs' by virtue of links with events and personages of earlier generations of 'their' people.'

Smith (1991: 9) defines this 'homeland' as

> The 'historic' land… where terrain and people have exerted mutual, and beneficial, influence over several generations. The homeland becomes a repository of historic memories and associations… The land's resources also become exclusive to the people; they are not for 'alien' use and exploitation.

The homeland is missing from the ordinary language definition because Fearon and Laitin (2000) attempt to include groups like the nomads and the Roma (Gypsies) who do not live in a definable territory. However, these cases are somewhat controversial, as many Roma conceive of themselves as the descendents of immigrants from north-

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[7] For instance, Melville (1983: 272) notes that "ethnicity is essentially a continuous, dynamic process that occurs between two or more ethnic populations," while Cohen (1978: 389) claims that "ethnicity has no existence apart from interethnic relations."

west India (Mayall 2004)[8] and nomads often can both trace back their ancestry to an original homeland[9] and recognize local sites as having ethnohistorical significance (Hobbs 1989).[10]

A homeland also provides a way to exclude classes and castes yet include groups like the Tutsi and Hutus. Despite the fact that the both the British upper classes and high castes in India descend from foreign invaders,[11] this fact has little to no relevance in contemporary British and Indian societies, since neither group claims Normandy or central Asia as their homeland.[12] Contrarily, the idea that Tutsis are originally from Ethiopia while the Hutus are indigenous to the Great Lakes Region has great contemporary resonance in regional ethnic politics, playing, for instance, a role in the 1994 Rwandan genocide (Mamdani 2001: 195).

One possible response to substituting a homeland for conceptual autonomy in the ordinary language definition is that, by excluding castes and classes and including the Roma, it results in the same set of groups as the original definition and is therefore no better or worse. However, there are two very good reasons to include a homeland in a definition of ethnicity. First, recent political economy scholarship has shown how important ethnic homelands are to the study of ethnic conflict and war. Toft (2001: 5-6) argues that "the likelihood of ethnic war is largely a function of how the

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[8] This is reflected in the presence of a red 16-spoke wheel in the middle of the Romani national flag, copied directly from the Indian national flag.

[9] "However intrigued the [Ma'aza] Bedouins [of Egypt] are with descriptions of foreign lands, these places have little appeal to them, and some are repulsive. An exception is Arabia, the original homeland of the Ma'aza" (Hobbs 1989: 73).

[10] Hobbs (1989: 87) notes that "the social and political histories of the Ma'aza are recorded in place names, [i.e.,] the tomb of the early Ma'aza raiding leader Ruwayshid." Another example is the Gattaar mountain, where "one of the founding fathers of the Egyptian Khushmaan [clan member], Sulimaan 'Awaad Raadhi, spent his life after coming from Arabia" (Hobbs 1989, 77). These sites are clear examples of what Smith (1998) calls "ethnoscapes."

[11] Both Bamshad et al. (2001) and Cordaux et al. (2004) show stronger genetic links between high castes in both North and South India to central Asians than to tribal groups in their own areas.

[12] The Normans, for instance, assimilated completely within English society within two centuries (Hastings 1997, 44). In fact, one could argue that both groups have so successfully indigenized themselves that they are emblematic of their respective nations. In Britain one need merely note the popular title of "England's Rose" bestowed upon the aristocrat Princess Diana, while in India the highest caste, the Brahmins, are the priests in the religion most central to Indian identity, namely Hinduism.

principal antagonists – a state and its dissatisfied minority – think about a territory in dispute… Ethnic groups will seek to rule territory in which they are geographically concentrated, especially if that region is a historic homeland." On the other hand, "conceptual autonomy" seems to play little role in predicting conflict or war between groups; one need merely note the prevalence of caste conflict across India and various degrees of class conflict across nearly the whole world.[13]

Second, the addition of a homeland to the definition allows us a better way to tackle the controversial question of whether racial groups should be included in a set of ethnic groups. According to the original ordinary language definition, races cannot unquestionably qualify as ethnic groups since they are not clearly conceptually autonomous: as with castes and classes, they are largely defined in opposition to other groups rather than their internal characteristics: as Banton (1983: 106) writes, "ethnicity is generally more concerned with the identification of 'us,' while racism is more oriented to the categorisation of 'them'."[14] Indeed, one cannot imagine a group of people defined by the color of their skin if all people have the same color skin. (The same would go for defining people on the basis of other racial features like epicanthic [eye] folds, hair type, nose shape, etc.) Yet while some scholars like Banton (1983) and Smith (1991: 21) would agree that ethnic communities "must be sharply differentiated from a race,"[15] many others like Eriksen (1993: 4-5) would disagree. For instance, Varshney (2001: 365) claims that, by classifying religious, racial and sectarian conflicts as ethnic conflicts, the scholar can thereby compare disputes which are often similar in their "intensity, duration or relative intractability."

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[13] For one example of how caste conflict plays out in contemporary South India, see Harriss (2002). There remains, however, more research to be done into the differences between conflict generated between conceptually autonomous groups and non-conceptually autonomous groups.

[14] To make this point in more down-to-earth terms, one need merely question the concept of "White Pride" put forth by white supremacists: what, exactly, is there to be proud about being white, other than not being black? As we shall see in a moment, the opposite case of "Black Pride" is more complex.

[15] Similarly, Malik (1996: 174-177) notes, "among sociologists and anthropologists… there is a general sense that if race describes differences created by imputed biological distinction, ethnicity refers to differences with regards to cultural distinctions."

When one applies the homeland criterion to racial groups, one gets a complex answer. One could make the case that racial groups can be said to have homelands: blacks come from Sub-Saharan Africa, whites from Europe, Hispanics from Latin America and Asians from Asia. Indeed, the names originally devised by the German scientist J.F. Blumenbach when he codified what we today call races in 1795 and the names we give these races today – Caucasian, African/Negroid, Asian/Mongoloid – seem to hint at some sort of racial "homeland" for these groups, which is not surprising given that Blumenbach drew upon the Swedish scientist Linnaeus's 1758 categorization based on the four continents of Africa, America, Asia and Europe (Gould 1994).

Yet when Blumenbach first classified humans into racial categories in 1795, he did not name his own group 'Caucasian' because he thought that the Caucasus mountains were the original home of the European, North African and West Asian peoples. Rather,

> I have taken the name of this variety from Mount Caucasus, both because its neighborhood, and especially its southern slope, produces the most beautiful race of men, I mean the Georgian; … That stock displays… the most beautiful form of the skull, from which, as from a mean and primeval type, the others diverge by most easy gradations. . . . Besides, it is white in color, which we may fairly assume to have been the primitive color of mankind… In that region, if anywhere, it seems we ought with the greatest probability to place the autochthones of mankind (Blumenbach 1795, quoted in Gould 1994).

Thus Blumenbach thought that the Caucasus were not the homeland of the Europeans but rather the homeland of all humanity, and therefore gave this name to the people Linnaeus had formerly called Europeans (Gould 1994).[16]

Blumenbach's racial categorization is indicative of the way races are often conceptualized using geographic terminology but without any putative link to a

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[16] Blumenbach also altered Linnaeus' taxonomy by substituting Mongoloid for Asian and Ethiopian for African and adding the category of Malay for the native inhabitants of Australia and the Pacific Islands (Gould 1994).

homeland. Indeed, as we have already seen in the case of the British aristocracy and the Indian castes, it is important to distinguish a mere place of origin from a homeland to which a given group sees as part of its identity.   For instance, while white Americans come from Europe, the image of Europe as a homeland has relatively little resonance for them, especially as compared to white minorities in Africa.[17] Furthermore, white Americans rarely designate themselves "European-Americans," preferring to use the aforementioned word "Caucasian."[18] White Americans also have less attachment to their place of origin than black Americans, who have increasingly called themselves "African-American" since the demise of the word "Negro" in the 1960s.[19] Both African-Americans and black residents of the West Indies were at the forefront of the pan-African movement in the early 20th century, which promoted, among other ideas, the idea of Africa as the homeland for all blacks in the world and, among adherents of Marcus Garvey, the return of blacks to Africa. Needless to say, the white separatist/supremacist movement in the US does not call for whites to return to Europe but rather establish a white homeland in the US. Finally, one need merely contrast how visits to Africa by American politicians are often seen as a ploy to garner more African-American votes (Sithole 1986); similar visits to Europe are never seen as attempts to increase support from European-Americans.[20] Thus it is much easier to make a case for black Americans as an ethnic group than white Americans.

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[17] In an autobiography of her childhood in what was then Rhodesia, Fuller (2003: 8-9) noted with bemusement her mother's professed love for Scotland, as her "home" even though she had only set foot there as a tourist.

[18] Interestingly, white supremacists like David Duke prefer the phrase "European-American" to "Caucasian," perhaps in an effort to legitimize "white nationalism;" cf. www.duke.org or http://www.eaif.org/. Perhaps indicative of the white supremacist use of the phrase, Google records only 1.2m hits for 'European-American,' fewer than for 'Irish-American' (1.5m), 'Arab-American' (1.6m), 'Chinese-American' (1.6m), 'Japanese-American' (1.6m), 'German-American' (2.0m), 'Afro-American' (2.1m), 'Italian-American' (2.7m), 'Mexican-American' (2.8m), 'Asian-American' (11.7m) and 'African-American' (89.7m).

[19] It is interesting to note that "Negro," unlike 'African-American,' does not have any geographical connotations (Keita and Kittles 1997, 535).

[20] Indeed, such a strategy might even decrease a politician's share of the "white vote" – inasmuch as one can speak of such a thing: see for instance the recent animosity towards the French, German and Spanish for not fully supporting the US in its invasion of Iraq.

Yet the above should not suggest that black Americans constitute an ethnic group. The fact remains that, as with many white Americans, most black Americans do not actually know their specific place of origin. As opposed to most Africans themselves, who are very aware of their specific homelands, black Americans cannot identify, in Smith (1991: 9)'s words, the "sacred places where their heroes and sages walked, fought and taught." This problem has led black Americans – as well as West Indians and Black Britons – to view the entire continent of Africa as their homeland, adopting such dispirate "heroes and sages" as the 20th-century Ethiopian emperor Hailie Selassie and the 19th-century Zulu king Shaka Zulu despite the fact that practically no black Americans are of Ethiopian or Zulu descent.[21] One need merely contrast African-Americans with people of South Asian descent in Fiji, East and South Africa and the Caribbean, almost all of whom can identify the part of South Asia – normally Gujurat and the Punjab in north-west India – where their ancestors originated.

In other words, what matters here is whether black Americans identify themselves along quasi-biological lines or geographical lines, where the former is indicated by use of the word 'black' and the latter by 'African-American.' It is indicative that many if not most journals and magazines targeted to black Americans prefer the word 'black' over 'African-American,' as seen in the titles of *Black Collegian*, *Black Enterprise*, *Black Men*, *Black Scholar*, *Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* and *Today's Black Woman*; of particular interest here is Afrocentrism founder Molefi Asante's *Journal of Black Studies*. There may a trend towards referring black Americans as African-Americans just as there is a trend away from referring to hyphenated European descendents in the US, but much of this change has to do with legitimating black Americans as immigrants similar to hyphenated

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[21] Oprah Winfrey has claimed, exceptionally and to loud scepticism in both the US and Africa, that she is of Zulu descent (Munnion 2005).

Europeans rather than a shift towards emphasizing the African roots of black Americans.[22]

5. Conclusion

To test this new definition of ethnicity we should go back to the primordialism/constructivism debate to see how it encompasses these two paradigms. Since the ordinary language definition does not emphasize fluidity and endogeneity to external factors, it is obvious that it would not support Collier et al. (2003)'s et al.'s claims that Scotland or other nations and/or ethnic groups could be created when it is economically advantageous to do so or that their salience and/or existence would fluctuate along with other factors (cf. Green 2004). Indeed, such ethnic characteristics as belief in a common descent, history and homeland do not waver over mere years or even decades. However, on the other hand, a belief in common descent can and does change over generations and centuries when, due to intermarriage, old beliefs in common descent are disregarded and new ones are formed: as Van den Berghe (1996: 59) notes, "three or four generations of 25% or more exogamy typically erode both racial and ethnic boundaries, and lead to the formation of new ethnic groups."[23] These phenomena of both ethnic assimilation and creation are easily observable throughout world history, whether in the case of the assimilation of the Banyoro of Buddu (Uganda) into Buganda (also Uganda) over the course of the 19th century,[24] or the creation of a new American nation, separate from Britain, by the time of the American Revolution.

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[22] In this sense one could see Alex Haley's efforts to trace his ancestry back to Africa in *Roots* as exceptional rather than stereotypical. For current attempts by black Americans at tracing back their roots see Journal of Blacks in Higher Education (2001).

[23] Caselli and Coleman (2002: 6) rather argue that assimilation among non-Anglo white immigrants to the US has taken place when newcomers "learn the language well enough that they [can] disguise their ancestry."

[24] Wrigley (1996: 218-219) notes that this "thorough absorption" of the Buddu natives took place within "four generations at the most."

While a belief in common descent can and does change significantly over merely a few generations, a belief in a common history or a common homeland is not likely to change as quickly. In the latter case, one need merely observe the current arduous attempts to create a European (supra)national identity in light of the fact that European history is largely filled with centuries of almost constant internal warfare. (Indeed, one could argue that one byproduct of this search for a common European identity has been the rise in both anti-Islamism and anti-Semitism in Europe over the past years and decades, since a shared Christianity, wars against Muslim invaders and the persecution of Jews are three of the very few aspects of European history common to most European nations.) Even more slow to change, however, is a belief in a common homeland: while the Jews are perhaps most notable in their attachment to their homeland of Israel for the past three millennia, they are by no means anomalous.

While the above might suggest that the ordinary language approach therefore has more in common with primordialists like Van den Berghe than constructivists, it is important to also note that the approach does not disallow a key feature of constructivism, namely the ability to hold multiple identities at the same time. In Scotland, for example, there is nothing wrong with the supposition that people may choose to emphasize their class identity over national (Scottish) or state (British) identity at a given point in time and that their emphases can and will change. The approach even allows for multiple ethnic identities: one need merely observe the nested identities of the traditional residents of the Ssese islands in the Ugandan part of Lake Victoria, who can legitimately identify themselves ethnically as Basesse, Baganda or Bantu, where all three identities qualify as ethnic under the ordinary language approach. Furthermore, in its emphasis on a common history, the ordinary language approach allows for the creation of new identities when formerly unitary ethnic groups or nations are split between states and thereby develop separate

histories, as with the Somalis and their residence under colonial rule in Ethiopia and British, French and Italian Somaliland (cf. Miles and Rochefort 1991).[25]

Thus my definition allows for both change and continuity in a way with which few scholars would disagree – except for those on the extremes of the primordialism/constructivism continuum. It would be nice, of course, if scholars henceforth use this definition in political economy literature. However, regardless of my own personal vanity, it would be helpful if scholars were to use *any* definition of ethnicity, since unfortunately few political economists ever refer to a definition of ethnicity in their work (Green 2004). Therefore, if political economy studies of ethnicity and nationalism are to move forward, scholars must first examine their preconceptions of ethnicity before engaging in the debate on the "interpretivist," "quantoid" and ordinary language approaches. Only then will they be able to avoid repeating the mistakes of previous scholars.

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[25] While many scholars still speak of the Somalis as a singular ethnic group or nation, it is increasingly evident that citizens of the unrecognized country of Somaliland – whose borders corresponde with the former borders of British Somaliland – see themselves as a separate nation from other Somalis. Cf. Jacquin-Berdal (2002: 190).

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