

## Categories, groups and communities

The histories of settler societies are in part stories of displacement, disruption, journey and resettlement in strange places (Pettman 1992: 1). Colonisation disrupts old identities and social relations but forges new ones enabling further relations and categories to be devised. The aboriginalisation of diverse peoples through the process of external and internal colonisation and the ethnicising of later arrivals deemed to be other 'Others' coincides with the making or remaking of 'Britishness' for settler populations. Each of these processes is interwoven within another layering of identity and categorisation. The national identifiers 'Australian', 'Canadian', 'New Zealander', for example, came into being as part of the process of movement and change and the way in which categories like nation, 'race' and ethnicity are constructed and reconstructed by majority populations *in relation with* the aboriginal and immigrant minorities they created. These relations are contained within broader geopolitical and symbolic world orders where neighbouring or more far-flung significant others shape the making and remaking of national identities. To name oneself a New Zealander now, in contrast to past eras, is more likely to be a statement of being not British; to call oneself Canadian is a disavowal of being American. To say what one is, is therefore a statement of what one is not – and the latter may be a somewhat easier task than the former in many circumstances.

Nationality, 'race' and ethnicity are not natural categories or predetermined identities, they are political constructs with shifting memberships and meanings. They are ways of naming oneself and others, of representing identities and interests within different orders of collectivity. Categories are not necessarily groups, and not all groups are communities. This maxim, oft-stated, is still all too easily forgotten. Categories are abstractions, analytical constructs used to describe and classify collections of individuals who may, unwittingly or otherwise, be wrongly attributed groupness. Groups are living, breathing social collectivities

that form out of interaction and awareness. Some groups are sufficiently close-knit and conscious of each other to display a communality of kind. Categories, groups and communities display different layers of relations between 'us' and 'them' the texture of which may vary according to their 'racial', 'ethnic' or 'national' content. The politics of categorisation, group affiliation and communal action is what this book is primarily about. We will readdress definitional matters in more detail at appropriate points in the text. But as a general rule of thumb I will be using 'race' and the more useful word, 'racialisation' (see Miles 1993) to denote, respectively, a category and the process through which that category comes to shape group identifications and relations. To be racialised is to be categorised, initially by others, but possibly subsequently by ourselves, as socially distinct based on imputed biological and/or phenotypical characteristics. One can also be ethnicised, with the locus of control over the process more likely to stem from internal identification than external categorisation, although both sides of the equation need to be considered. To be ethnicised is to identify oneself, and/or be identified by others, as putatively having the same descent, history, sense of place and cultural symbols and attributes. At a minimal level, as Cornell and Hartmann argue, 'an ethnic or racial group is simply a self-conscious ethnic or racial category' (Cornell and Hartmann 1998: 85), with part of that process being a relational awareness of 'us' to 'them'. A community, ethnic or otherwise, implies a deeper solidarism arising out of shared common interests, institutions and cultural mores. If part of the self-consciousness of ethnicity and/or 'race' is focused on the project of establishing or reproducing a form of *political* autonomy, unity and identity, then we are describing nationalism (Hutchinson and Smith 1996: 5). Are nations simply politicised, self-governing ethnic groups, or, far more likely, clusters of such groups? Often but not always should be the reply. Cultural nationalist projects, and we will encounter several in this book, may not have statehood in mind, and even if this aim is pursued, non-ethnic bases for unity may prevail: for example, political national models deliberately designed to knit together a civic-based weave of common (national) sentiments that extend beyond the alternative inclusivities and exclusivities that perception of ethnic and racial differences promotes.

Ethnic, racial and national categorisations have material consequences for those so named and represented. Such categories are also devices for drawing boundaries denoting belonging and not belonging. Resultant borders may be seen as sites of struggle over ideological collectivisation, language formation and the mobilisation of identity

and action (Pettman 1992: 3). Boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are always constructed within and through relations of dominance and subordination, although national, racial and ethnic boundaries are not simply imposed from above, they are resisted, subverted and exploited from below. Both aboriginal and immigrant minorities were named, constructed and reconstituted by the process of state inclusion and exclusion and such minorities, in turn, accepted, modified and contested this process within the dynamics of positioning and counter-positioning.

### **Inclusion and exclusion**

Minority/majority concepts, however defined, point us towards positions of consistent relative disadvantage. Colonisation is always a complex balance of domination and resistance. The colonised are never simply pawns in an overarching 'game' of control. Paradoxically, the process of state formation fosters conditions that furnish even the most powerless of peoples with possibilities for frustrating the plans of the powerful.

As noted earlier, state formation is an essential prerequisite for nation making in settler societies. In common with historical patterns in much of 'the West', the 'modernising' state, as Mann (1984) suggests, seeks to expand what he calls its infrastructural power to a point where it intrudes into most areas of society, enforcing its control by surveillance and direct coercion, over progressively tighter measures of units of population and territorial boundaries. This neatly describes the process of colonial state making in mass settler societies as well as the transition from feudal to capitalist states in the metropolitan experience. Mann also contends that, in contrast to the absolutist states of past eras, the modern (Western) state is infrastructurally strong but despotically weak, particularly in federal coalitions. However, in the early stages of state making in settler societies, neither infrastructural nor despotic strength can be relied upon, particularly where settler elites are isolated from the support of the metropolitan state and where the strength of resistance, within and beyond their own ranks, curtails their desire for imperious control. Hence the tendency for state elites to use policies of co-optation, limited self-regulation or devolution to maintain their ascendancy over class, gender and ethnic subordinates. The 'spaces' created by these policies become the sites of struggle within which ethnic minorities seek to achieve more control over their lives. The pattern of differential political and economic incorporation of minorities depends on the historical distribution of power between ethnic categories/groups and the shape of ethnic stratification. This is likely to vary depending

on whether we are talking about aboriginal minorities formed from internal dispossession, or immigrant minorities created out of the control of new arrivals from outside settler societies.

State policies of inclusion and exclusion and the forms of, often racially ascriptive, categorisation used to facilitate these policies were and are partly designed to solve the problem of what Weaver (1985: 114) calls 'representivity'. All states need to be able to 'name' the groups they deal with and they require 'representatives' to act for those so named. The process of naming and providing a system of representation not only maintained the control of the state over aboriginal and immigrant minorities, but also constructed and incorporated subordinate categories to the point where new political points of resistance were created. The politics of boundary making, to extend two major examples, constructed the Other in a way that transformed diverse autochthonous, stateless societies into 'tribal' and pan-tribal political alliances, and created 'ethnic' and/or 'immigrant' constituencies within or across the array of regional, linguistic, and inwardly stratified populations that entered these societies in increasing numbers, particularly since the Second World War. This historical construction of the Other as dispossessed, colonised aboriginal populations ('Indian', 'Aborigine', 'Maori'), and immigrant 'ethnics', promoted a sense of identity and difference through imposition and opposition (Pettman 1992: 117).

With increased industrialisation, bureaucratisation, and urbanisation the Other, moving in from the margins in a geographical, economic, political and symbolic sense, came into closer proximity and more intense and visible competition with the majority group and other ethnic minorities. The shape and goals of ethnic politics in this type of scenario are multifarious, contingent upon the character of individual and collective agenda within particular societies, but all hinge on linked questions about membership, degrees of participation, and degrees and forms of authority in the political and national community. The use of the word 'community' should alert us to the amorphous character of both concepts. Who or what makes up 'the community' in the senses of membership, participation and control?

### **Culturalisms and colonialisms**

Who are we, and what should we be? These questions are of increasing concern, at least among those with intellectual pretensions to render their thoughts in texts. 'We are all multiculturalists now', answers Nathan Glazer (1997) in his recent analysis of cultural difference in the

United States. The phrase is not meant to imply a wholehearted embrace, there is hardly a lack of contestation about the issue, but, for Glazer, multiculturalism is the latest, and most potent, evocation of a concern to 'manage' cultural diversity. In ethnic political terms, there has been a recent questioning in the United States of what used to be taken as an article of faith – the value of immigration. Calls for immigration restrictions, particularly on migrants from Third World sources, and the denial of citizenship to 'illegal aliens', conjure up remembrances of the restrictive immigration climate of the 1920s, with such memories strengthened by the fact that California legislators are at the forefront of recent debates about 'Asians' and 'Hispanics' in their midst. If immigration debates have an air of *déjà vu* about them, other racial fault-lines are equally familiar. The old sores of slavery and dispossession remain unhealed. African-American and Native American 'shadows of race' (Heller 1997) still fall across the face of a nation and state that espouse '*e pluribus unum*'.

Multiculturalism is also an issue in Britain, although the histories and discourses of immigration and slavery have very different resonances on the other side of the Atlantic. As in the United States multiculturalism is a word that conjures up debate, if that is not too polite a term, about the position of ethnic and racial minorities within state institutions, notably education and social welfare agencies. But Britain is a classic society of *emigration*. Consequently, debates about a multiethnic Britain hardly have the same ring about them when only 5 per cent of Britons are classed as belonging to ethnic minorities. Such persons are primarily in Britain because Britain was in their homeland. The 'Other' is no longer geographically at a distance, but resides within. So the anxieties in British urban heartlands have some ingredients of the enduring American dilemma. Additional, broader questions of sovereignty and national unity, however, signal rather more particularistic forms of unease. Who are 'the British', or should that be 'the English', now that the Empire has unravelled, union with Europe has arrived, and the 'Celtic Fringe' shows persistent and new signs of departing?

Between these American and British benchmarks of waxing and waning metropolises, Australia, Canada and New Zealand portray their own variants of 'culturalist' ideologies and institutional arrangements and we can see them as particularly striking illustrations of multi-culturalisms (note the hyphen and plurality that denote a mix of 'bi' and 'multi' possibilities) deriving from the specificities of these settler and post-settler states. Paradoxically, states that were once quintessential examples of attempts to form new nations based on a narrowly conceived ethnic

core have moved in recent decades to dualistic and/or multiple imaginings of national membership. States that once guarded their monocultural underpinnings with vigilant immigrant gatekeeping and strict control of their indigenes are now officially denouncing assimilation and lauding the merits of cultural pluralism.

Faced with the spiralling climate of demands for expanding social citizenship rights that governments faced after the 1960s, multi-culturalisms became strategies for the regulation and institutionalisation of ethnic conflict. Are these policies and ideologies indicative of innovative ethnic political arrangements, possibly global in scope, that will eventually see the demise of modernist conceptions of citizenship and sovereignty within outdated states? Or are we seeing the peculiarities of post or late modern states within which premodern and modernist ethnic political pathways are still apparent? These questions will loom large in the final section of this book.

In ex-dominion settler states current 'culturalist' struggles reflect a loosening of the ties to societies of origin for majority group members and their internally divided attempts to renew or create 'old' and 'new' nationalisms, while ethnic minorities, aboriginal and immigrant, within the 'new nation' seek to assert greater control over that process by pursuing their own imaginings. This conjunction of ethnic forces shares something of the experience of Britain and the United States. Recent Australian, Canadian and New Zealand nationalisms grew out of a colonial and post-colonial history that, initially, sought an intimacy of British relations but over time veered closer to the American path. With the result, some would argue, that in so doing national imaginings risked replacing the first site of influence and locus of control with the other. Yet the settler and post-settler societies that comprise the core case studies in this book illustrate rather novel forms of ethnic and national frameworks that are in the forefront of attempts to devise social democratic solutions to the ethnic conflicts that beset us. Australia, Canada and New Zealand reflect an array of multi-culturalisms that bear only a partial resemblance to some aspects of American ethnic politics, whilst diverging sharply from much of the British experience.

The recent history of settler societies might imply a decolonising of First Worlds to set beside the Third in the same untangling Empire. Post-settler states are, arguably, post-colonial, having undergone a process of change in which 'majority' groups in ex-dominions finally reached a destination where their American counterparts had long ago arrived. Semi-peripheral histories, however, introduce and maintain ambiguities.

Settler societies occupy an uneasy position between oppressor and oppressed, particularly when the dynamics of internal colonisation are set within its external manifestations. The ex-dominions' role within the colonising enterprise set against their moves for independence placed them in an ambivalent zone between Euro-American metropolises and their less privileged colonies. Postcoloniality and post-colonialism, the former an ongoing process of becoming, the latter an outcome contentiously achieved (Boehmer 1995: 3), are therefore beset with delicate counterpoints depending on whether we are examining, for example, aboriginal or post-imperial diasporic nationalisms. Are the self-determinative aims of aboriginal peoples in any way reconcilable with the national imaginings of the ancestors of those settlers who dispossessed them? Not forgetting, in Canada, 'First Nation' quests for 'sovereign' status are complicated by the ethnoregional ambitions of Quebec. And where do immigrant minorities fit into these national, and possibly statist, visions?

### **Citizenship and sovereignty**

Such questions strike at the heart of current debate about citizenship and sovereignty in nation-states increasingly influenced by global forces. How can 'the nation', as an ideological framework utilised by dominant elites and national minorities, be sustained when the traditional vehicle for its dissemination, the state, is being reconstructed and rolled back; when the culminations of historically embedded ethnic conflicts are openly displayed; when globalisation threatens, some say dissolves, any sense of bounded community and state authority? Perhaps new conceptions of citizenship within and across nation-states can provide innovative avenues for new forms of social democracy: or do they still reflect trajectories of historical inequalities embedded in the frameworks of current ethnic politics?

Ethnic and national categorisations, alongside gender and class distinctions, have been persistent bases for inclusion/exclusion within a variety of citizenship models across space and time. Elites, often with passive or active acquiescence from the masses, have used immigration controls, in tandem with differential citizenship rights and obligations, for filtering or excluding persons. The degree of cultural and/or physical distance from majority group norms has been a common yardstick for rules of admittance, but immigration policies and practices in settler states have always been constrained by internal political and market considerations and international geopolitical and trading relations.

But citizenship, as this book shows, is not only about movement between international territories. The rights and obligations of aboriginal populations, or explaining their absence within settler and post-settler societies, also claim our attention. Discussion of aboriginality extends debates about immigration and citizenship into questions about other areas of political and territorial confinement and movement and raises profound issues about communal rights (and responsibilities). Aboriginal peoples have successfully asserted their special, reparative and collective rights as 'first nations' within settler states, while, at the same time, they are individual members of society, sharing much in common with other citizens.

Legal and political/civic rights and duties, relating to suffrage or military service for example, and the degree of access to property and labour markets, education provision and social welfare, are important examples of sites of contested material rights and obligations for ethnic minorities, aboriginal and immigrant. Equally salient is how citizenship status affects the symbolic place of immigrant groups and aboriginal peoples in the wider polity and 'nation' (Breton 1984). Citizenship is (thus) both an instrument and an object of intersecting material and symbolic closure (Brubaker 1992: 23). This conception has general utility in studying ethnic politics *per se*, but once again the peculiarity of settler and post-settler states and nations is brought into focus.

Turner, for example, argues that whilst citizenship should be seen as a quality of modernity in all 'Western' states, including 'dominion societies' modelled, at least initially, on the political and legal institutions of 'the mother country', these offspring had their own unique characteristics (1986: 67). They did not follow the broad path of civil, political and social rights mapped out by T. H. Marshall in his seminal, if still much debated, evolutionary model of British citizenship. Marshall, writing in an era of frozen nationalisms and domestic welfare expansion (Joppke 1998), saw British citizenship *in situ* as a progressive evolution of rights protecting the (male) working classes from the vagaries of capitalism. Settler capitalism, at least within the areas of the British Empire we shall be concerned with, was forged in the heat of meetings between non-feudal indigenes and post-feudal settlers and the speed of transformation contrasted with the slower changes in Europe. Class struggles, war, migration and egalitarian ideologies were still, as Turner (*ibid.*) suggests, major components of the modernisation of both metropolis and satellites, but the weighting and content of these factors in the contest for real, substantial citizenship varied in the core and semi-periphery. While recent post-settler state experiments in seeking

## 24 *The Politics of Ethnicity in Settler Societies*

pluralistic solutions to the confluence of aboriginal, immigrant and majority group nationalisms have their own distinctive flavour, despite the increasingly global links that extend beyond nation-state borders.

The above themes suggest that in order to go forward we need, at first, to go back. The business of seeking solutions to ethnic conflicts in post-settler states is as much a question of unfinished as it is of moving onwards.