dependence and monitoring mechanisms[20] that operate in a fashion wholly consistent with rational choice principles. Hence, I suspect that a close reading of the evidence about religious, ethnic and racial assimilation would reveal that rational choice theory does a reasonably good job of accounting for gross differences in inter-group preferences.

This would be significant, for it would do away with a persistent criticism of rational choice analyses: namely that to be falsifiable such explanations have to specify individual preferences *ex ante*, but that in practice they are always specified *ex post*. There seems to be no intrinsic reason why group preferences cannot be inferred from detailed case-studies, and then employed for the purposes of prediction.

[A rational choice approach to race and ethnic relations', in D. Mason and J. Rex (eds.), *Theories of Race and Ethnic Relations* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), 268–77.]

MICHAEL BANTON

16 The Actor's Model of Ethnic Relations

The theoretical approach which I favour starts not from any prior conception of the ethnic group or the nation, but from the human individual, socialized and optimizing, and belonging to more than one social group. For this purpose I take an imaginary individual, Husin Ali, a clerk working in 1989 for a multinational engineering firm in Petalingjaya, a suburb of Kuala Lumpur.[1] A sample of residents in that locality was told that Husin Ali had been patronizing Mr Ah Kow's grocery shop, noted for its cheapness and nearest to his house. He had been told that someone called Ahmad was about to open a second grocery shop in the neighbourhood. Respondents were asked whether they thought that Husin Ali would transfer his custom to the new shop. The research assumed that the names of the three individuals would be taken as signs that Husin Ali and Ahmad were Malays and Ah Kow a Chinese Malaysian. Some respondents, so it was thought, would expect that Husin Ali would want to shop with Ahmad because he was a fellow Malay, while others would expect him to shop wherever the goods were cheapest.

There were two main reasons for expecting Husin Ali to change to Ahmad. Firstly, the possibility that the personal satisfaction he would derive from helping a co-ethnic would outweigh any greater price of the goods bought. Secondly, the possibility that he would be influenced by a concern for the judgements of his peers, who would approve his patronizing a co-ethnic and disapprove of his shopping with a Chinese Malaysian when he could quite easily have helped Ahmad.

There are some circumstances in which virtually all Malays will feel bound to align themselves with their co-ethnics in dealings with Chinese Malaysians,

such as in situations of political competition, and some circumstances in which an individual will have an unconstrained choice whether or not to interpret the situation in ethnic terms. This requires us to recognize the existence in Malaysia of ethnic roles, that is, of relationships in which the parties' conduct is governed by shared beliefs about their mutual rights and obligations.[2] As hypothesized, respondents were found to be divided in their predictions about whether Husin Ali would see shopping for groceries as a relationship governed by ethnic roles. One finding of this research was that in many circumstances what we, perhaps unwisely, called ethnic loyalty, was a less important determinant of Malay alignment than my coworker expected. At a time when ethnic nationalism is often misrepresented as resembling a living force, it is important to note our finding that self-interest in saving money or gaining social status, and sentiments of obligation to a friend, neighbour or fellow worker, were often more influential than ethnic identification.

Having considered Husin Ali's personal sentiments, we can move to a further variable: whether his relations with his peers were competitive or cooperative. Since we did not cover this in the Petalingjaya research, I take an example from a very different location, concerning language use in Catalonia, as presented by David Laitin.[3]

Industrial growth in the Catalan-speaking region has encouraged the immigration of workers speaking Castilian Spanish. The Catalan government promoted the regional language although some Catalans preferred that their children should learn in primary school to speak Castilian, as it is a world language and the official language of the state. The immigrants might have been expected to resist programmes favouring Catalan. A possible explanation of why they did not resist is offered by Laitin's ingenious application of game theory. Taking first the position of the immigrant worker seeking a strategy that will enable his or her children to climb the social ladder, he concludes that a parent will envisage his or her child as having to compete with the children of other immigrant parents. Will they see that their children learn Catalan? If they do, then the first parent's child will be at a disadvantage unless he or she has also learned it. Laitin has noticed that the alternatives assume the form of the game known as the prisoner's dilemma. Likely payoffs depend upon the decisions of the actor's peer. Assigning scores to the various outcomes if the actor chooses an assimilation or a cultural maintenance strategy, and the competitor does likewise, he provides a highly plausible interpretation of why they were content for their children to attend Catalan-speaking schools.

This model requires considerable elaboration because in the prisoner's dilemma the two prisoners are unable to communicate with one another. If they could communicate and agree upon a common strategy they might do better. Laitin's application of the model assumes that the Castilian-speaking

immigrants chose to compete as individuals rather than as a group, in the well belief that the pay-offs would be the greater this way. An immigrant might well believe that he or she would be better off were all immigrants to get together and compete as a group. Someone would have to organize the group, since others would find it in their interest to be free-riders. The prospective organizer would then have to contend with the Hechter equation.[4] Would the benefits of collective action be sufficient to compensate him or her for the effort involved in organizing it?

As Laitin observes, immigrant families often want their children to be introduced to the cultural traditions of their familial homeland. They are accustomed to particular rituals and ceremonies as ways of marking the stages of the life cycle. Other peoples' rituals do not have the same meaning for them. They want to maintain their own rituals, ceremonies and fiestas as ways of marking the phases of the calendar. Who among them is to assume the burden of organizing such events? My point is that there is an inter-relation between the capacity of a group to compete collectively in the public sphere, such as taking up a stand regarding language maintenance, and their collective organization in the private sphere. As Mancur Olson[5] has taught us, collective action is often a by-product of an organization established for some other purpose. A group which has its own private festivities will be more solidary in its dealings with other groups, so one way of promoting group competition is to begin in the private sphere.

The position in Catalonia suggests that there may be a contrast in this respect between an immigrant group and the settled population. The immigrants may have come alone or as nuclear families, disposed to compete on an individual basis. The settled population is more likely to see them as an entity and to respond cooperatively to their presence. Collective action among the settled population could therefore be subject to lower costs than among the immigrants, and less vulnerable to free-riding. Malays would dispute that such a conclusion can be applied in their country because they see Chinese Malaysians as cooperating more successfully with one another than they are able to do. (Their perception may not be accurate, and may reflect only a general tendency for individuals to perceive a competitor group as more cooperative than their own.[6]

These accounts of Petalingjaya and Catalonia point to a process by which ethnic boundaries are often dissolved. Some situations continue to evoke ethnic alignment, but the pattern of social relations changes with the intro-duction of new relationships, such as those deriving from motoring, the market for consumer goods, paying taxes, using new technology, and many kinds of employment, which are seen as independent of ethnic definitions. Twenty-eight years ago I argued that it can be helpful to conceive of roles as arrayed on a scale. At one end are basic roles, like those of gender, which are relevant in many or most situations. At the other end are those roles which

are largely independent of other relationships, such as those created by leisure time pursuits. The scale records the relative frequency with which a particular role is socially relevant.[7] In circumstances of ethnic tension, such as those of the former Yugoslavia, ethnic roles that have been pushed up to the middle of the scale have been pushed up to the basic end.[8] At other times ethnic roles may move towards the independent end and because other definitions have become relatively more potent. Ethnic definitions can lose ground to other social definitions, such as those of religion, class, nation or friendship. They can also weaken if self-interest is allowed greater legitimacy at the expense of social obligation. Change in ethnic relations often comes about not because people change the value they place upon association with co-ethnics, but because they change their ideas about which relationships are to be governed by ethnic norms. The research in Petalingjaya suggests that the consumer market can be a solvent of ethnic particularism.

Actor and observer models

A name, or a person's appearance, can be a sign of a role that person is expected to play. How do we decide whether a name or some other feature of a person is a sign of an ethnic role? How is it to be distinguished from a sign of a national role? To answer these questions it is best to begin by comparing what we think of conventionally as ethnic and national roles with other ascribed roles, such as those of race and gender.

There is no way in which we can tell *a priori* the extent to which respon-dents in Petalingjaya took the names Ah Kow and Ahmad as signs of ethnic, national and religious roles. This is an empirical question. The significance given to a name or other attribute will vary from one subject to another and from one situation to another. The social scientist, however, seeks criteria for distinguishing ethnic from national and religious significance in empirical research. To sort out what is entailed, it is best to begin by differentiating two kinds of models of the social structure: those of the actor and the observer. The resident of Petalingjaya rarely employs any concept of ethnicity. He or she uses a practical language embodying proper names, such as Malay, Chinese, and Indian. Anyone who speaks this language knows that persons assigned to these categories vary in their cultural distinctiveness. In the languages they use, the costume they wear, the use they make of their leisure, etc, some are more culturally distinctive, and in this sense, more 'ethnic', than many of the adolescents who listen to the same pop music, eat similar foods, and mix readily. Some Malays may perceive some Chinese as being more orientated towards China, and in this sense more 'national'. Some Malays, too, are more concerned with the promotion of Islam, and may consider a difference in ethnic origins unimportant by comparison with profession of the faith. There have been similarities in the former Yugoslavia

where some have seen others as Serbs and Croats without employing any concepts of ethnicity, nationality or religion. It is the observer who decides that a particular attitude is to be labelled ethnic, national or religious. It is also the observer who notes that group boundaries are more easily maintained when they incorporate elements from nationality and religion as well as ethnic descent.

An actor's model is one which he or she uses to navigate a course through daily life, helping to identify the shallow water, the best channels, and the likely reactions of other vessels. An observer's model uses abstract concepts like that of ethnicity in place of proper names; it seeks to distinguish ethnic, national and religious attributes in order to compare relations in Petalingjaya or Bosnia-Herzegovina with some other locality, and in this way learn about the causes of tolerance and intolerance. The observer looks for regularities of which the actors are unaware or about which actors have insufficient information. In so doing, the observer often comes to mistaken conclusions which take a long time to clear up.

One such confusion was that of race. It makes no sense to distinguish ethnic from racial relations in Petalingjaya or the former Yugoslavia. Racial theories were advanced in the mid-nineteenth century as observer models. They asserted that underlying the actors' models of their social relations there were zoological determinants which the actors ought to learn about and take as guides to policy. When many yielded to the apparent plausibility of these theories, in Europe, North America, and regions influenced by them, the theories became constituents of actors' models of their societies. We now recognize the theories to have been ill-founded and pernicious. There would be benefits could we stop using the idiom of race, but this is not a practical prescription. Firstly, race is too important in many actor models, and secondly we need the word 'race' as part of the rationale for all the legislation, international and national, which has been designed to combat discrimination based on ideas of race.

In English-language usage ethnic groups are commonly regarded as sub-divisions of racial groups. A physical feature is taken to indicate that an individual is to be assigned to a racial category while a cultural feature is taken as a sign that the individual is a member of an ethnic group. So a nation, like perhaps the United States, may be seen as divided into racial groups which in turn are divided into ethnic groups. In Petalingjaya and the former Yugoslavia the nation has been divided into groups which the actors identify by proper names but which observers have called either racial or ethnic, though contemporary opinion prefers the latter. These groups are constituted by both inclusive and exclusive processes. Malays, Chinese and Indians in Petalingjaya wish to preserve some of the cultural characteristics of their groups, and share a fellow-feeling with group members. These are inclusive processes. The non-members are regarded, and treated, as different by others

in certain circumstances; this is exclusion. It appears that in Bosnia some people have been forced by Serbian politics into ethnic categories, becoming Bosnian Serbs instead of Serb Bosnians, and forced to regard their ethnic identity as more important relative to other identities than they used to do. Whereas previously they could have placed obligations to a friend, neighbour or fellow worker before an obligation of shared ethnicity alone, they have been forced by processes which we do not yet fully understand, to change their priorities. If so, this is a more striking example of the importance that exclusive processes can acquire.[9] [....]

The signs of ethnicity

Though both language and costume can be signs of ethnic self-assignment, they differ in their social implications. We need always to remember that no-one can hear, see, smell, taste or touch ethnicity. As an influence upon behaviour it is something we can know only through the things that are taken as signs of it. Personal names are frequently interpreted as signs of ethnicity. They are particularly open to manipulation, in that a person may change a name to make it less distinctive, or, indeed to make it more distinctive, as many African Americans have adopted African names or, if members of the Nation of Islam, have taken X as a family name.

In reviewing the signs of ethnicity, it is useful to start with the definition of ethnic group adopted by the House of Lords in the case of *Mandla v Dowell Lee*.[10] Notice how, in Lord Fraser's speech, he distinguished between the factors constituting an ethnic group, and the signs by which it is to be identified. He said that for a group to constitute itself an ethnic group for the purposes of the 1976 Act, it must 'regard itself, and be regarded by others, as a distinct community by virtue of certain characteristics'. It must have 'a long shared history, of which the group is conscious as distinguishing it from other groups, and the memory of which it keeps alive'. So whether it has the requisite consciousness is signified by its members' behaviour. Such a group must also have 'a cultural tradition of its own, including family and social customs and manners'. Again, the definition specifies both the necessary condition and the signs for deciding whether or not a group meets it. Certain other characteristics, of geographical origin or descent, language, literature, religion and size, though not essential, may be relevant. They, too, may be signs of the presence of an ethnic group. While this definition is based upon the meaning that the word ethnic has acquired in English, it might be employable in other cultures too.

From studies of discrimination in applications for employment we have learned that accent, address and birthplace may be taken as signs that an applicant belongs to a minority. Studies in Belfast have also illuminated the process of 'telling', the ways in which people 'tell' whether someone else is

Catholic or Protestant.[11] In principle, the processes are no different from those by which people assess the class status of those they encounter. The features which can be taken as signs of social position are varied, and it will often be impossible to tell if the ethnic or the national sign has been influential. This is one of the reasons why empirical research should not depend upon any assumption that the actor and the observer share the same conception of what is ethnic or national.

['Modelling ethnic and national relations', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 17: 1 (1994), 2–7, 9–10.]