

²⁰*Ibid.*, 210.

²¹Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985) 293.

Critique

Ethnic Studies is generally viewed as a minor program in the academy, lacking research philosophy and methodology. Consequently, scholars who attempt research concerning peoples of color focus on the “group”: their social history, migration patterns, political and economic development, educational attainment, and lifestyle. Social science disciplinary guidelines are the usual framework. John Hatfield’s “Identity as Theory and Method for Ethnic Studies” provides a basis for truly understanding ethnicity.

Hatfield stresses “identity” as a key for understanding the nature of the human character: That is,

The interaction of people who are self-consciously engaged in exploring their lives biologically, culturally, and personally, and the articulation of the boundaries at which these interactions take place, determines the scope and content of ethnic studies.

Hatfield emphasizes how the interrelationship of the biological, socio/cultural, psycho/personal components are crucial for ethnic studies theory and method. Although Frederik Barth emphasized the nature of ethnic group members moving across ethnic boundaries depending on their social situation,¹ Hatfield’s specific focus on personal identity provides a method for comprehending how “human beings move from biologically determined particularity through cultural nurturing and identity, to personal and self-conscious transcendence.” By placing emphasis on identity within a program devoted to understanding the complexities associated with ethnicity and ethnic groups, Hatfield begins to explore the soul of human development and choice. Personal liberation within the context of understanding oneself in relationship to society, familial inheritance, and group alignments bridge university disciplines and broaden the scope of ethnic studies.

The responsibility of ethnic studies programs is to provide a forum for dialogue and interaction as a method for enhancing and generating the self-discovery process. One does not have to give up heritage, identity, and pride to be an active participant in “the mainstream” or within the “superculture.” Through the process of dialogue and interaction, students become aware of “who they are” in relationship to society, discover how the various components of identity shape their responses and choices, and establish bridges for cross cultural understanding.

Two autobiographies illustrate the significance of Hatfield’s article—Maxine Hong Kingston’s *A Woman Warrior* and Richard Rodriguez’s *Hunger for Memory*.² Rodriguez’s work reflects a denial of Chicano heritage and identity in order to fit into the public role of the “scholarship boy.” By suppressing his private/personal and biological self and only opting for the “white” socio/cultural mainstream, Rodriguez finds limited success and suffers from not fitting into either world. He creates and lives with the dualistic mental image that he must be in one world or the other, no choice, no alternative, and at the same time can neither recapture his “private” Mexican past nor function in “white” society.

Kingston, conversely, uses language and her bilingual voice—Chinese/English—to illustrate power and liberation through self-definition. The mythic vision of “the Woman Warrior” in Chinese folk tradition becomes Kingston’s reality as she transcends ethnic boundaries and fights for her English voice outside the Chinese family. By discovering aspects of her identity, the biological, psycho/personal (her ability to function in both worlds), and her socio/cultural component (integrating her Chinese background and her American education), she uses language, her voice, as a tool for integrating aspects of her identity. Unlike Rodriguez, Kingston bridges the cultural gaps forced by using English and going to American schools by maintaining connections through Chinese language to her Chinese heritage. By interweaving the three components of identity discussed by Hatfield, Kingston personifies liberation.

The response to “identity” is central to Kingston’s and Rodriguez’s autobiographies. The examples illustrate how identity becomes the focal point for creating a methodology and a starting point for understanding ethnicity through the eyes of the beholder rather than from an external point of view. Through personal voice and a self-defined language, personal liberation is generated. Hatfield’s theory and method focusing on identity is a powerful tool for ethnic studies where personal and cultural liberation are the goals.

—Barbara Hiura

Notes

¹Fredrik Barth, ed. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. (Bergen-Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1969).

²Maxine Hong Kingston. *A Woman Warrior*. (New York: Random House, 1975); Richard Rodriguez. *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1982).

Critique

John Hatfield's discussion of identity and ethnicity in an increasingly wider, abstract, and problematical context is an extended definition of the current dilemma. I suspect Hatfield intends to offer an essentially optimistic statement, but for many readers questions and doubts may remain, if not predominate.

For example, Hatfield's citation of Higham on the relationship between the Copernican revolution and racism reminds us that every revolution provokes reactionary impulses in the cultural and political body. Is it inevitable that the forces of revolution and transcendence will prevail? Similarly, Hatfield offers the observation that pluralism and its fragmentation of the whole and assimilation and its elimination of the parts seem unnecessarily messy and neat, respectively. Further, adversarial relationships between ethnic cultures and the "superculture" seem endemic in their interaction. But while Higham's "pluralistic integration" may be the *tertium quid*, history suggests that what usually "unites us as a nation" is less often Copernican vision than the intolerance of international antagonism and hostility—that is, war or our fear of it.

In fact, Hatfield makes us aware that culture-transcending shared experience—the enabling stuff of the ideal macro-culture—is presently identifiable only in negative terms; the "common culture" is a fiction that exists most concretely in terms of what it is not. We know that it is not the shared experience of "marketplace [American] society," the ubiquitous popular culture of the electronic media, big business, and government. We know it is not the "national superculture" life of higher