



Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks (Oxford Studies in Culture and Politics)

By Andreas Wimmer

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Why does ethnicity matter in certain societies and contexts but not in others? Drawing on the boundary-making perspective first championed by anthropologist Fredrick Barth, Andreas Wimmer introduces a comparative analytic of ethnic group formation. He analyzes how and why ethnic boundaries are sometimes associated with inequality and exclusion, with political salience and public debate, with enduring loyalty and thick identities, while in other cases ethnicity and race do not structure the allocation of resources, invite little political passion, and represent only secondary aspects of individual identity. Wimmer argues that three key mechanisms influence the dynamics and consequences of ethnic boundary-making: institutional incentives, the distribution of power between individuals, and the reach of pre-existing social networks.

Cautioning against seeing ethnicity wherever one looks, Wimmer argues for disentangling ethnic and non-ethnic group formation processes and proposes a set of research designs, analytical principles, and strategies of interpretation appropriate for the task. Several qualitative and quantitative studies then apply this agenda: on how local residents in immigrant neighborhoods draw symbolic boundaries against each other, on the ethnic and racial composition of friendship networks, and how ethnic closure influences cultural values. By overcoming essentialist approaches to ethnicity while avoiding the pitfalls of excessive constructivism, *Ethnic Boundary Making* offers a new perspective on a topic of vital interest to sociologists, anthropologists, and ethnic studies scholars.

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By *Andreas Wimmer*

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Editorial Review

Review

"*Ethnic Boundary Making* 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, Wimmer explains the implications of his findings for a wide range of theories and debates in sociology and beyond, engaging with the best and the brightest in the multi-disciplinary literatures on ethno-racial divisions, immigration and citizenship, and group formation. This ambitious book will surely leave its mark and be widely debated." -Michele Lamont, author of *The Dignity of Working Men: Morality and the Boundaries of Race, Class, and Immigration*

"*Ethnic Boundary Making* summarizes a vast research program on the topic. Wimmer problematizes what others have taken for granted by showing that ethnicity is neither pre-determined and immutable, nor entirely constructed and malleable. In the end, ethnic boundaries reflect the interaction between the power of privileged groups seeking to legitimize their position and those of subordinate ones to alter, though various strategies, their own. Wimmer's vast erudition and command of empirical materials worldwide makes the book both a valuable reference point and worth arguing with." -Alejandro Portes, Howard Harrison and Gabrielle Snyder Beck Professor of Sociology, Princeton University

"This is one of the most exciting books I have read in any social science in two decades. It offers a root-and-branch revamping of the constructivist paradigm in the study of ethnic division, infusing a field marred by national myopia and cultural parochialism, rampant moralism and stale political posturing with conceptual rigor, empirical vigor, historical depth and geographic breadth. Mating theoretical insights from Barth, Moerman and Bourdieu, Wimmer elaborates a lucid 'comparative analytic of how and why ethnicity matters.' He demonstrates its merits by taking us on a dazzling world tour of salient cases, past and present, and he rolls out sophisticated research designs suited to disentangling ethnic from other dynamics of social structuration. *Ethnic Boundary Making* marks a signal advance in the study of inequality, identity, and group formation, and it will cement Wimmer's place at the forefront of analytic sociology." -Loïc Wacquant, author of *Urban Outcasts*

"The sweeping theoretical ambition of *Ethnic Boundary Making* is innovative and exciting; Wimmer's analytic framework enables the systematized accumulation of knowledge about ethnic boundary processes from the most diverse contexts, promising genuine theoretical advancement of this field." -*American Journal of Sociology*

About the Author

Andreas Wimmer is Professor of Sociology and Faculty Associate of Politics at Princeton University. His research is aimed at understanding the dynamics of nation-state formation, ethnic boundary making and

political conflict from a comparative perspective. He is author of *Nationalist Exclusion and Ethnic Conflicts: Shadows of Modernity* (Cambridge, 2002) and *Waves of War: Nationalism and Ethnic Politics in the Modern World* (Cambridge 2012) and his articles have been published by the American Journal of Sociology, the American Sociological Review, World Politics, Sociological Theory and Ethnic and Racial Studies, among others. Professor Wimmer's work has won best article awards from the Comparative Historical, Political, Cultural, and Theory sections of the American Sociological Association as well as the Thyssen Prize for Best Article in the Social Sciences.

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