

Ethnicity and Identity Politics

Spring 2008
Anthropology 479
McGraw 145

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[H]ave you not observed that it is characteristic of a well-bred dog to behave with the utmost gentleness to those it is used to and knows, but to be savage to strangers... it is a trait that shows real discrimination and a truly philosophical nature ... for the dog distinguishes the sight of a friend and foe simply by knowing one and not knowing the other.

(Plato, "The Republic")

And now what will become of us without Barbarians?--

Those people were some sort of a solution.

(C.P. Cavafy, "Waiting for the Barbarians")

Course Overview:

The most baffling aspect of ethnicity is that while ethnic sentiments and movements gain ground rapidly within the international arena, the claim that ethnicity does not exist in any objective sense is also receiving increasing credence within the academic community. How can something thought "not to exist" have such profound consequences in the real world? In lay understandings ethnicity is believed to be a "natural" disposition of humanity. If so, why does ethnicity mean different "things" in different places? Anthropology has much to contribute to a greater understanding of this perplexing phenomenon. After all, the defining criterion for ethnic groups is that of cultural distinctiveness. This course introduces students to some of the major theoretical approaches to ethnicity, primarily but not exclusively within anthropology. Through a careful reading of ethnographic case studies we will explore the relationship of ethnicity to culture, ethnicity to nation and ethnicity to state. We will also examine that relation between history and ethnicity, history conceptualized as methodology (as in a historical anthropological approach to ethnicity), as discipline (as in the complicity between the production of certain forms of knowledge and ethnic movements) and as sociohistorical process (the persistence and transformation of empirical contexts through time). The course also engages the more recent literature on the formation of identities at centers and margins within national and transnational contexts. We will attempt to unpack terms gaining increasing (academic?) significance such as "whiteness", "creole," "diasporic,"

“border, ” and “third space” identities in an effort to understand emergent processes of identity formation.

Course Requirements:

1. Class Presentation based on reading for one particular week. However, all students are **required** to do the assigned readings for each week and formulate two questions/comments. These comments will not be graded but will be used to facilitate class discussion. Students will be called upon randomly to express their views on the assigned subjects for a particular week.
2. Oral presentation of final paper.
3. Final paper (20 pages) on a topic that addresses ethnic identity politics and which integrates readings and discussions in class. **Due: May 5.**

Required Texts:

1. Appadurai, Arjun (1996) **Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization**, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
2. Barth, Frederik (1969) **Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference**, Boston: Little Brown and Company .
3. Fanon, Frantz, (1967) **Black Skin White Masks**.
4. Frost, Linda (1988) **Never One Nation**.
5. Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger, eds., (1983) **The Invention of Tradition**, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
6. Lavie, Smadar and Ted Swedenberg (1996) **Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity**, Durham and London: Duke University Press.
7. Lipsitz, George (1998) **The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics**, Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
8. Lowe, Lisa (1996) **Immigrant Acts**. Duke University Press.
9. Povinelli, Elizabeth (2002) **The Cunning of Recognition**. Duke University Press.
10. Trouillot, Michel-Rolph (1995) **Silencing The Past: Power and the Production of History**, Boston: Beacon Press.

[The Books are available at the Campus Store. Articles are available on Blackboard]

Course Calendar

Jan. 24 Introduction

A Theoretical Overview

Jan. 31 *Primordialism*

Geertz, Clifford (1973) "The Integrative Revolution" in **The Interpretation of Cultures**.

Isaacs, Harold (1974) "Basic Group Identity: The Idols of the Tribe." **Ethnicity** 1: 15-42. [This is also Chapter 1 of his book with the same title]

Shils, Edward (1957) "Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties." **British Journal of Sociology** 8: 130-145.

Weber, Max (1978) "Ethnic Groups" in **Economy and Society**, vol. 1, pp.385-398.

Feb. 7 *Situationalism*

Leach, Edmund (1964) "Introduction: The Problem and its Setting" in **Political Systems of Highland Burma**, Boston, Beacon Press.

Barth, Frederik (1969) **Ethnic Groups and Boundaries** [Introduction and Chapters by Eidheim, Haaland, and Barth]

Appadurai, Arjun (1996) "Life after Primordialism" in **Modernity at Large** [Chapter 7].

Feb. 14 *Ethnicity and Power: Social Classification of Difference and Inequality*

Vincent, Joan (1974) "The Structuring of Ethnicity." **Human Organization** 33: 375-9.

Munasinghe, Viranjini (1997) "Culture Creators and Culture Bearers: The Interface Between Race and Ethnicity in Trinidad, in **Transforming Anthropology** Vol. 6 (1&2): 72-86.

Williams, Brackette (1989) "A Class Act: Anthropology and the Race to Nation Across Ethnic Terrain." **Annual Review of Anthropology** 18: 401-44.

Verdery, Kathryn (1994) "Ethnicity, Nationalism and the State: Ethnic Groups and Boundaries Past and Present" in **The Anthropology of Ethnicity**. Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis.

Drummond, Lee (1980) "The Cultural Continuum: A Theory of Intersystems." **Man** 15 (2): 352-374.

Ethnicity vis-à-vis History; Culture; Nation; and State

- Feb. 21 Trouillot, Michel-Rolph (1995) **Silencing the Past** [Chapters 1 and 3]
Hobsbawm, Eric and Terence Ranger eds., (1983) **The Invention of Tradition** [Introduction and Chapter 7]
Munasinghe, Viranjini (2008) “Foretelling Ethnicity in Trinidad: The post Emancipation ‘Labor Problem’” in **Clio/Anthropos: Exploring the Boundaries between History and Anthropology**. Edited by Eric Tagliacozzo and Andrew Willford, Stanford University Press.
Handler, Richard (1985) “On Dialogue and Destructive Analysis: Problems In Narrating Nationalism and Ethnicity.” **Journal of Anthropological Research** vol. 41 (2): 171-182.
- Feb 28 Fanon, Frantz (1967) **Black Skin White Masks**.
- March 6 Frost, Linda (1988) **Never One Nation: Freaks, Savages, and Whiteness in U.S. Popular Culture, 1850–1877**.
- March 13 Lowe, Lisa (1996) **Immigrant Acts** [Chapters 1,2 and 3]
Lipsitz, George (1998) **The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics**. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. [Introduction, and Chapters 1,4,5 and 7]
- March 20 Spring Break
- Postcolonial perspectives: Identities in Centers, Margins and Borderzones*
- March 27 Stoler, Ann Laura (1995) “Cultivating Bourgeois bodies and racial selves” in **Race and the Education of Desire**.
Stoler, Ann Laura (1997) “Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: in **Tensions of Empire**.
Munasinghe, Viranjini (2005) “Narrating a nation through mixed bloods,” **Social Analysis** 49 (2): 155-163.
[Sara Ahmed’s essay’s relevance about the connection between knowledge and the stranger is fitting here]
- April 3 Lavie, Smadar and Ted Swedenburg (1996) **Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity**. [Introduction]
Povinelli, Elizabeth. **The Cunning of Recognition**. [Introduction and Chapter 4]
- April 10 Presentations
- April 17 No class—AAAS Conference

April 24	Presentations
May 1	Presentations
May 5	Final Paper Due