

2: ETHNIC IDENTITY I

Read: Gladney 1-24
Nagel 3-13
Eriksen 1-22

- I. Ethnicity as a topic of study
 - A. We're studying it partly because interest in ethnic and national identity has surged
 1. Scholarship on it has increased
 2. The topic is certainly much more important in the world than 15 years ago
 - B. As Eriksen points out, many people felt that ethnicity and nationalism were incompatible with "modernity" and would disappear
 1. An image of all of us becoming a global village ruled by a body like the UN (what was it called in "Star Wars"?)
- II. Why didn't ethnic and national loyalties continue to diminish, as everyone predicted?
 - A. Most present-day conflict involves ethnic groups one way or another
 1. In 1991: 35 of the 37 major armed conflicts were internal and most of them could plausibly be described as ethnic conflicts
 - a. Some conflicts are non-violent (Quebecois independence movement)
- III. Explanations:
 - A. Structural factor 1: Colonialism
 1. Breakup of colonial holdings during the 20th century
 - a. Newly independent nations tend to be culturally diverse
 - b. Examples of Papua New Guinea; India, all sub-Saharan African countries
 - c. The colonial powers deliberately created colonies that divided up the territories belonging to pre-existing social/cultural groups

- d. A divide and conquer strategy
 - 1) Look at a political map of Africa (showing the countries)
 - a) Then look at a map of tribes and kingdoms
 - 2) There's no congruence—on purpose
 - 3) Indonesia is the best current example—an archipelago (collection of islands) that's highly culturally diverse

2. **Empire**

- a. The European colonial powers—Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands—were building empires
- b. Empires by definition are multicultural
 - 1) They're made up of diverse conquered peoples
- c. Empire-builders have cared about building a strong **state**
 - 1) But they've not been interested in building a strong **nation**
 - a) In the sense of a citizenry that sees itself as one people, one culture, one language, etc.
 - b) In fact, empires have worked against colonized peoples being able to foster nationalist sentiment
- d. This is why so many newly independent countries have found it extremely difficult to unify the populations within their borders
 - 1) Example 1: a very bloody civil war in Nigeria in 1967-68: Biafrans wanted to secede
 - 2) Example 2: Sun Yat Sen's quest for building a nation (in Gladney)
 - a) He wanted China to cast off the yoke of external colonialism—the British empire
 - b) And unite against the ruling Manchus, also an empire
- e. So, Empires are *states*, but they aren't *nations*

- 1) The fact that several empires were quite successful for a considerable amount of time demonstrates that they did not need to be a nation
- f. **DISCUSS:** was the U.S. ever an empire?
3. Other kinds of ethnic conflict also stem from history of colonization
 - a. Religious conflict in Ireland
 - 1) Ireland was the first British colony—prior to establishing the 13 American colonies
 - 2) Ireland is still living out that colonial legacy today
 - b. The same for Indonesia—horrific religious conflict has occurred in that country
- B. Structural factor 2: how post-colonial states have been reconfigured
 1. The populations that were “tribes,” “aboriginals”, etc. in the colony, are now considered “ethnic minorities”
 2. Post-colonial states have tried to assimilate, or at least control these internal populations that are distinct in some respect
 - a. These populations usually resist
 - 1) Example: the Kurds resisting the states of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey
 - 2) Gladney mentions that the Chinese state is very concerned about members of its “nationalities” in regions near China’s borders—fears of separatism
- C. Structural factor 3: an increase in the number of people located in diasporas (away from their homeland)
 1. Why move to other countries? Several reasons:
 - a. Because of capitalism’s need for cheap labor
 - b. Refugees fleeing violence

- c. Many countries now contain migrants who arrived relatively recently
 - 1) Laotians in Texas; Hmong in California and Minnesota, Turks and Pakistanis in Germany and Scandinavia
 - 2) **DISCUSS**: other examples?
- d. And ethnic conflict sometimes results

D. Structural factor 4: end of the Cold War

- 1. Breakup of the Soviet Union and its satellite countries (E. Europe)
 - a. New countries emerged, with new assertions of national identity
- 2. Many socialist states had seen ethnic loyalties as regressive
 - a. Ethnic, religious activities were repressed
 - b. Examples: Yugoslavia; the Soviet Union itself; China; Ethiopia; Tanzania (there are no distinct ethnic groups in socialist Cuba)
- 3. Ethnic conflict followed

E. Structural factor 5: Globalizing processes, transnationalism

- 1. Western Europe: the formation of the European Union resulted in less power for the nation-state
- 2. Also, regions within European countries have become more autonomous
- 3. Spaces have opened up in which to assert ethnicity
- 4. Examples: Wales, Ireland, Scotland in Great Britain, many others
- 5. Spain is another example: regions like Catalonia, the Basque region, have become much stronger
 - a. Like the Soviet Union, during the regime of dictator Franco, Spain repressed nationalist mobilizing
 - b. Regional identity is strong there, and in other parts of Europe
- 6. There's a movement in northern Italy to secede from the rest of the country

- IV. Conclusion: ethnic identity has become more important, more salient, more significant to the holders of the identity themselves
- A. People are claiming their identity in ways they didn't before
1. Nagel's book explores Native Americans working to reverse the previous trajectory of assimilation
 2. Other indigenous peoples reveal a similar story
 - a. In some cases there was too much repression earlier, and people hid or denied their identity
 - 1) El Salvador¹ is an example
 3. Of course the earlier pattern of diminished identification with one's ethnic group continues to occur
 - a. What sociologist Mary Waters calls "symbolic ethnicities" and "optional ethnicities"²
 - 1) Example of someone with an Italian last name, but that's pretty much it
- B. There are several theories as to why many people who earlier weren't interested have become interested in their ethnic roots
1. One explanation that's been offered: there's more anxiety, fear of cultural standardization, McDonaldization of the world
 - a. This is one explanation Eriksen (and many others) offers
 - b. We'll search for answers throughout the course
 - c. **DISCUSS:** examples you can think of?
- V. Methodology: how to study the various meanings of concepts like "ethnicity," "ethnic"?
- A. First: look at history of the meaning of the word: for example, "ethnic"

¹ See Tilley VQ. 2002. New help or new hegemony? the transnational indigenous peoples' movement and "Being Indian" in El Salvador. *J. Lat. Amer. Stud.* 34(3):525-554.

² Mary Waters, "Optional Ethnicities: For Whites Only?" pp. 430-38 in Andersen and Collins, eds., *Race, Class and Gender*, 4th edition. Wadsworth 2001.

1. An earlier meaning was heathen or pagan
 2. The term subsequently was used to refer to “racial” characteristics (in the mid-nineteenth century)
 3. Then it came to be a polite term (in the US) for Jews, Italians, Irish—populations the majority considered to be inferior:
 - a. “Ethnics”
- B. Second: look at current meanings, both scholarly and general
- C. Scholarly meanings:
1. Ethnicity refers to classifications of people and to relationships
 - a. Two (or more) groups must be in contact with each other—ethnic groups do not exist as isolates
 - b. And must entertain ideas of members of one group being culturally different from the other
 2. Scholarship often encounters problems in classification and analysis
 3. Gladney asks, who are the Chinese? Who are the Hui?
 4. Many scholars conclude that self-ascription is the best definition
 - a. **NOTE:** Don’t worry about difficult terms you find in your reading (e.g., “...emic category of ascription”)
 - b. The self-ascription approach pays attention to groups that consider themselves as
 - 1) Culturally distinctive
 - 2) Employ metaphoric or fictive kinship
 - 3) Have myths of common origin
 - 4) Encourage endogamy (marriage within the group)
 - c. Yet self-definition can produce problems
 - 1) For example, a census taker will often want other kinds of evidence

- D. Non-scholarly, everyday meanings of “ethnic”
1. “Ethnic” usually refers to a perspective the majority applies to minority others
 2. It refers to a *relationship*
 - a. It will often be a term connoting inferiority
 - b. **DISCUSS:** Can WASPs (White Anglo-Saxon Protestants in the US) be “ethnic”?
- E. To study the meaning of a word we also have to compare it to related words
1. Our syllabus is organized this way
 2. Eriksen organizes his book the same way
 3. Eriksen compares “ethnicity” and “race”
 - a. One notion: that ethnicity refers more to group identification, and race is more oriented to the categorization of “them”
 - b. But they both tend to stress common descent among the members
 4. The relationship between ethnicity and nationality is equally complicated
 - a. Nationalism: holds that political boundaries should be coterminous with cultural boundaries
 5. Social class
 - a. In general there are 2 kinds of relationship between social class and ethnicity:
 - 1) An ethnic group may or may not be internally ranked—contain more than one social class
 - 2) And there may be a high correlation between ethnicity and class in a given society: this often happens
 - 3) **DISCUSS:** examples?

VI. The China example

- A. China has usually been seen as huge homogeneous, monocultural nation
 - 1. It has had long history of empire-building (and falling)
 - 2. Heavily affected by European colonialism (although never formally a European colony)

- B. Gladney asks specifically, what does it mean to be Hui in the Chinese nation-state?
 - 1. He discusses a “new feeling” in China, a “revalorization” of something
 - a. A revalorization of ancestral and ethnic ties
 - b. A politics of ethnic and cultural difference within China proper
 - c. Official minorities in China began to strongly assert their identities
 - d. And groups within the so-called Han majority began to rediscover, reinvent, and reassert their ethnic differences
 - 2. Especially in the south, there is a newfound interest in the southern Chu kingdom
 - a. Many museums...early Chu now seen by some as essential to Chinese culture, said to be less important northern dynasties
 - b. Note the use of archaeology for present-day political interests
 - c. **DISCUSS:** other examples of archaeology being used for this purpose?

- C. China’s nationalities
 - 1. There are 56 “official” nationalities, but there are nearly 350 other groups who have applied
 - 2. These latter groups are regarded as ethnically different but don’t fit into any of the official categories recognized by the state

- D. Gladney briefly discusses how the state created the majority “Han”
 - 1. Sun Yat-Sen saw familism and clanism in the China of his day but he saw no real nationalism
 - a. His project was to create it

- b. To get people to throw off the yoke of the Qing empire (who were Manchu)
 - 2. “Real” Chinese were Han; the Manchu and others were foreigners, occupiers
 - a. Sun’s scheme proposed 5 peoples of China: Han, Man (Manchu), Meng (Mongolian), Zang (Tibetan) and Hui (all Muslims, now the Uygur, Kazakh, Hui, etc.)
 - 3. Similar to Eriksen’s point about ethnicity always being a relationship, we see Sun’s concern to create “minorities” as part of an overall scheme to create a “majority”—a unified Chinese nation
 - 4. One people, one history
- E. Quite successful: got all sorts of people to think that “Chinese” and “Han” are the same

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