

17.50, Introduction to Comparative Politics (Fall 2006)
Prof. Chappell Lawson
Session 5: Social Structure, Race/Religion/Ethnicity

Ethnicity

Not clear which **identities get politicized**

- Language and religion: Belgium
- Race: Trinidad and Tobago, Fiji, South Africa
- Region: Korea, U.S. post-civil war, to some extent Brazil
- Combination of race, religion, and language: Sri Lanka

How malleable are those identities? Two main schools of thought:

- **primordialism** (visible markers, readily apparent, natural locus of identity)
- **constructivism** (identities actually quite malleable)
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- Example of constructivism
 - Not obvious which identities will be most salient and when (Example: Hindu woman from Punjab on an airplane to Delhi and then Boston)
 - Sometimes, identity is malleable, but involuntary (light-skinned man of mixed black and white race in Dominican Republic arrives in New York City and is considered black)
 - E.g., Plessy v. Ferguson (octaroon)

Also, many steps between differences based on physical markers and real conflict along ethnic lines

- 1. Demographic markers have to be there
- 2. But then become socially significant

What things might minimize this problem:

- Many different minorities; no winning coalition (Somalia under parliamentary rule)
- Cross-cutting vs. cumulative cleavages (Trinidad and Tobago vs. Guyana)
- How deeply polarized society is
- Institutional arrangements (checks and balances, quota systems)
- Find an external enemy; fight a war