

**First Written Assignment**  
**21A.226: Ethnic and National Identity**

This assignment is intended to get you thinking more comprehensively about the analytic terms we are using in this course—thinking more like social scientists.

Choose a definition of identity. There are several easily available: Eriksen, Nagel and Wade discuss it (looking in the index of a book is a great time saver). Then compare Gladney’s case study with one or two examples of ethnic and/or national identity<sup>1</sup> chosen by you. Keep in mind that both individual identity and collective identity will be involved. You may choose your other case/s from the course reading (e.g., Nagel).

First, briefly describe your two or three cases with respect to identity. Then compare them: what are the similarities between the two or three identities? Differences? Then briefly describe what historical factors might have been important in bringing about the current situation.

If relevant, you may discuss how legislation and state policy have led to the objectification and, in some cases, creation, of identity in the one or two cases you’ve chosen—as happened with the Hui. Gladney refers to this process as ethnogenesis, and cites anthropologist Bernard Cohn (1987), who suggests that legal statuses can lead to the objectification and, in some cases, creation, of identities—perhaps previously present but loosely defined (p. 159).

Or you may find that your case(s) provide an example where ethnic/national conflict helped create, strengthen or weaken the identity. Eriksen provides other types of explanations for ethnic/national identity formation which might apply to your analysis.

Depending on the sources you choose, you might also find it useful to discuss how your authors differ in their analyses and explanations.

Please see the “Rules of Thumb” and “Helpful points for written assignments” posted on the class website, and take them seriously.

Important: do not write in terms of “shoulds” or “oughts.” Think in terms of describing and analyzing what *is*—what exists. If you have opinions, tell the reader about them only in the last paragraph.

You *must* back up everything you say with evidence. Do not make unsupported assertions. If you are not clear about what this means, even after reading the “Rules of Thumb” and “Helpful Points,” then ask me.

A note on sources: scholarly literature on whatever case(s) you choose is easily available. One or two books will provide enough information. You may include encyclopedia, magazine, and newspaper sources. Some of these will be biased; you may still use them, just provide a brief comment about why you think what the author says is more opinion than fact.

---

<sup>1</sup> The phrasing is awkward because while some ethnic identities are also national identities, some are not, and vice versa (some national identities are not ethnic identities).

If you have trouble choosing your case(s), consult the articles under “supplemental reading” at the website for inspiration.

This is a 7-page (or more) assignment, so obviously you cannot provide a thorough discussion of your two or three cases. Your analysis will be partial, which is fine; the main purpose of this assignment is to get you to understand processes of ethnic and/or national identity formation more deeply.

7 or more+ pages

Handed out: Session 3

Choice of cases discussed in class: Session 7

First draft due: Session 9

MIT OpenCourseWare  
<http://ocw.mit.edu>

21A.226 Ethnic and National Identity  
Fall 2009

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <http://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.