

PLS 140 Intro to Comparative Politics

Week 3
Origins of ethnic and
national identities

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Ethnicity

- Set of institutions that bind people together through a common culture.
- Often based on language, religion or other factors.
- A social identity, not necessarily political.

National identity

- ◉ An institution that binds people together through common political aspirations.
- ◉ A sense of belonging to a Nation.
- ◉ Often but not always derived from an ethnic identity.
- ◉ Can create **nationalism**: a pride in one's people and the aspiration to have their own political sovereignty.

Citizenship

- An individual's relation to the State.
 - > Mutual responsibilities.
- Political and more easily changed.
- The basis for patriotism: pride in one's State and citizenship.

Different approaches to ethnicity in CP

- **Primordialism** focuses on the powerful essence of identity.
- **Constructivism** focuses on the set of circumstances and actors behind the creation of identities.
- **Instrumentalism** focuses on the actors that use identities for material gains.

Primordialism

- Ethnic ascriptions are not a matter of choice but of tradition and emotion linked to perceptions of common ancestry.
- Belonging based on blood ties.
- Actors perceive common interest with those whom they perceive to share their descent.
- Ex: Samuel Huntington

Question 1. If the father is Kazakh and the mother Mongol, what is the ethnicity of the child?

Question 2. The father is Kazakh, the mother Mongol, *but* everybody around the family is Mongol *and the child has never even seen a Kazakh*, outside of the father. The child will learn Mongol customs and language. What is the ethnicity of *this* child?;

Question 3. A Kazakh couple have a child that they do not want. They give it in adoption to a Mongol couple when the child is only a year old. Around the Mongol family there are only Mongols and the child grows up never meeting a single Kazakh. Since he was a baby when adopted, he knows nothing and thinks that his biological father and mother are the Mongol adopters. He grows up learning Mongol customs and language. What is the ethnicity of *this* child?²

796 *Francisco J. Gil-White*

Table 1. *Ascription: appearance vs. descent*

Answer	Question 1		Question 2		Question 3	
Child is Kazakh	56	94%	49	83%	35	59%
Child is Mongol	0		10	17%	24	41%
Child is <i>erliiz</i> (‘half-breed’)	3	6%	0		0	
Total	59	100%	59	100%	59	100%

N = 59

Who are you?

Mongols vs Kazakhs

- 59% claim that you can be a Kazakh child adopted by Mongols, not know it, and still be a Kazakh.
- The assumption of the respondents is that children take the biological father's ethnicity no matter what.
- The kid may not know it, but he is still Kazakh. It doesn't matter'.

How to do you construct an identity?

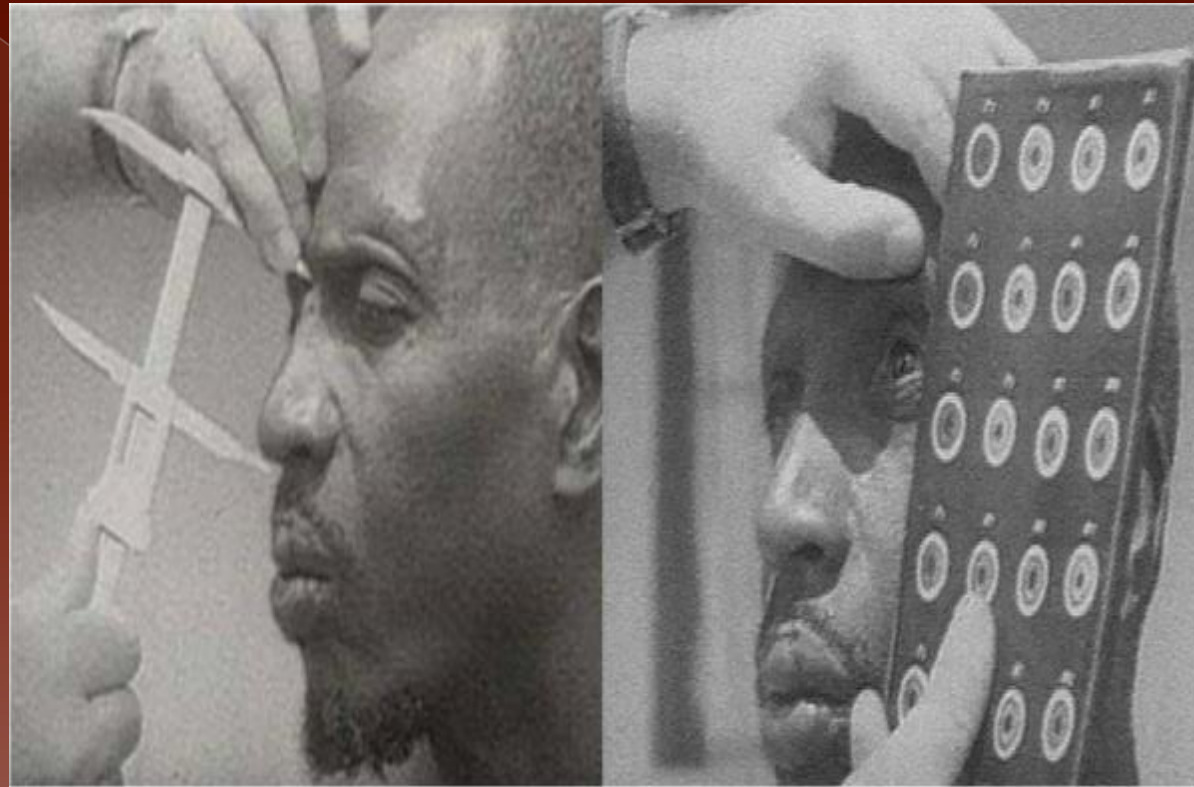
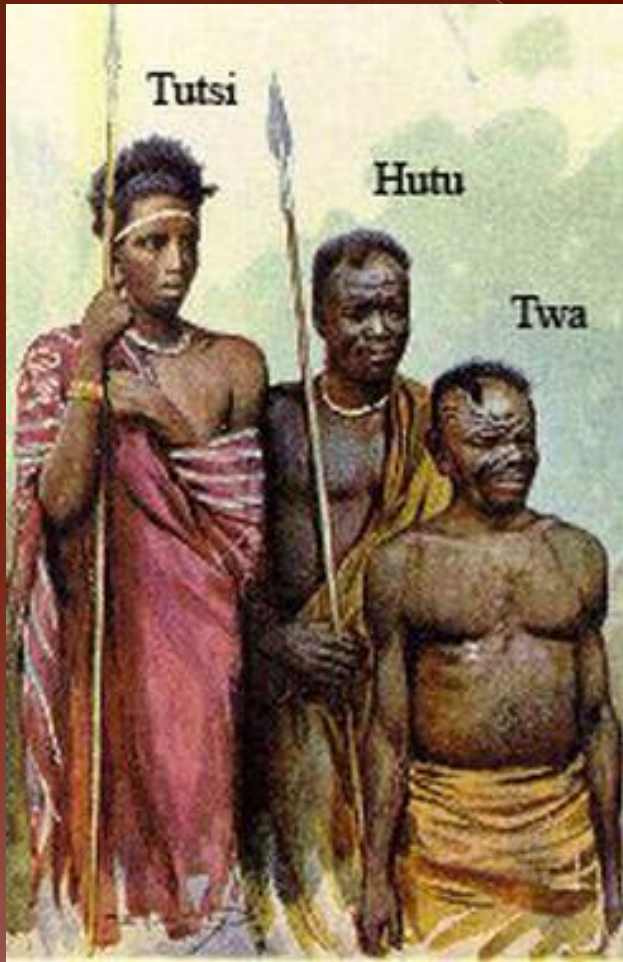
- Invent cultural traditions and deem them ancient symbols of cohesion and identity.
- Modernization, and the development of capitalist social relations to consolidate national identities.
- Literacy, development of education systems that generate common values and knowledge.
- Assign identities to the population.

Role of colonizers in creating identities

- **GB in India:** Constructed the caste system as the dominant mode of identity to render Indian society more legible and manageable, and de-politicize it.
- **Belgians in Congo:** Hierarchized ethnicities.
- **USSR:** Creation of titular nationalities for the expansion of socialism.

« Divide and rule. »

Hutus and Tutsis as seen by colonizers



Belgians in Congo

- Tutsis seen as a superior group because they were more “white” looking.
- Tutsis seen as natural rulers, put into positions of authority and discriminated against Hutus and Twa.
- The Hutus (about 85% of the population), were denied higher education, land ownership and positions in government.
- Created resentment, led to conflict.

Rwandans of both ethnic groups speak the same language, live in the same places, and are not always physically recognizable by distinctive characteristics.

DIFFERENCES IN CHARACTERISTICS

Hutu



Tutsi



In the USSR

- ◉ Development of national identities as a necessary component for the expansion of socialism.
- ◉ Through censuses and bureaucratic measures.
- ◉ Raised people's awareness of their national identities, even if, initially, many people could not easily define their group.
- ◉ The number of official nationalities fell dramatically from 172 to 60 as the State carried out this project.
- ◉ Internalization of these identities by the people.
- ◉ Individual republics broke away in accordance with (and in reaction to) the identities constructed in the Soviet era.

Ethnic groups in the USSR



Русский



Украинец



Татарин



Еврей



Цыган



Киргиз



Белорус



Литовец



Грузин



Армянин



Казак



Узбек



Латыш



Эстонец



Азербайджанец



Молдаванин



Таджик



Туркмен