

Cornell University

John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines

Document Title: Analyzing Ideology and Making Critical Comparisons

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Course: Government

Course Title: Women, Nationalism, and National Identity

Year:

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Morefield, Jeannie. TA, *Government*. "Women, Nationalism, and National Identity"

John S. Knight Assignment Sequence Prize:
Analyzing Ideology and Making Critical Comparisons

Description and Rationale

My interest in designing this assignment series developed about a month into the course. I was becoming increasingly frustrated by my students' confusion about what makes an argument both critical and interesting. Although we had discussed the difference between critical subjectivity and what they referred to as "my opinion" ad nauseum, many of them seemed to be operating under the assumption that there are only two ways to write a paper. In the first type of paper, the student simply summarizes the arguments of the author's in question. In the second type of paper, the student waxes poetic about his/her own, uncritical opinion about democracy, women, nationalism, or whatever the topic might be. They seemed to be having an incredibly difficult time imagining that they could work with the insights developed by other theorists and develop them into an argument which was both intellectually rigorous and uniquely their own.

So I decided to backtrack a bit to see if I could find out what link was missing for them along the chain that runs from critical reading to critical writing by looking more closely at the weekly written analyses of the readings that they had been turning in for the past several weeks. As I read, the first thing I realized was that many of them had a difficult time distinguishing between primary and secondary sources. For instance, the class itself tends to focus on secondary critiques of nationalism such as Cynthia Enloe's analysis of militarization and George Mosse's in depth discussion of the linkages between masculinity and nationalism. When assigning these readings I had never thought to consider that my student's might actually confuse Mosse's *analysis* of masculinity and nationalism with *support* for a masculinized vision of the nation. It had never occurred to me that they might confuse the language of nationalist critique with the language of nationalism itself.

But then I realized, these students were seventeen and eighteen years old, fresh out of highschool and I was asking them to have an already finely developed sense of how to analyze primary and secondary critiques of ideology. There was no real reason *why* they should be able to tell when Mosse was speaking in a critical voice and when he was taking on the voice of the nationalist as a way to look inside the internal workings of the discourse if they had never been exposed to this kind of writing before. And, if they had no real understanding of how theorists in the social sciences and humanities approach the study of ideology, then there was no reason why they themselves should be able to both engage in this kind of critique *and* develop unique, critical arguments based on comparisons between the readings.

Thus, the following assignment series is based around these concerns. In the first assignment, I attempt to help the students both understand and actually engage in a number of different approaches to the critique of primary ideology. The second assignment encourages the students to look more deeply at the underlying assumptions which secondary critics of ideology bring to their analysis. The last assignment asks the students

to think comparatively about these critics in relation to the larger themes of the class and, from this comparison, develop an original argument. Along each step of the way I have the students both talking with each other and writing. The goal of these exercises is to encourage students to realize that critical thinking and critical writing go hand in hand.

My actual experiences with these assignments in the classroom were both wonderful and humbling. The students frequently surprised me with their ability to analyze the most complex of arguments. On the other extreme, there were times when they would all just stare at me as if stunned, completely confused. Thus, as I explain each assignment individually in more detail, I will also be noting the changes I have made to the original series based on student reactions.

Assignment #1: Analyzing Ideology: Primary Texts

The purpose of this assignment was to expose my students to a number of different ways in which critics of nationalism (a category which I insisted included *them*) might analyze primary, nationalist ideology of the type assigned for that week's reading. In particular, I wanted them to shake off the intense desire, which they all seemed to share, to completely repudiate an ideology without attempting to understand its power. For instance, their initial response to the literature we were reading on Nazi Germany was to completely denounce Nazi ideology as being illogical, nonsensical, evil, wrong, immoral and stupid. My goal was to convince them that one could retain all of one's anger, all of one's critical fury, and still attempt to understand why such an irrational and stupid ideology managed to move millions of people into action. I encouraged them to think about how to actually get into the mind of the nationalist in order to understand the power of their argument from the inside out.

The assignment itself explores three different types of ideology critique; total repudiation, exploration of the nationalist mind, and a combined approach. When I initially walked my students through these explanations I did so without the benefit of examples and the abstraction of it all was clearly confusing for them. I eventually went back and found examples from the McClintock article which I then shared with my students and which I have included in this draft. The writing portion of the assignment consists of both an in class and a take home element. The in-class portion asks them to listen to a portion of a radio broadcast put out by the Christian right organization Focus On The Family entitled "Hope for the Homosexual". The goal of the assignment was to get them talking, thinking and writing about the broadcast from both an insider and outsider perspective. The whole thing seemed to go over pretty well. The students had an excellent time pretending to be Dr. Nicolosi with one another.

The take home aspect of the assignment was helpful but not quite as satisfying for me as a reader and teacher. In the original draft I had my students write about the importance of the family *only* from the perspective of Theodore Roosevelt. While they really enjoyed pretending to be some one else, I realized, as they read their papers aloud in class, that they weren't really turning that insider knowledge back around to then critique the ideology itself. Instead, we ended up talking about this a great deal in class. Hence, I have added the second part of the assignment to reflect both our class discussion and the changes I would make were I to use this handout in the future.

Reading the papers aloud proved to be a very useful endeavor. Not only were the students quick to comment on one another's work but the actual act of reading aloud helped the presenters themselves to hear where their papers were either awkward or unclear. They also turned their papers in to me which I then returned with comments.

Assignment #2: Analyzing Ideology: Secondary Texts.

The goal of this assignment was to help students be critical readers of secondary texts. In this sense, I wanted them to learn how to really root through an author's argument and be able to crystallize its main themes and the assumptions which underlie it. I wanted them to begin to get a sense that these authors weren't just pulling their observations out of thin air but, instead, were basing them on a combination of their reading of other works and their own critical insights. My hope was that once they could begin to recognize this technique in others they would be able to utilize it themselves.

In this spirit, the in-class assignment asked them to break into two groups and then actually consider themselves to be disciples of the two authors we were reading for that week, to once again try and get into the heads of the people whose work they were reading and then critically examine this work from the inside out. I also wanted them to help each other through this process by talking to one another. The first part of the assignment worked well in that each group did an excellent job of unearthing some of the key notions inherent in McClintock and Balibar's critique of the family. They also did a fairly good job of pinpointing the parts of Roosevelt's analysis which McClintock and Balibar would disagree with. However, the debate portion of this endeavor fell kind of flat (perhaps because the two authors were so similar in their analyses) although being able to talk about these issues as a class was useful. Consequently, while I have left the idea of class debate in this draft, I would change its form slightly in future versions of the assignment.

Assignment #3: Making Critical Comparisons

The goal of this last assignment was to encourage students to begin to take the critical insights they had gained from the study of primary ideology and secondary texts and apply these insights toward the creation of an interesting, comparative argument that addressed the main themes of the class. Because I tend to imagine arguments in visual terms, I decided to use graphics to explain the three paper types I wanted them to understand. In particular, I wanted them to be able to close their eyes and actually *see* the difference between a paper that makes no comparisons, a paper that makes a few interesting comparisons, and a paper which truly integrates broader themes into the overall analysis. I also wanted to give them a practical tool for writing this kind of paper. Hence, the inclusion of the chart idea. I believe that all of us make some kind of chart in our minds when we critically compare authors and themes to one another, although most of us would be hard pressed to describe this mental process! Actually having them make a chart was a way for me to get my students to unpack this mental process, to examine more clearly what happens between point A and point C in the invention of an argument.

Amazingly enough, they loved it! Each student came to the next class with an immaculately constructed chart, and each one had come up with a fantastic idea for an

argument. Again, having them read their paper proposals aloud was an especially helpful thing to do in that I could actually watch these students look down at the charts they had constructed, notice similarities and differences, and then formulate their ideas based on these comparisons.

In its original form I had the assignment end at this point. In this sense, I read and responded to both the students' charts and their paper proposals but, since they were already in the middle of writing another, longer paper, I had them simply think about how these ideas could help them with their writing. However, the proposals they came up with were so interesting and well thought out that in the future I will ask them to transform these ideas into five page essays.

Assignment #1
Analyzing Ideology: Primary Texts

In this class we have examined a number of nationalist ideologies as they are expressed by nationalists themselves (e.g. Fichte). These works are known as **primary texts**

The following handout walks you through three possible approaches that you might take to the study of primary nationalist ideologies. It does this by taking the nationalist discourse of white South Africans as the subject of analysis. It then uses Catherine McClintock's critique of Afrikaner nationalism in "Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism and the Family" to exemplify these approaches.

Option One: Total Repudiation: In this model, you are motivated by both a sense of moral outrage toward apartheid and a conviction that, when plainly presented, the facts of the apartheid system clearly point to its illogical nature. Therefore, in your work you clearly articulate the falseness of this doctrine, expose the relative 'newness' of Afrikaner, national identity, and, in essence, illuminate the difference between the *ideology* of apartheid and the *reality* of South African society.

Example: In this passage, Catherine McClintock examines the *Eeufees* (a mass Afrikaaner, nationalist rally) from a critical, outside perspective. She notes in particular how the ideology of *Eeufees* is *invented*, that it symbolizes a kind of political domination rather than an authentic, nationalist identity.

"The *Eeufees* was, by anyone's standards, a triumph of image management, complete with the spectacular regalia of flags, flaming torches, patriotic songs, incendiary speeches, costumes and crowd management. More than anything, the *Eeufees* revealed the extent to which nationalism is a symbolic performance of invented community: the *Eeufees* was a calculated and self-conscious effort by the Broederbond to paper over the myriad regional, gender and class tensions that threatened them."

Option Two: Exploration of the Nationalist Mind: In this model, you really try to get into the brain of the nationalist by taking their arguments at face value. In other words, you attempt to understand *why* nationalist legends such as the Afrikaner Great Trek can have such power over the imaginations of so many by actually attempting to speak in the voice of the nationalist, or, by discussing their world vision through their eyes. (Remember, just because you are trying to understand the inside of a particular world vision does not mean you have to actually *believe* it. Instead, you are trying to understand what makes it so *believable*! You are trying to understand why an ideology that looks illogical from the outside can make so much sense from the inside.)

Example: In this passage, McClintock takes on the "we" voice to try and better understand the "natural" relationship between the family and the nation. In essence, she tries to get into the mind of the nationalist who calls the nation "mother".

"The term 'nation' derives from 'natio': to be born. We speak of nations as 'motherlands' and 'fatherlands'. Foreigners 'adopt' countries that are not their native homes, and we are 'naturalized' into the national family. We talk of the Family of Nations, of homelands and native lands."

Option Three: Combining the Strength of Both Approaches: In this model, you attempt to combine the factual, critical stance of the first option with the insight gained from the second. In other words, you maintain your critical awareness of the facts of Afrikaner nationalism as they appear from the outside while simultaneously taking the power of this ideology from the insider perspective into account.

Example: Here Anne McClintock considers both the paradoxical and oppressive characteristics of the image of the "volkmoeder" while at the same time attempting to understand the ideological and emotional importance of this figure for white, male Afrikaners.

"In 1913, three years after the Union, the 'Vrouemonument' (Women's Monument) was erected in homage to the female victims of the war. The monument took the form of a circular, domestic enclosure, where women stand weeping with the children...Here women's martial role as fighters and farmers was purged of its indecorously militant potential, and replaced by the figure of the lamenting mother with the babe in arms.....By portraying the Afrikaner nations symbolically as weeping woman, the mighty male embarrassment of military defeat could be overlooked, and the memory of women's vital effort during the war washed away in images of feminine tears and maternal loss."

In class assignment: analysis of primary texts. Listen to the "Focus on the Family" tape. In the spirit of the first example of ideology analysis given above, one half of the class should consider themselves outside observers of Dr. Nicolosi's argument. Take a minute to jot down the reasons why his argument seems illogical and/or where it might make sense. In the spirit of the second example, the other half of the class should pretend that they *are* Dr. Joseph Nicolosi. Take a minute to write down why *you* (Dr. Nicolosi) believe that the presence of strong, masculine fathers is essential for the healthy development of boy children. Break into groups of two to discuss what you have written.

Take home assignment: in the voice of Theodore Roosevelt, write a one page essay on the importance of the family to the nation. Then, once you have written this, use the insights you have gained from this insider's view to write another page in which you explain why Roosevelt's arguments would hold such powerful appeal for the American public. Be prepared to share these with the class.

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Assignment #2
Analyzing Ideology: Secondary Texts

Even more frequently than the study of primary nationalist documents, this class focuses on other peoples' critiques of nationalist discourse. These critiques are known as secondary texts.

As we have discussed, each of the secondary authors that we study has their own particular method for analyzing nationalist ideology. Some, such as Cynthia Enloe, take a critical outsider's perspective to the study of nationalism. Enloe pulls no punches in her repudiation of nationalist doctrine and her declaration of the differences between nationalist discourse and the material reality of women's daily lives:

"Rape and prostitution have been central to many men's construction of the nationalist cause.....Bangladeshi women who had been raped during the war of secession from Pakistan were rarely asked to help build the identity of the new nation, though news of their rapes had the effect of mobilizing the anger of many Bangladeshi men. Likewise, today, women who have been raped are more symbols than active participants in countries such as Sri Lanka and Kashmir."

In contrast, George Mosse tends to explore nationalist ideology from the inside out, frequently taking on the voice of his subjects of study. Here, he describes Johann Muller's vision of the sexually pure nation through Muller's eyes:

"Sodomy and masturbation led to impotence and thus depopulation; the secrecy that accompanied deviant sexuality resembled a conspiracy sowing hatred against the state; men and women who practiced such vices lacked either moral sense or civic responsibility..."

In addition, each of these authors approaches their material from a particular theoretical position and with a particular set of assumptions. For instance, George Mosse's analysis rests upon the assumption that masculinity, sexuality and nationalism are related in a number of key ways. Likewise, Cynthia Enloe's arguments depend upon the assumption that militarism is always dangerous for women. Both theorists base these assumptions not only on their own observations but also upon the work of other theorists. In this sense, Enloe frequently refers to the work of Ben Anderson while Mosse evokes the work of any number of historians to substantiate his claims about late 19th century European nationalism.

In class assignment: getting inside their heads! The objective of this exercise is to better understand the assumptions that underlie the works of those authors we have read for class today. First, the class divides in two. Half of you are "Balibarrians", the other half of the

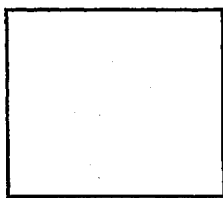
are "McClintockians." Next, each group should take a minute to jot down the main theoretical position and of the author whose ideas you are representing. Remember, just as Marxists are called Marxists because they analyze politics from the perspective of Marx's theory, so you are "McClintockians" and "Balibarians" because you analyze politics from the perspective of McClintock or Balibar. Once you have established what this perspective is, discuss it with one another, and then write down at least three issues having to do with the family which Teddy Roosevelt believes and which the author you represent would disagree with. Make sure to clearly articulate *why* you, as a McClintockian or Balibarian, would disagree with Roosevelt. Finally, get ready for a debate!

**Assignment #3
Making Critical Comparisons**

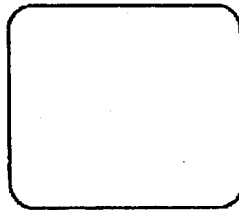
While it is important to understand the variety of ways in which the authors we study approach the ideologies of nationalism, it is also important to avoid thinking about these authors in isolation from one another. In this sense, most of what we do in this class centers around different *themes* of nationalism. For instance, we are concerned with the relationship between masculinity and nationalism as well as with connections between the family and nationalism. This is why your syllabus is not broken down into weekly units defined by an author, but instead, into units defined by a particular theme

What does this have to do with writing good critical papers? A WHOLE LOT!!! Lets visualize three scenarios:

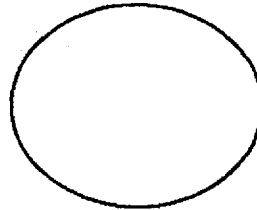
A) Really boring paper:



Anderson



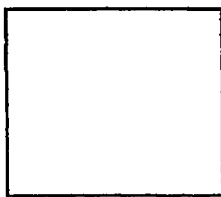
Enloe



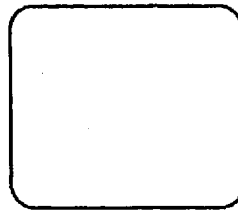
Mosse

In an average, boring paper, you imagine each reading to be completely disconnected from all other readings. You proceed to line up the authors next to one another and then give a summary of each one's theory. Because you make no real connections between the authors, you don't really get into any kind of interesting analysis.

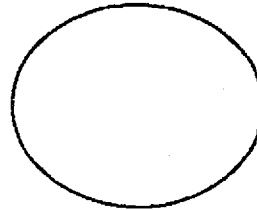
B) Slightly better paper



Anderson



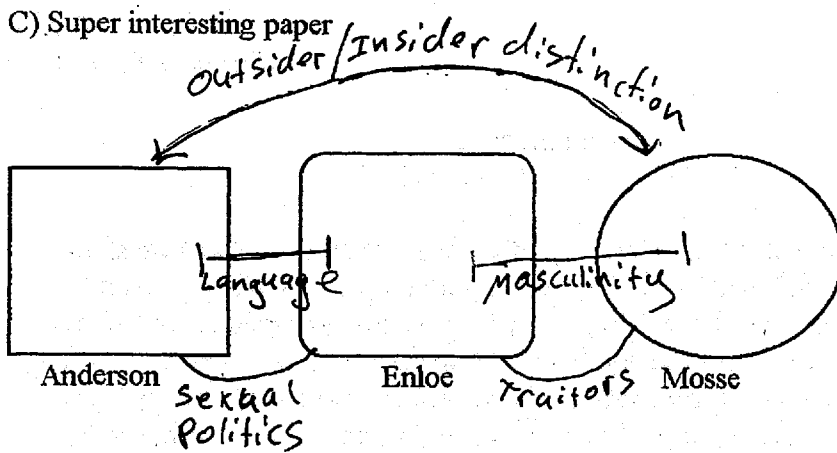
Enloe



Mosse

You still imagine the readings as isolated units but you begin to compare them. This comparison consists of exploring each author's argument *individually* and then making an argument about which one you find most convincing.

C) Super interesting paper



While you can still visualize each author's argument as a whole, you have begun to think critically about the central THEMES of these arguments and relate them to one another. For instance, Anderson has a theory about the imagined qualities of the nation. How might these imagined qualities relate to Mosse's notion of "outsiders" and "insiders"? Likewise, how might Enloe's notion of the importance of women as reproducers for the nation expand upon or improve Anderson's theory on the fall of "sexual politics" and the rise of nation states?

So, how do you go about writing this kind of paper?

1) One way to get at these kinds of critical comparisons is to make a grid. You will probably want to organize your grid in terms of subject and author. For instance:

	What defines the borders of the nation?	Who is inside and who is outside the nation?	What role does masculinity play?	What role does language play?
Anderson				
Enloe				
Mosse				

2) Once you begin to think about these themes in an organized way, then you can start making your interesting observations. For instance, you can look at your grid and say, "Hey! Mosse's notion of who is inside and who is outside the nation sort of resembles Anderson's idea of an imagined, bounded, national community!" or "Gee! Erloe's ideas on the role of masculinity in the nation differ from Mosse's in a number of ways."

3) THEN, you can start constructing an argument. For instance, you might look at Anderson's analysis of "imagined community" and find that Mosse's notion of insider/outsider possibly adds something to Anderson's original argument that makes it more interesting or convincing.

Take home assignment:

Part one: Due in class on Thursday: make up a chart of your own (like the one above) which includes last weeks' readings and this weeks' readings EXCEPT FOR ROOSEVELT.¹ In other words, down the vertical axis you should list Balibar, McClintock, Heng and Devan, and Suryakusuma while along the horizontal axis your should list at least three major themes concerning the family and nationalism which all of these authors discuss. Fill in the chart in as much detail as you have time and room for. After you have spent some time thinking about the beauty of your chart, write a paragraph in which you speculate about a possible argument for a paper which you can see emerging from these comparisons.

Part Two: First draft due in class on Tuesday. Expand this argument into a five page essay.

¹I am having you leave Roosevelt out of this particular exercise because, as we discussed earlier, his work is representative of a *primary* nationalist document. The other readings are all *secondary* approaches to the issue of nationalism and the family. Comparing them in this way would not really be fair because Roosevelt truly believes all of the issues which these other authors are criticising. This doesn't mean that if you were to write a paper on this subject you would necessarily leave Roosevelt out of the picture. BUT, as a primary rather than secondary text, Roosevelt should be treated differently than the other authors. In essence, his work provides the *subject* of the analysis while the others provide you with the tools you need to do such an analysis.

