

## **USE2312: Nationalism and the Arts**

**A/P Barbara Ryan**

### **Overview and Objectives**

For close to a century, analysts pondered nations in terms of how these groupings came into existence. Was it through shared history, a document like the Magna Carta, geographical barriers such as a river or mountain range, or perhaps religion? More recently, theories of nationalism have proposed that nations are constructed, even called into existence, by vehicles as different as newspapers, guided forgetting, labor of elites for elites, and more. This module introduces you to theories of modern nations, and related discussions. This module introduces you, also, to theories of art. By juxtaposing these fields, art and nation, we create opportunities to enrich comprehension of nationalism and the arts. Our 'Singapore Studies' mandate makes this juxtaposition particularly intriguing under the aegis of this concept: sincerity.

Class discussions probe with two main goals. One is that every student practice finding his or her way, critically, into abstract arguments. The other is that every student develop insights tuned to nationalism and the arts or – not the same thing – works of art that are nationalist.

This module is suitable for all curious citizens of any state rather than for political scientists only, Singaporeans uniquely, or Arts students exclusively. The sequence of assignments is designed to stair-step learners toward competence in realms that we may not typically conjoin critically.

This module has no final exam; all grading is CA.

## **USE2312: Nationalism and the Arts**

### **Getting started thoughts:**

As you cast off into this module, you may find it useful to realize that part of our work together goes toward localizing claims that have been articulated abstractly. You will study assigned texts, therefore, with an eye to how an argument about nationalism or about art that is based on distant experiences can (or cannot) give you leverage on nationalism and the arts in Singapore. You may bring to our attention theories of art that you think helpful for our growth. But we begin with one that was crafted long before the Republic of Singapore. This theoretical text is Leo Tolstoy's "What is art?" (1897). With regard to nationalism, our start-up guide is a statement crafted at almost the same time: Ernest Renan's "What is a nation?" (1882). We

start with older arguments because they allow much room for critical converse. Too, by starting with arguments that have been respected for generations, we are reminded that critical thinkers learn from each other. We may find that these classic texts yield insight still even if aspects of them need to be supplemented, rebutted or abandoned in relation to present-day Singapore.

Over-arc'ing outcomes for this module include learning to

- \* read to enrich one's argument by learning from other people's ideas;
- \* learn to engage artworks in varied ways;
- \* consider nationalism from diverse angles;
- \* explore ideas and experiences, then communicate in writing and speech;
- \* provide constructive feedback.

### **Schedule of readings and assignments (CHANGES TERM BY TERM IN ivle VERSION)**

#### WEEK ONE:

before we meet as a group, you have an **assignment**: post in IVLE forum 120-150 words on your current understanding of what makes Singapore a nation or disqualifies Singapore from this category. This assignment, counted in your class participation score, is due by 11:59 p.m. Reply-posts are welcome but optional.

FIRST CLASS MEETING: introductory remarks: nation, state, the arts, nationalism and the arts

SECOND CLASS MEETING: discuss excerpts from Ernest Renan, "What is a nation?" This material is on e-reserve. A hard-copy version is held in CL as *Nationalism in Europe, 1815 to the Present*, ed. Stuart Woolf (London and New York: Routledge, 1996): 48-60.

**IVLE assignment**: post 120-150 words on your current understanding of what makes art, art. This assignment, counted in your class participation grade, is due by 11:59 p.m. Wednesday.

#### WEEK TWO:

Before we meet at a group, post a reflective comment about two classmates' posts about what makes art, art. Quote or paraphrase both posts on which you reflect. Deadline: 11:59 p.m.

FIRST CLASS MEETING: discuss excerpts from Leo Tolstoy, "What is art?" Julie C. Van Camp's selections guide our discussion; see <http://www.csulb.edu/~jvancamp/361r14.html>.

Consider what Tolstoy helps you ask, see or wonder with regard to a poem, "Question and Answer" (2014). Post your thoughts on IVLE by 11:59 p.m. before the second class meeting. This deadline will help classmates, and me, find time to preview your discoveries and arguments. Please realize that I assign reading homework for the upcoming class, too.

I will make the poem available in our IVLE forum. I will also share information about the poem, if you think the information is relevant. Classmates can share the information earlier if they take responsibility for this vital question: is the information relevant to our work in this module?

SECOND CLASS MEETING: discuss John Berger's short thought-piece, "The White Bird" from *The Sense of Sight* (New York: Vintage, 1985). Find it on e-reserve.

WEEK THREE:

FIRST CLASS MEETING: mini-lecture on Ernest Gellner's theory of nationalism. If you like to read up, now or later, try "The Coming of Nationalism and Its Interpretation: The Myths of Nation and Class," *Mapping the Nation*, ed. Gopal Balakrishnan (London: New Left Review, 1996): 98-145. This book is in the Central Library.

**SING ART PAPER #1 IS DUE in the IVLE work-bin.**

SECOND CLASS MEETING: let's try a TED talk. Look for Golan Levin.

WEEK FOUR:

FIRST CLASS MEETING: read for this class-meeting's discussion, Catherine Diamond, "Dreaming our own Dreams: Singapore Monodrama and the Individual Talent," *NTQ* 24 (May 2008): 170-88. Find this essay online through the CL Portal. Though this essay can teach you a lot, you must read carefully to learn critically. Consider the merit of reading this piece more than once, over a few days' time. Look out for arguments that you think gapped or unfair, or assumptions that may not serve well (er, serve whom?). Be ready for a quiz ...

SECOND CLASS MEETING: to prepare for class, watch “Karang Guni Man” (2012), dir. Anthony Chen; you will find it on youtube. Read too a short piece that you can find via the CL portal on Swetswise: Shiv Visvanathan, “Nation,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 23 (2006): 533-538.

WEEK FIVE:

FIRST CLASS MEETING: we will discuss “Presence Achieved in Language” by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. You can find this provocative piece through the library portal; it was published in *Theory, History and Theory* 45 (2006): 317-27.

SECOND CLASS MEETING: more thoughts on nationalism. We’ll discuss Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), pp. 5-46. This book is in the USP Reading Room.

**SING ART PAPER #2 IS DUE in the IVLE work-bin.**

TIME TO SPARE? we will discuss a short story, “Pawn,” by Amanda Lee Koe. A copy is on e-reserve. This story is collected in *Ministry of Moral Panic* (2013).

**RECESS WEEK: friendly tip:** start reading Pheng Cheah early, and posting as questions arise.

WEEK SIX:

FIRST CLASS MEETING: Pheng Cheah, “Spectral Nationality: The Living On (*sur-vie*) of the Postcolonial Nation in Neocolonial Globalization,” *boundary 2* 26:3 (1999): 225-52. Find this essay in CL databases; start with Project Muse.

SECOND CLASS MEETING: if stints permits, let’s try David Scott, “The Tragic Vision in Postcolonial Time,” *PMLA* 129:4 (2014): 799-808. This short piece bears careful re-reading, pen in hand. Plan to read this essay twice at least.

WEEKS SEVEN TO ELEVEN:

depending on enrollment, **teaching stints** scheduled on a first-come, first-serve basis. **PLAN AHEAD.** Within this period, I reserve three class-meetings for my use.

Each stint must be preceded by a plan that needs to reach me five days before your duo is scheduled. Failure to meet this deadline, and/or a poorly conceptualized plan, will affect your shared stint grade. I reserve the right to reject a plan, or to require substantive amendments. For this reason, you should consider submitting your plan early.

FINAL WEEK

FIRST CLASS MEETING: a chance to reflect, and perhaps squeeze in peer review of the final project

SECOND CLASS MEETING: wrap-up

**Final papers are due in the IVLE work-bin.**

### **Graded assignments**

**These instructions provide a rough guide, only. Details will be provided nearer the day.**

Singapore art papers This assignment gives you a chance to engage with issues specific to art and to Singapore. You will write two 'Sing art' papers. Sing art 1 is worth 20% of your final grade while Sing art 2 is worth 25%.

**Sing art 1** examines a work of art from (or about) Singapore in terms of one assigned theory of art. Your examination should reveal knowledge of, and reflection about, our discussions in class and on IVLE. Word limits are firm: 500-750 words in length.

This assignment is designed to help you practice working with a theory. This theory will concern art. Notice that this assignment says nothing about nations or nationalism. You can conceptualize this paper as a step toward the final paper in which you draw on a larger number of sources. This assignment is individual but I encourage swapping drafts, and/or visiting the Writing Centre.

N.B.: your task being analytical, resist the temptation to argue as an art-assessor. Your task in both Sing art papers is closer to comparative analysis which may include 'lensing', a critical question, and/or analysis that interrogates both texts rather than one only. Evaluation of the

artwork as 'good' or 'bad', from an Olympian standpoint, falls off-task for all projects in this module.

**Sing art 2** analyzes one work of art from (or about) Singapore in terms of one theory of nation. This paper should reveal a probing attitude toward the meeting of one theory and one creative artwork. The emphasis in this description is on one of each. Helping you to make this critical commitment are this paper's word limits: 750 to 1,000.

I grade Sing art papers by the criteria outlined for this module's final paper. Have a look at these criteria, early in the term, so that you set your sights correctly.

Teaching stint In this assignment, duos **teach the class** a work of art for 20 minutes. Each stint draws on two theories of art, two theories of nation, or one theory of art and one theory of nation. Your goal is to engage the class and actually teach, rather than to present only. After the 20-minute section, each duo fields Q&A for 10 minutes more. Strive to handle whatever happens during Q&A with your best thought and care.

Stinting helps you practice communicating your ideas and insights. Each duo may show up to three Powerpoint slides. Three is the maximum. Use of Powerpoint is optional, however, so do consider other teaching methods, too. Use of Prezi and so on must respect the basic idea here: in my experience of this module, classmates object strongly if they feel subjected to info (or graphic) overload.

Remember, each day of stinting may present one artwork, only.

A duo may assign homework up to a 1,000-word limit or, in the case of art, an artwork that can be viewed on-line which, if something like a video, is no longer than 10 minutes. Note: it is fine with me if classmates agree to read or watch more, or travel to an art site. However, no stinter may require this. Nor will such a plan serve if less than 2/3 of the class agrees. You see the point: we must respect other people's time.

Stints are worth 25% of your final score in this module. Partners receive the same grade. The parameters of this assignment, hence the grade you receive on it, include a **200-word plan** for the stint that you submit to me as a team, for approval, 5 days before you stint. Plans that a duo submits less than 5 days before a stint, lose grade-points for this assignment. I reckon the drop in two-hour increments. You will submit plans by email or on IVLE, in the interests of record-keeping.

I may reject a given plan or require overhauls. Feel free to submit your duo's plan early or to discuss a proposal well before the five-day requirement draws near.

## Final paper: you choose

This assignment, conducted individually, gives you a chance to pull together your learning. The task is to analyze one work of Singaporean art in terms of one theory of nationalism and one informed or/and reputable theory of art. I grade this analysis (ranging from 1,200 to 1,500 words long) in terms of its demonstration of your comprehension of this module's assignments and discussion (in class and on IVLE), your capacity to probe critically, the depth of your reflection(s), and your prose's clarity. Your grade on this project counts for 20% of your final score in this module.

You choose ONE of the following options:

**A theoretically informed analysis of a recent or current art showing that you have attended in person (i.e., no on-line encounters unless the art was made specifically for that engagement modality),** including a main claim (aka thesis) and quest (aka motive),\* that you back up with an annotated bibliography that you hand in 5 days before this project is due. Expect the annobib to occupy 400 to 500 words which are not reckoned in the 1,200 to 1,500 word limit mentioned above. Each annobib will mention the work of art, providing a link if possible or some other way for me to access the art, if a link can't be found. Feel free to consult about the sorts of 'showings' that will serve for this assignment. (If you have not learned these concepts yet, I will explain them.)

This assignment gives you a chance to try to write to and for the local arts audience, broadly conceived.

**A reflective interview report** that starts with you interviewing a Singaporean about art, nation, nationalism, and/or a work of art that has claims to be thought nationalist, and leads to you writing reflectively about your findings with an analytical "edge" which could include discussing your interviewee's theory of nation, nationalism, art, and/or of nationalist art. This project includes an informal transcript of the part of the history on which your reflection focuses. Sample starter questions can be brainstormed on IVLE but might include: do you consider yourself a nation-builder? When (and/or how) did you first think of yourself as Singaporean (or not Singaporean)? We discussed this work of art in class and some people felt ... How do you react to that reaction to this art?

This assignment gives you a speaking/hearing/pondering sort of 'real world' practice with the topics and tools that we engage in this module this term.

**A thoughtful, and justified, guided tour for non-Singaporean visitors**

This project starts with you choosing a work of art to show visitors to this country. The next move is justification of your choice, explanation of what you would tell the visitors about this artwork, and clarification of your stance as a guide: will you act as a nationalist? an anti-nationalist? on behalf of the patria? as a post-colonial subject and/or a specialist in “oscillating”? and so on. You should also consider, and relate, what you will tell the visitors before they see the art (if anything), what you will say – or do? – while they are experiencing it, and what you will say and/or do afterward. This assignment is designed to be fun yet serious. In fact, it may turn out to be the most serious of the three choices. Certainly, this assignment is every bit as critical.

Class participation Contributions that you make in class and on IVLE count in this category, worth 10% of your final score. Several short writing assignments are included here, too, such as quizzes. Quantity of participation counts less than quality. Intelligent questions or searches for clarification can be valuable. Strive though to offer informed or/and thoughtful preliminary answers to your own questions, to help us see your angle. Bringing to our attention relevant topics or texts, which are not on the syllabus, can enhance everyone’s learning. At the same time, there is danger if inquiries scatter too widely. Stay focused therefore, to contribute in a ‘best practices’ manner.

Be ready for quizzes, in-class projects, and reflection opportunities for which there will be no make-up.

Graded papers for this module are typed and double-spaced. Leave margins of 1.25” at top and bottom, please, with 1” margins on each side. Choose a 12-point font which is no smaller than Calibri.

All written assignments for this module will use this heading:

**USE2312: Nationalism and the Arts**  
**Fall 2011, A/P Ryan**  
<Assignment rubric: e.g., Sing Paper #2>  
<Title of your paper>

**Your name must not appear on any uploaded work**, including any running head you may choose to insert. However, your matric number must be at the bottom of the last page; I need this information to record your grade. **Insert page numbers**.

We must respect intellectual property rights. If you have completed WCT, you know how to cite sources properly. If you have not completed WCT yet, please find below formats that you can use for our module.

**In your paper's body-text:**

When Renan speaks of 'the fusion of the populations' of which various states are composed, some will think that he is really talking about nations (49).

In our discussion of 'the fusion of the populations' of which various states are composed, some will suppose that we should have used the word *nation* (Renan 49).

**At the end of your papers:**

Brown, Mary. "A Very Interesting Article." *Studies in Nationalist Art* 56 (June 2007): 34-56.

Renan, Ernest. "What is a nation?" *Nationalism in Europe, 1815 to the Present: A Reader*. Ed. Stuart Woolf (London and New York: Routledge, 1996): 48-60.

Tolstoy, Leo. "What is art?" <http://www.csulb.edu/~jvancamp/361r14.html>.

Note the **alpha order** in the "Works Cited" section at the end of one's papers. Note spacing too since it's an easy thing to get right. If in doubt about these formats, post your questions on IVLE so that all can learn.

**Deadlines**

Deadlines are not flexible. I plan them for your benefit. Work that misses a deadline by more than two hours, loses points in two-hour increments unless you have my written permission to hand work in late.