

CHAPTER II FRAMEWORK OF THE THEORIES

A. Political Identity

Identity politics as a mode of organizing is intimately connected to the idea that some social groups are oppressed; that is, that one's identity as a woman or as a Native American, for example, makes one peculiarly vulnerable to cultural imperialism (including stereotyping, erasure, or appropriation of one's group identity), violence, exploitation, marginalization, or powerlessness (Young 1990) according to http://cscs.res.in/courses_folder/undergraduate-courses/papers.2008-02-05.9798782311/7.-the-identity-question (accessed on Friday, September 7, 2018). Identity politics starts from analyses of oppression to recommend, variously, the reclaiming, redescription, or transformation of previously stigmatized accounts of group membership.

The term “identity politics” is also something of a philosophical punching-bag for a variety of critics. Often challenges fail to make clear their object of critique, using “identity politics” as portrayal that invokes a range of tacit political failings. From a contemporary viewpoint, some early identity claims by political activists absolutely appear to be naive, totalizing, or unnuanced. However, the general rhetoric of identity politics give useful and empowering purposes for some, even while it sometimes misrepresent the philosophical complexity of any claim to a shared experience or common group characteristics. Since the twentieth century of the well known political movements that made identity politics so visible, a vast academic literature has sprung up, although “identity politics” can draw on intellectual precursors from Mary Wollstonecraft to Frantz Fanon, writing that actually uses this specific term, with all its contemporary baggage, is limited almost only to the last thirty years. Other than that it was barely as intellectuals began to systematically outline and defend the philosophical underpinnings of identity politics that we simultaneously began to challenge them. At this historical point, then, the question whether one is for or against identity politics is an impossible question. Wherever they line up in the debates, thinkers agree that the notion of identity has become the basic to contemporary political

discussion, at the same time as they agree that it has disturbing implications for models of the self, political inclusiveness, and our potential outcome for solidarity and resistance.

As Sonia Kruks puts it:

What makes identity politics a significant departure from earlier, pre-identarian forms of the politics of recognition is its demand for recognition on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition has previously been denied: it is qua women, qua blacks, qua lesbians that groups demand recognition. The demand is not for inclusion within the fold of “universal humankind” on the basis of shared human attributes; nor is it for respect “in spite of” one's differences. Rather, what is demanded is respect for oneself as different (2001: 85).

In the West, identity is a method of organizing physical characteristics, beliefs, accumulated knowledge, experiences, abilities, and personality into attributes, the particular mixture of which makes each individual unique and identifiable. Identity is that center part of the person that provides continuity to the self as it moves through life. This center of identity is thought to form early in childhood and to be quite stable under normal circumstances. Changes to identity are events worthy of special notice and sometimes even ceremony (graduations, religious ceremonies, and other transitional experiences).

According to Frueh Jamies (1966:23) Global Politics has also adopted the term identity to discuss about the “basic character” of states. In this corporate sense, identity refers to a collectivity’s culture, territory, resources, and relative power in a metaphor for an individual’s personality, physical traits, and social roles. Although the idea of a person having an identity is ultimately as arbitrary as that of a state having one, identity was initially regarded as an attribute of an individual, and most scholars who have employed the metaphor have assumed rather than explained the appropriateness of the implied comparison. Using theories of identity to explain how a nation is “evoked into being” and “how that national public may then tend to behave” is a important key. In general, such psychological theories of identity tend to essentialize biological and psychological drives and downplay or challenge social power, agency, and change.

A key condition of possibility for contemporary identity politics was institutionalized liberal democracy. The citizen mobilizations that made

democracy happened also shaped and unified groups also invited expectations of material and symbolic equality. Citizens are able to register their individual preferences through voting or to make themselves involved even more systematically by forming an association such as a party or neighborhood community league. These methods could be defined by the identity of their members or by specific shared interests and goals.

B. Political of Englishness

The creation and belief in a form of Englishness as a means to conceptualise and contextualise community, history and people is a means to systematically rationalise and understand, in a self-serving form of coherence, what it means to identify as English. In a Gramscian sense, this can be used to contextualise dominance in an ideological field of conflict which produces, or at least tries to form a hegemonic narrative of English national identity and purpose. This highlights the idea of ‘social settlement’ (Massey, 2014), where the hegemony of the current social order creates a dominant ideological framework and social narrative. Conservatism, traditionalism and neo-liberalism therefore dominate, in an often assumed and taken-for-granted understanding of social and national discourse across all areas. Identity can become bound up with an intimate relationship with this ideological dominance framing our social and national existence and experience.

Political questions or perspectives are often disguised as social or cultural commentary when efforts towards achieving or maintaining dominant representations of identity are attempted. For example, in the case of immigration or the EU and the language and boundaries these topics are couched within. Parallels can be drawn with how Stuart Hall (1983) theorized Thatcherism and the Conservative domination and exploitation of patriotism around the Falklands conflict. Politics, in this sense, is conflated with social or cultural questions or issues which produces a manipulated sense of purpose and disguises key issues toward a political or ideological end. The success of Thatcherite conservatism can be seen to derive its success from reinforcing patriotism and imperial nostalgia. Traditionalist concepts of Englishness draw heavily on carefully selected and

cultivated historical construction of place, class, position and the seeming superiority of the English ruling class as rightful rulers. This can be identified in reference to writers such as C.K Chesterton or Cyril McNeile who referred to ‘the Breed’ - those who:

Had been in the eleven at Eton, and was a scratch golfer. He had a fine seat on a horse and rode straight; he could play a passable game of polo, and was a good shot...He belonged, in fact, to the Breed; the Breed that has always existed in England, and will always exist to the world's end (McNeile, 1953:155).

Tony Bennett comments that the myth of Englishness is constructed against the tide of history. It is related directly to a sense of a specific construction of history, and to a sense of loss or a yearning for a historical utopia according to <http://eprints.brighton.ac.uk/17708/1/FINAL.pdf> (accessed on Tuesday, October 9, 2018)

Here Englishness is portrayed by a series of what Oded Heilbrunner (2012) describes as fixed cultural signs, patterns of behaviours, institutions, representations and stereotypes. They can be viewed as and represent a particular nostalgia which echoes William Blake's ‘Jerusalem’ (which symbolically is heard at one of the traditionalist bastions of England - Lords cricket ground, before a test match). According to Heilbrunner (2012), Patrick Wright and Robert Hewison characterise ideologically motivated concepts of heritage and Englishness as the triumph of aristocratic and reactionary nostalgia. This nostalgic perspective draws deeply into a typically and purposefully white, rural, middle class and culturally conservative identity- a nostalgia for a ‘green and pleasant land’ England often defined by what it is not as much as what it is. The interpreted meaning of the past informs and defines Englishness. A concept of traditionalism is drawn upon to deal with challenges thrown up by modernity, industrialisation, democracy, post-colonialism and globalisation. Traditionalism harks back to a sense of domination and stability prior to any ‘new’ challenges to a specific established order and will always look to a glorified and idealized construction of the past in relation to the present.

England being an intensely globalized space, one in which the dominant neo-conservative free market political and economic discourse views

globalization as a positive process and an opportunity, yet the same dominant and prevailing conservative ideology on the other hand views globalization through a social and cultural discourse as a distinct threat and problem. In an historical, cultural and social context Britain (and specifically England) has been an extremely globalized and globalizing nation. In essence, England or more generally Britain is defined by globalization- a long history of economically and politically generalising forms such as imperialism and capitalism but also as a receiver of generalising cultural globalization and successive waves of migration. Indeed, as Stuart Hall points out

“it is almost impossible to think about the formation of English society or of the United Kingdom and all the things that gave it a kind of privileged place in the historical narratives of the world, outside of the process that we identify with globalization”(Hall, 1997:173).

Conservative notions of Englishness are arguably built upon things that have disappeared or are in the process of rapidly fading away, mainly since an accelerated process of globalization post-1945: economic global supremacy, large-scale industrial base, global military might and influence, direct and indirect imperial control and a stronger sense of union towards an internal and external national project. Contemporary reality presents a very different picture. Arguably it can be observed that dominant discourse concerning Englishness has not moved with or kept pace with social, cultural and political developments.

As an entity and as a national culture the United Kingdom rose with and is arguably declining with one of the successive epochs of globalization. An era dominated by and defined by the economies and cultures of powerful nation-states. In this sense, the past informs and frames our perception of the present, none more so than the relationship between processes of globalization and English/ British national identity. This can go some way to explain why an English national identity is so heavily indebted to concepts of nostalgia of a supposed ‘golden era’ and hostility or anxiety towards the present, as Krishan Kumar states,

“in whichever direction they look, the English find themselves called upon to reflect upon their identity and to rethink

their position in the world. The protective walls that shielded them from these questions are all coming down” (Kumar, 2003:16).

Any sense of English national identity is torn between the widely perceived glories of the past and anxiety towards the present and future. It must also be considered that the present and future places a sense of English national identity in a very ambiguous and conflicting position. Any sense of contemporary dominant English national identity is strongly related to the past however globalization presents the problem of situating and contextualising this within the present, which is a significant departure from idealised notions of perceived former glories. The English have more trouble identifying themselves in the post- imperial era than other nations. For the English the loss of Empire calls for a new reassessment of identity, one in which it has yet to fully come to terms with both in an internal (UK) and external (EU, global) sense.

