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Identity, Ideology, and Institutional Impacts

Personality, with regard to a certain aspect of reflection, irrefutably creates the notion of identification. More importantly, identity is a crucial keystone in fully grasping the overall depiction of certain ideologies, economic studies, or any other political or social concern; without a concise and clear comprehension of identity as a separate notion, one only notices portions of the overall relationship between people, things, and ideas. Yet, identity in relation to comparative institutions shapes the ideas of masses and elites alike. Louis Althusser, a French Marxist philosopher, notes that an inexplicable relationship exists between any state apparatus and the sense shared identity of certain groups of persons. And due to the impact of ideology on identity, a variety of consequential institutions and cultural norms will be key case studies in examining the issue of identity.

Eric Hobsbawm, James Fearon and David Laitin, Samuel Huntington, and Fouad Ajami, discuss unique aspects of comparative international institutional arrangements and each author asks how each arrangement impacts the identity of people and states. In the first two cases people essentially shift their understanding of themselves, and in the second two cases states are in essence viewed with different ideological perspectives. The latter two cases are dialect viewpoints that describe the identity of the states in the international order. Important notice should be directed that in every case study, fundamental institutional transformations impact the identity of the unit being studied; each case highlights that the issue of identity does not form in a vacuum, but instead is influenced by institutional and cultural restrictions.

Nationalism and the Rise of the European Middle Class

In the 1840's, much of European society had disposed of the vassalage structure associated with feudalism; city-states were completing their unification process as the loyalties of citizens changed.

Instead of loyalty to a king, many French, German, British, and other European citizens pledged allegiance to the flag of their country. The institutional paradigm shift associated with a rising middle class society afforded a slim portion of the populous, which was not aristocracy, education and critical thought. As a result, literacy rates improved. While Eric Hobsbawm emphasized the spread of nationalism as a global phenomenon, it is distinct that the identity of citizens as loyal subjects shifted to individual informed members of a country due to the “dual revolution” of the nation-state.

Civil War as a Catalyst of Identity

Similar to the institutional impacts of state development, degradation of a state also increases the likelihood of changing identities. James Fearon and David Laitin compare the relation between ethnic heterogeneity and civil war. Fearon and Laitin note that a nation-state is more likely to experience a civil war if its citizens do not have an adequate standard of living supported by capable governance. A state that is unable to address the grievances of a particular group also produces the possible conditions for civil unrest and/or institutional change; this change tends to occur in states with a low GDP/capita. To elaborate, a state that has citizens that perceive that they are mistreated are also experiencing an incentive to alter their role in society. The role of the individual becomes their new identity, even if the state did not intentionally attempt to create an opposing force.

States with regard to Civilizations

Both Samuel Huntington and Fouad Ajami, noting their debate in the early 1990's, perceive that the role of the state is shifting from that of the Cold War era. Huntington argues that states are experiencing unification with their respective civilization; classification of fissures and borders between civilizations show that Huntington is using an ideological perspective that argues states are conglomerating with their similar cultural neighbors. The term “kin-country” similarly states that Huntington identifies states along the concept of civilization commonality. Furthermore, Huntington

specifically notices that hegemonic order has grouped states over the past millennium due to balance-of-power arrangements.

Yet, Fouad Ajami argues from an opposing ideological stance rebutting the argument of Huntington. Ajami cited specific instances of internal strife between civilizations, such as the conflict between Saddam Hussein and the Islamic civilization of Huntington. Ajami finds that civilizations have not had loyalty or fidelity to one another due to the modern hegemonic international order. Fouad Ajami, like Samuel Huntington, is also confined by a certain ideological constraint; however, Ajami instead identifies that states will remain unchanged – states will continue to persist in an existence of self-help. Clearly, identities form also based on the perception of a third-party such as an academic.

Conclusion

Ideological shifts in international society altered the identities of masses. Nationalism led to the development of individual citizenship separate from a monarch. In civil wars, the rebel group experiences a displacement in belief due to the overall institutional collapse. In the first two cases, identity of the individual changes based upon cultural and institutional changes. In the latter two cases, comparisons can be made between a nationalistic ideological constraint, of Samuel Huntington, and a civil war ideological confinement, of Fouad Ajami. Huntington finds that states could conglomerate based on nationalism and creates civilizational identities for states; however, Ajami finds that states are more like rebel groups in a domestic environment fighting a civil war, and as a result imposes a self-help identity on states.

The notion of a role or part to play is linked to identity due to the nature the actor identifies with as a particular role, in some instances; a separate observer may identify actors. Ideology is directly related to perception, and often defines how one sees a role. The role, or identity, of a specific unit of analysis, whether it is the individual or the state, is dependent upon the perceptions one has of that role.