

# Culture Politics And Identity

Professor: Madhumita Mazumdar

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## 1 What is Identity?

A sociological perspective : Late modern social theorists have developed a particular sociological perspective on self-hood in new times. A generally held assumption of late modernity suggests that identity matters more now because we have more choice. It could be argued that in previous generations we had identities waiting-for us. The existence of strong class-based and regionally specific communities shaped the life trajectories of individuals. Within these locally bounded contexts individuals further developed a notion of being in the world through occupational structures and work-based cultures. By contrast late modern social worlds appear to offer fluidity, mobility and choice.

Social identity is defined as the part of the self-concept or as termed it the self-image that is determined by social categories. Social identity can be either positive or negative. Of course, an individual strives to gain a positive social identity with the aim of increasing self-worth and self-esteem. In other words, social identity comprises how the social categorizations and the value ascribed to particular groups are represented in an individual's self-concept. Closely linked to social identity is the term social status. Groups strive for a high social status and use several strategies to satisfy this motive. For example, they might over-state the in-groups strengths or deny the out-groups benefits and advantages. Avoiding comparison with relevant out-groups might be a strategy to save a social status.

Cultural identity is unique to every single person and is heavily based on the community and environment they grow up in. A person can analyze their cultural identity through many different categories such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status and many more.

In this response paper different perspective of identity will be explored and the works of Zygmunt Bauman and Stuart Hall on How, why and What of Identity throughout history and Modernity.

## 2 Authors - "Identity"

Zygmunt Bauman - A Polish-born sociologist who explored the fluidity of identity in the modern world, the Holocaust, consumerism and globalization. Dr. Bauman was renowned for an approach that incorporated philosophy and other disciplines, and he was regarded as a strong moral voice for the poor and dispossessed in a world upended by globalization. In the 1990s, he coined the term liquid modernity to describe a contemporary world in such flux that individuals are left rootless and bereft of any predictable frames of reference.

Bauman, following Freud, came to view European modernity as a trade off: European society, he argued, had agreed to forego a level of freedom to receive the benefits of increased individual security. Bauman argued that modernity, in what he later came to term its 'solid' form, involved removing unknowns and uncertainties. It involved control over nature, hierarchical bureaucracy, rules and regulations, control and categorization all of which attempted to remove gradually personal insecurities, making the chaotic aspects of human life appear well-ordered and familiar.

Stuart Hall - Stuart McPhail Hall, was a Jamaican-born British Marxist sociologist, cultural theorist and political activist. Hall, along with Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams, was one of the founding figures of the school of thought that is now known as British Cultural Studies or The Birmingham School of Cultural Studies.

In the 1950s Hall was a founder of the influential New Left Review. Stuart Hall was director of Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University. While at the Centre, Hall is credited with playing a role in expanding the scope of cultural studies to deal with race and gender, and with helping to incorporate new ideas derived from the work of French theorists like Michel Foucault.

Hall's work covers issues of hegemony and cultural studies, taking a post-Gramscian stance. He regards language-use as operating within a framework of power, institutions and politics/economics. This view presents people as producers and consumers of culture at the same time. (Hegemony, in Gramscian theory, refers to the socio-cultural production of "consent" and "coercion".) For Hall, culture was not something to simply appreciate or study, but a "critical site of social action and intervention, where power relations are both established and potentially unsettled".

Hall's works, such as studies showing the link between racial prejudice and media, have a reputation as influential, and serve as important foundational texts for contemporary cultural studies. He also widely discussed notions of cultural identity, race and ethnicity, particularly in the creation of the politics of Black diaspora identities. Hall believed identity to be an ongoing product of history and culture.

### 3 Two complementary perspective

Zygmunt Bauman reminds us that identity is forged in the social sphere is located within temporal relations; a sense of the past, present and future haunts identity-work and identity practices. In asking the question, Who am I? individuals are invited to set down identity markers located within the past and the present. Mother, lover, worker- or whatever terms we reach for - work as both ascription and claims that account for the self in shorthand. How should I live? points to the present, conjuring up the practices and routines that define ways of being in the world. The third question, Who do I want to become? orientates us towards the future, tapping into the aspirational project of fashioning a future self. The inter-relationship between past, present and future in the on-going work of developing an identity suggests that who we are, what we do and what we become changes over the life course and furthermore, the work of identity remains fragile and unstable to the point where settlement is unachievable. Bauman powerfully suggests that developing an identity is a fate that modern individuals cannot escape; we need identity because without it we would go mad.

Zygmunt bauman focuses mainly in the topic of individualism Identity, and describes the idea of "Individualization" that is to set free from inherited identity and accept the identity of self. Bauman also mentions the "Individualization" as transforming the 'human-identity' from inherited to a 'task' and he will be charged with responsibilities for that task.

The "self-identification" of high class people's were determined by the way of their living, there was three estates in France the first estate (those who pray-the clergy), the second estate (those who fight-the nobility and military) and the third estate (the middle class, peasants) but in the early modern era these "Estate" system was broken and the term called "re-embeddedness" was mentioned, that is falling apart of "Estates" to "Classes" and allocation of individuals to a class, as it was negotiable and self established identity rather than what happens in the "Estate-systems". The individuals can choose the class, this distinguished the "Individualization" from "Liquid Modernity" where individuals can have access to build so called "life-projects" by choosing the niche through behaving and as established aristocracy like living a satisfactory and comfortable life.

He also expresses Eric Hobsbawm's ideology of identity, which briefs that individual men or women were continuously looking for the groups to fit-in, which is a never settled activity. He also adds that the Identity emerges when the communities collapses. Identities are not inherited or acquired, in other terms to face the reality of globalizing world "Identification" is always incomplete, it is never ending and unfinished, because everything is moving, never settling. Identity is an open activity where people can choose

what they want, activity of free to choose.

Stuart hall's perspective - Views on cultural identity and the African diaspora.

Hall defines cultural identity in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective one true self, hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed selves, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as one people, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning. This oneness, underlying all the other.

Cultural identity is a "a sort of collective 'one true self' which many people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common." In this view, cultural identity provides a "stable, unchanging and continuous frame of reference and meaning" through the flow of historical change.

Hall's cultural identity "recognizes that, as well as the many points of similarity, there are also critical points of deep and significant difference which constitute 'what we really are'; or rather since history has intervened 'what we have become. In this view, cultural identity is not a fixed essence rooted in the past. Instead, cultural identities undergo constant transformation throughout history as they are "subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power". Thus Hall defines cultural identities as the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. This view of cultural identity was more challenging than the previous due to its dive into deep differences." In other words, for Hall cultural identity is "not an essence but a positioning".

In the paper "The Question of cultural Identity" Stuart Hall explains cultural Identity through five de-centering of different ideologists and philosophers.

In first de-centring Hall explains about the "Marxist Thinking" that the Identity is not all about the 'men' (mankind) it's about the how social culture and the the historical conditions are the foundation of social and cultural identity.

In the second de-centring hall explains about the ideology of Freud's theory of identity and Lacan's psychoanalytic theory. Lacan interprets Freud's saying of the image of self and unified is something which infant learn through complex unconscious imitation of others or the learning of behaviors through mirroring of the parental figures, Lacan term it as "Mirror Phase Development". This forms the image as a 'whole' person in the subconscious brain of a child/infant. And this formation of self opens the child's perspective of the world so that he can relate to the symbolic system outside itself, symbolic system including language, culture and sexual differences. Thus the identity is not inherited or born with consciousness, it is the formed through the unconscious process or the mirroring of the existing system of historical and

cultural processes over time.

The third de-centring hall follows the ideology of saussure, that language pre-exists us. It is the language which is not individual but it is social through which our system of meaning of culture is defined. As Lacan says "Identity, like the unconscious, is structured like language" it's same like mirroring concept, different cultures have different meaning of the word, meanings arise in the relation of similarity. Meaning is unstable, it aims for the identity. Thus language is the major factor which also defines the social identity and cultural Identity as whole.

The Fourth de-centring Hall explains about the philosophy of Michel Foucault about his idea of 'Genealogy of modern subject'. In his idea of Genealogy of modern subject the main idea was "disciplinary Power", disciplinary and surveillance of people or he terms "subjects" or whole population and the individual and the body. The basic object was to make human beings a submissive subjects who just follow like "docile body" which primarily takes away the Identity. Foucault also mentions that in a disciplinary regime where everything is under control, it "individualizes" the subject (people's). In other words the disciplinary regime and administrative power isolates people's from cultural identity and disrupts the social identity. In Foucault's thought, identity is not a metaphysical notion, but (importantly) a political notion that is necessary for those strategies of power through which human beings are made subjects.

In Fifth de-centring the main ideology was about "Feminism" and the emergence of "Identity Politics". In 1960s the great watershed of late modernity, many social and political movements like the anti-war and counter cultural youth movements, the civil right struggles, the peace movements, each movement has a meaning and appealed to the social identity of its supporters, and also gave birth to identities like gender equalities, Feminism, identity politics etc. one identity per movement. Later as a social and political question, the gender identities and gendered subjects are produced.

## **4 Takeaways - Examples - Argument**

The way Zygmunt Bauman puts it, Identity is a name given to escape sought from that uncertainty. In this process different cultural landscapes of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race and nationality which gave us firm locations as social individuals in the past and the blending of real and virtual are shifting our personal identities, undermining our sense of ourselves as integrated subjects. Identities are being decentered or dislocated causing a series of identity crises among young people.

Stuart Hall describes identity as a structured representation which only achieves its positive through the "narrow eye of the negative". This means that the self cannot be formed in isolation and only when it

comes in contact with the other does it know itself. Identity thus stitches the subject into the structure. All our unique characteristics like dreams, voice, style of talking, walking and behaving help in defining the self but this self still has to interact with the outside world of religion, market, work, family or community in the context of history to belong and feel part of.

What Stuart Hall misses is the politics of cultural identity, how the model of identity and difference is the dominant model of political organization what the possibilities of dynamism and openness in cultural identities are, and consequently what inhabits and resists such qualities, promoting in their place rigidity and closure. Identity politics based on gender, race, religion, caste, class and nation is often played around by politicians or people in power to create animosity and differences among people.

## **5 Do the paper reach similar conclusions if yes how if not why?**

Yes, Zygmunt Bauman's opinion on Identity was on "Individualism Identity", which mainly focuses on the self rather than collective. Self in the sense of class and groups. And in the late modernity people's were free to choose the class and groups to live by. But these groups and activities were never settled these were the continuous moving activities to fit-in. Stuart hall's gives the example of the late modernity in which how the people gave rise to different identities through movements and through awakening or realization, that these were the socio-cultural Identities.

He also gives his opinion about the "The Enlightenment Subject" that is awakening and knowing of "thy-self", which centered the individual men and women and is a fixed stable identity, and how it was broken down into five de-centring in which men(sic) or the mankind was put aside and think of as all as one collective identity.

The conclusion was that Bauman's ideology of individualism is defined on a scale that is centered on men or the people's but also at the same time Hall's ideology of cultural Identity, that de-centred the men and focuses on collective identity. But the similar conclusion observed was that Identity is an open activity and never ending process either be it Individual Identity or Cultural Identity.

## 6 Conclusion

In a postmodern world where all actions are mediated and where choice is available for everything, from toothpaste to the latest gadget on our fingertips, the question of who you are and where you belong and what you want to become is not lack of the intrusion of media.

In the world of digital media where screens are personal and individuals operate with high degree of autonomy and faceless and bodiless communication transpires, geographical cultural signifiers become invalid, and there arises a new digital cultural regime filled with likes, posts, reposts and sharing and a language of its own. In social networking, online profiles and archive create identity. Every time one creates an update, posts a picture of self, his/her need to be linked in, to feel at once connected and in control of ones forms of interaction and self-expression is fulfilled. Emergence of new spaces of connection focus on style, creativity and play for the creative promotion of the self. This includes discrete aspects of visual semiotic modalities, such as gesture, gaze, the body, space. The recent development of low-cost digital image technologies has enabled multimodality of human communication. One individual is connected to many.

In such a situation, new forms of political protest emerge where anonymity, diversity and opinions are used to raise peoples awareness, give voice to those who dont have one and offer social empowerment through participation. While the individual becomes atomized and location based apps track each and every movement, the self becomes endlessly performative, identity becomes a freely chosen game, something to be constructed though Facebook and Instagram theatrical presentation of the self.