SciencesPo
SUMMER SCHOOL

(Re)thinking Social Identities:
Nationalism, Ethnicity and Politics

Professor: Adam Lenton
Session: Pre-College Programme 2021
Language of instruction: English
Number of hours of class: 14

Objective of the Course

The objective of this course is to help you to think critically about how social identites both shape and are shaped by politics. After taking this course you will be able to: a) understand the main theoretical approaches used to study social identities in politics, with a particular focus on nationalism, ethnicity, and race; b) critically assess these approaches' benefits and drawbacks; and c) apply these insights to real-world issues across countries. As such, this course will provide you with several tools with which to engage critically with questions of identity and politics, whether in academic, political, or social settings.

Summary

Whether considering the rise of populist nationalism in Europe, racial injustice in the United States, or civil wars and conflicts across the globe, identity is of central importance for social scientists and citizens alike. But what is an identity? Why do some identities become politically important? And how do identities influence political behaviour? This course will provide you with insights and perspectives from across the social sciences and humanities to think about and engage meaningfully with this important concept.

In our seven-session course we will focus predominently on nationalism, ethnicity, and race. Whilst these identities are distinct, together they contribute a rich set of perspectives for thinking about issues of culture, societal organization, and human diversity. Each session will be structured around a key theoretical question and an important contemporary political issue.

We will start by asking what identities are and what functions they fulfil. Then, the course turns to ask how politics has influenced these identities. As social constructions, ethnicity, race, and nation did not naturally or inevitably emerge: we will explore how processes of industrialization and colonization profoundly affected - and continue to affect - identities today. The second part of the course asks how these identities impact politics. We will examine how identities impact political parties, voting behaviour, and participation in social movements and protests, drawing upon and discussing the role of identity in contemporary political events across Europe and the United States, such as the rise of populist parties, anti-immigrant sentiment, separatism, and racial injustice.

The final part of the course looks beyond ethnicity, race, and nationalism. We will investigate how other identities - such as gender, class, and religion - intersect with these identities, and we will consider whether we are moving towards a post-ethnic/racial/national world.

Organization of the Course

Introduction

Session 1: What is identity?
Identity is a central concept in the social sciences, but what does it mean to "have" an identity? Which elements of our identities are most important to us, and why? Are identities inherently oppositional? In this session we will examine foundational approaches to conceptualizing group identities, drawing upon perspectives from psychology, anthropology, sociology, and political science. These approaches offer contrasting answers to the above questions, and we will use these to begin to think about why - and how - such group identities can be politically relevant.

Readings:
- Geher, Glenn. 2019. "The Psychology of "Othering": Outgroup psychology and the roots of social conflict."
https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/darwins-subterranean-world/201904/the-psychology-othering
-Selasi, Taiye. 2015. "Don't ask me where I'm from, ask me where I'm local." (video).
https://www.ted.com/talks/taiye_selasi_don_t_ask_where_i_m_from_ask_where_i_m_a_local?language=en.

Part 1: how politics affects identities

Session 2: Where do identities come from?
One of the most most enduring debates among scholars and individuals alike concerns whether national identities are modern or ancient, natural or socially constructed. We will visit the arguments and positions of "primordialists" and "constructivists." We will use these perspectives to discuss where we stand in this debate on whether nations are old or new.

Readings:
- Renan, Ernst. 1882. "Renan, Ernest. "What Is a Nation?" .
http://ucparis.fr/files/9313/6549/9943/What_is_a_Nation.pdf
(for those who can read French, see "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?" http://www.iheal.univ-paris3.fr/sites/www.iheal.univ-paris3.fr/files/Renan_-_Qu_est-ce_qu_une_Nation.pdf.)
-Wimmer, Andreas. 2019. "Why Nationalism Works: And Why It Isn't Going Away." Foreign affairs.
https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2019-02-12/why-nationalism-works

Session 3: Why are some identities easier to change than others?
This session explores the forces and political processes which make some identities durable and meaningful for individuals. We will engage with a rich body of critical scholarship that seeks to uncover how race - despite having no biological foundation - came to be seen as a "natural" category. By doing so, we can begin to understand why some identities remain powerful social constructions, and what power relations they can help us to see. We will discuss the challenges of making race visible or invisible, notably by comparing the French and American contexts.

Readings:
- Hall, Stuart. 1997. "Race as floating signifier." https://vimeo.com/87470149.
- Calvès, Gwénaële. 2004. "Color-Blindness at a Crossroads in Contemporary France". In Herrick Chapman,
Laura Levine Frader, Race in France: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Politics of Difference, 266.
- Singletary, Michelle. 2020. "Credit scores are supposed to be race-neutral. That's impossible." Washington Post.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/10/16/how-race-affects-your-credit-score/?arc404=true

Part 2: how identities affect politics
Session 4: Do people vote based on interests or identities?
In this session we transition to thinking about how identity impacts politics. Scholars and politicians alike strive to understand why voters choose certain candidates or parties over others. Across the globe, identity-based appeals are widespread, both among populist and mainstream parties. In this session we will examine some of the ways in which identities shape voting behaviour and political parties. We will discuss the role of group identities versus economic and elite interests, with a particular focus on populist parties in the EU and the United States.

Readings:
- Bröning, Michael. 2016. "The Rise of Populism in Europe." Foreign Affairs.
https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/europe/2016-06-03/rise-populism-europe
- Camus, Jean-Yves. 2014. "Not your father's far right." Le monde diplomatique.
https://mondediplo.com/2014/03/03populism. (for those who can read French, see Camus, Jean-Yves. 2014. "
Extrêmes droites mutantes en Europe," Le monde diplomatique. https://www.monde-
diplomatique.fr/2014/03/CAMUS/50209.)

Session 5: Why are people willing to risk their lives for group struggles?
Identity-based claims are often central to collective group struggles, and continue to be important today, from the
Black Lives Matter movement in the United States to anti-colonial and nationalist struggles worldwide. One way to ask
what role identity plays in contentious politics is to ask why people decide to protest, resist, or even kill for group
struggles. We will examine the role of elites and institutions in mobilizing individuals, and consider the broader links
between group struggles, justice, and culture.

Readings:
-Fanon, Franz. 1963. The Wretched of the Earth. Excerpts (for those who can read French, see Fanon. 1961. Les
Damnés de la Terre. Excerpts)
-King, Martin Luther. 1963. "Letter from Birmingham Jail."
- Malcolm X. 1964. "The Ballot or the Bullet."

Part 3: Moving beyond ethnicity, race, and nation
Session 6: How do these identities intersect with gender, class, and religion?
In this session we will examine the ways in which ethnicity, race, and nation interact with other important group
identities, as well as how they differ. We will explore how these can offer new perspectives for thinking about the
issues discussed in the previous sessions.

Readings:
- Crenshaw, K., 1990. Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color.
Stan. L. Rev., 43, p.1241.
- Htun, M., 2004. Is gender like ethnicity? The political representation of identity groups. Perspectives on Politics,
pp.439-458.

Conclusion
Session 7: Are we moving towards a post-ethnic/racial/national world?
In our final session we will look at the state of contemporary politics in 2021 and consider the future. Reflecting upon
what we've learned so far, are we moving towards a post-ethnic/racial/national world? Can, and should we be doing
so? Is it possible to make identity (in)visible? Are there alternative group solidarities that may replace these?

Readings:
- Giridharadas, Anand. 2018. "What is identity?" https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/27/books/review/francis-
fukuyama-identity-kwame-anthony-appiah-the-lies-that-bind.html

Main Professor Biography

Adam Lenton is a doctoral candidate in political science at the George Washington University, in Washington, D.C. His research interests include nationalism, political integration, and the politics of symbols and historical memory, with a regional focus on the former Soviet Union, the EU, and the United States. He previously received a dual master's degree in international security from Sciences Po Paris and the Moscow State Institute of International Affairs.