Identity Politics in the Age of Globalization
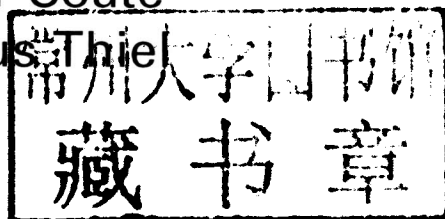
edited by
Roger Coate & Markus Thiel

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Preface

The topic of this book—identity politics in an age of globalization—is simple yet has important consequences for understanding world politics in the post-9/11 world. Identity is the need for a sense of "self" in relation to those around oneself and recognition of the legitimacy of that identity in society. It is a basic human desire and as such is a powerful source of explanation of human behavior and social interaction in international relations. The framework employed here is derivative from a basic human needs approach to understanding world politics (Coate and Rosati 1988). That approach argues that all politics are inextricably linked to processes and outcomes associated with the satisfaction or deprivation of basic needs.

Building on this foundation, the book is the result of a collaborative group process that has evolved over several years and numerous professional conferences and much networking. The process germinated during a dinner-time conversation between the editors at the 2007 annual meeting of the International Studies Association in Chicago. Panel sessions and group discussions at subsequent annual ISA meetings in San Francisco in 2008 and New York in 2009 followed. As we have proceeded, the world has moved and changed around us, making it ever more apparent that our topic—identity politics—is as important as ever. This change has served to challenge some of our initial basic assumptions and helped to enlighten our understandings of identity-based political activities and identity politics.

The election of the first U.S. African-American president has brought to the fore both in the United States and abroad a renewed focus in public discourse on the nature and role of identity politics. Writing about President Obama's nomination of Judge Sonia Sotomayor for the Supreme Court in May 2009, for example, Peter Baker of the *New York Times* stated on May 30: "In the heat of his primary battle last year, Barack Obama bemoaned 'identity politics' in America, calling it 'an enormous distraction' from the real issues of the day. Many thought his inauguration as the first African-American president this year was supposed to usher in a new post-racial age.... But four months later, identity politics is back with a vengeance." Much of the controversy centered on a speech Sotomayor had given in 2001, in which she stated the hope that

a wise Latina woman with the richness of her experiences would more often than not reach a better conclusion than a white male who had not lived such a life. A few short months later, when President Obama was addressing a joint session of Congress on health care reform, the issue of race again captured headlines as Congressman Joe Wilson from South Carolina shouted "You lie" at the president from the House floor. Former president Jimmy Carter, a seasoned veteran of southern racial politics, was quick to suggest that Wilson's comment had been based on racism.

Moreover, the renewed focus on identity politics spurred by Obama's presidency extends far beyond the waters of North America. In mid-October 2009, for example, Roger Coate was in the staff cafeteria of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris having coffee with a friend of some 25 years from French-speaking Cameroon. For over three decades she had served in the Director-General's office at UNESCO and thus gained a unique vantage point on world affairs. Soon the conversation came to the topic of President Obama's selection as Nobel Peace Prize winner for 2009, which had been announced the day before. To her, the selection was not curious or questionable. She went on to explain her perspective on the role of symbolism and identity in global political affairs. "This is the first time in modern times," she offered, "that a person of black color has assumed the top leadership role of any major world power and with his selection by popular vote came a renewal of hope and belief in the American dream and the restoration of America as a symbol of equality, justice and rights of all."

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The recent salience of identity politics provided for an intellectually stimulating exercise during the authors' collaborative effort, and it is our hope that the reader may find the outcome equally thought provoking.

Contents

1

Identity Politics and Political Identities: Local Expressions in a Globalizing World

Markus Thiel and Roger Coate

The resurgence of identity politics of various groups aided by processes of globalization is one of the major puzzles of the contemporary political world. From indigenous groups fighting against corporate power to gay-rights movements seeking equality to political dissidents publicly denouncing authoritarianism, political action based on collective identity promotion is evident everywhere these days. On the other hand, the 2008 U.S. presidential campaigns supposedly transcended issues of race and gender because of the candidates' universal appeal irrespective of their characteristics. Yet as was clearly illustrated with the vice-presidential nomination for the first female Republican candidate vying for votes against an African-American Democratic one, identity politics are not only an important, but also contentious, political dynamic in our age. In today's world, emphasizing and mobilizing identities of various kinds seem to be a constituent part of global politics. Be it in the domestic realm or in transnational and regional affairs, the significance and utilization of collective identity as a marker of political activities are evident everywhere, with some analysts projecting a new, global 'clash of peoples' as a result (Muller 2008).

This has not always been the case. Identity politics—broadly defined as political action oriented on the needs, values and interests of particular collective groups possessing a shared identity—have received growing attention in the past three decades in the academic realm and public discourse. The acceleration of processes of globalization and

cultural homogenization acted as catalysts of identity politics and has impacted on them, lending new urgency to issues of identity and its nexus with politics. As a result, the relationship between globalization, identity, and social movements has been noted as an important area of future research (Bernstein 2005). This volume concentrates on two major questions worth exploring in this context: first, how are collective identities being experienced, framed and utilized in identity promotion and maintenance and secondly, how are globalizing features such as the mediatization of politics, the spread of international norms and support by intergovernmental institutions and non-governmental actors being instrumentalized by various identity-based groups. This book explores collective identity configurations as they play out in the globally expanded political environment involving to a greater degree mass media, IGOs and INGOs, rather than focusing on constitutive identitive characteristics or movement strategies alone. A brief primer on collective identities and the theoretical framework surrounding identity politics below is of essence to correctly assess the repercussions of such actions.

The use of the term "identity politics" to describe identity-based political activities originated in the 1960s with the civil rights movement in the United States, although collective political groups and social movements representing particular identity-related causes have existed throughout history (Calhoun 2004). In a first wave, these groups aimed at inclusion into society and nondiscrimination, whereas in recent years, a more assertive stance has taken hold among them, requesting acceptance or recognition as different (Isin and Wood 1999, p. 14). Nowadays such collective group representations are based on a diverse array of identity markers, including gender, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, culture, and other shared characteristics, such as being disabled or chronically ill. The definitions for identity politics are as numerous as the groups conducting such action, from philosophical definitions highlighting the ambivalent liberty-threatening character of identity-based demands to the post-structuralist or neo-marxist critique of class-based politics to the social-movement inspired literature we are drawing upon (Bernstein 2005). The lack of an international relations and political science body of work stems from the fact that identity-based groups only recently began to utilize the effects of globalization transnationally, and that the post-modern and constructivist literatures challenge forms of essentialism. Our aim here, however, consists less in exploring the constitution of collective identities but rather how such collectives experience and transform their identities in the international environment. These groups represent to a certain extent a minority

struggling for, at the minimum, equal treatment, recognition or other social-justice causes. At times these demands are extended to include affirmative treatment (e.g. with gender or racially based groups) and/or territorial autonomy (e.g. with many ethno-cultural groups). In this sense, research on identity politics focuses on "how culture and identity [...] are articulated, constructed, invented, and commoditized as the means to achieve political ends" (Hill and Wilson 2003, p. 2).

The number of groups concerned with identity politics is very large, and the emergence of largely normative global human rights standards have pushed issues of recognition, preservation, and resource allocation to new heights. The abundance of collectivities bound together by a shared identity facet based upon differentiating characteristics from the majority population is confusing at best and has led to a somewhat biased overuse of the term "identity politics," coupled with the assumption that these groups are too diverse to be conceptually compared as to their expectations, goals and performance. It can be said, however, that these groups are joined by their belief that their belonging to politico-cultural identities contain valuable resources for social change and that they need to be actively involved in obtaining their goals (Preston 1997). They should be distinguished from more professionalized public interest groups or power-acquiring political parties, although admittedly, identity-based groups are often simultaneously social movements. Identity politics, however, are also distinct from social movements because they exist independent of a postulated opportune political structure (Tarrow 1994) and prove often more durable than issue-based movements. Collective identities and the ensuing identity movements, while in itself socially constructed "arise out of what is culturally given" (Johnston and Klandermans 1995)—they evolve out of socially engrained and ritually reinforced group affinities. The theoretical underpinnings supplied by social movement theorists specifying political opportunities, mobilizing structures, cultural framing processes and contentious interaction between state and movement aid in the analysis of identity politics in changing socio-economic environments. Even globalization has been examined in its impact on social movements (Guidry et al. 2000). Yet these movement structures have been questioned in recent years (Goodwin and Jasper 2004; Kriesi 2007), and it is our contention as well that identity politics cannot easily be reduced to the issue politics of most social movements, nor do identity-based groups pursue necessarily postmaterialist objectives typical of (new) social movements. In light of the augmented prominence of medialized politics, discursive opportunity structures, in

creating enabling political and social public spheres, are significant promoters of identity politics as well (Koopmans et al. 2005).

Members of such a group generally share a social positioning in relation to the self-identification of other societal groups as not only sharing common traits, but often also as being oppressed or marginalized i.e., they constitute collectivities that are often defined by social or political inequality and encumbered with ambiguous or negative representations by the wider polity (Williams 1998; Woodward 1997; Ingram 2004). This does not mean that identity politics represents simply protest by oppressed minorities, nor are concerns for recognition or competition for resources sufficient explanations for the prevalence of collective identities: "Like identities, identity politics in itself is neither positive nor negative. At its minimum, it is a claim that identities are politically relevant, an irrefutable fact. Identities are the locus and nodal point by which political structures are played out, mobilized, reinforced, and sometimes challenged" (Martin-Alcoff and Mohanty 2006, p. 7). Groups exercising identity politics should also be differentiated from non-identity based groups who agitate on behalf of humanity in general, such as environmental groups or the peace movement (Harding 2006), which are often summed up as 'new' social movements (Melucci 1996; Kriesi et al 1995).

One important discussion in the theoretical treatment of identity politics concerns the apparent dichotomous reactive effects of identity politics: while the almost universal acceptance of fundamental equitable democratic values has become a main focus of liberal democracies, "claims for the recognition of group difference have become increasingly salient in the recent period, at times eclipsing claims for social equality" (Fraser 1997, p. 2). This debate has been taken up by political theorists, philosophers, and social theorists, who have recognized the underlying tension between these two societal processes as constitutive elements of contemporary political discourse and practice that do not have to contradict our conception of liberal democracies as long as civil rights are not obstructed by the choices people or governments make in practice. This claim is based on John Rawls "overlapping consensus," (Kenny 2004) exemplified, for instance, by gender parity laws in Europe. If every person is an individual with a unique set of identity markers, it seems reasonable to expect to live with the tensions created by the pressure for recognition as special or different as long as there exists some degree of solidarity regarding equal coexistence in society and before the law. Sometimes, the argument is put forth that identity politics may be illiberal because of its emphasis on special privileges. In our opinion, this holds not true as a

vibrant civil society adds towards a democratic ideal, and the salience of identity promotion, even when facing difficult domestic circumstances, proves that it remains a constant concern for such groups. This specific notion also distinguishes the cases in this book here from movements based solely on opposition towards a government or another entity.

With respect to the "political" connotation in identity politics, it appears that while some of the literature on identity politics deals concretely with the political implications of minority rights, much of it is confined to an ontological debate in political theory and philosophy (Kenny 2004; Ingram 2004) or it is treated within the fields of anthropology and ethnology (Martin-Alcoff 2006), often by utilizing singular case-studies with little room for generalization. Some valuable efforts were made in the field of ethnic politics or nationalism research, for example recent investigations exploring the impact of cultural variables on the outcomes of ethnic conflict in a comparative manner (Ross 2007; Brubaker 2006). This literature, however, tends to include only one aspect of identity politics, race or ethnicity. In contrast, our project attempts to conceptually position identity politics in the political sociology and international relations realm by examining the common political structures and processes that a variety of marginalized groups create and face in a globalizing environment.

This book sets out to deliver a much-needed comparative analysis of identity politics in an attempt to discern identitive structures and differences in the utilization of globalizing processes across various regions, rather than focusing on the intrinsic origins of these movements—or identities—in specific cases. While a review of the vast literature on globalization (Held et al. 1999) is impossible here, some major effects of the global technological, economic, political, and cultural transformations are addressed insofar as they influence the political actions of identity movements, as such a discussion is lacking in the camps of pro- and anti-globalization scholars (Stieglitz 2003; Bhagwati 2004). We concur with recent analyses of globalization who attest that we find ourselves in a third-wave 'transformationalist' age (Tarrow 2005; Martell 2007), a stage in which state sovereignty is increasingly shared with other international actors such as IGOs and NGOs, but which also leads to greater risk for the maintenance and protection of cultural and social identities because of competitive neo-medievalist tendencies in the emergence of various (non-)state actors jousting for influence, and the homogenizing influence of a Westernized harmonization of politics, economics and culture. Yet at the same time, the threat of homogenization is not indicative of the rise of such movements alone; groups promoting their identity tend to be concerned

with more tangible self-asserting claims than, for instance, much of the current anti-globalization movement with its all-encompassing socio-economic focus against neoliberal capitalism. All of these movements experience 'glocalization' in that local, regional and domestic identities and cultures are increasingly created and modified in reference to external global structures (Robertson 1994). This produces qualitatively different configurations of identity politics under the impact of globalization, and presents novel challenges for states as well.

Returning to the foundational sociological literature, classic social movement theory evolved out of the struggle for economic justice and labor rights. Yet socio-economic class is not covered as a separate identity marker for political groups in this work. Economic structural indicators have been found to have an effect on the total population, and in the related literature issues, uneven economic development tend to be left out as a sole base for identity politics (Benhabib 2002; Nederveen Pieterse 2007). It has been simultaneously argued, however, that "the social valuation placed on personal attributes such as skin color, ethnicity and gender [...] is determined by the individual's objective class position" (King 2004, p. 189). Traditional movement activity relating to social class has been largely channeled into political parties, from the inception of the conservative and social-democratic parties to the stratified party spectra found today in multi-party democracies. While it is established that class is in many regions somewhat institutionalized through political parties, many other social minority groups still largely act through social movement organizations (Verloo 2006). Sociology, which provides the theoretical backdrop for identity-based action, thus distinguishes between traditional class-based social movements advocating social equality and so-called 'new' social movements that are rather concerned with postmaterial and identity-related issues (Melucci 1996). This distinction has been often criticized on grounds that the line between these two kinds of activity is too blurry, though for our approach this basic distinction holds true as identity maintenance and promotion as the main concern is *the* essential feature of identity politics.

Furthermore, critical theory has proposed that the fact that every individual sells labor, exploits it and is involved in consuming commodities and services creates a homogenizing class positioning process for every individual (Harvey 2000), albeit to different degrees in developed and emerging economies. This in turn provides for structurally similar issues of economic inequality independent of a country's stage in economic development. In this volume, macroeconomic conditions are taken into account only as they bear on

the resource mobilization of individuals and groups in these varying socio-economic regions. Equally, spatial relations of collectives and their environment are a universal feature of identity politics (Maier 2007), particularly when they are connected to economic conditions i.e., economically advanced or deprived regions inhabited by a single ethnic minority (Jenne 2007)—as is the temporal factor in the collective interest aggregation (Preston 1997).

Gender is a noteworthy category of identity politics as numerically, women represent the largest contingent of a 'minority'—in absolute terms, they actually consist of almost half of the world's population (United Nations 2008). While globalization certainly augmented competitive pressures and exposed women to some negative socio-economic risks, many also profited from the empowering effects of globalization: "Globalization breaks through cultural barriers and transports images and ideas on television and the Internet [...] It often runs up against archaic social ideas that cement drastic inequality between the sexes. Globalization attacks backward gender roles in Vietnam, encourages women in Yemen to shed their veils and gives European women economic power" (Supp 2009, p. 2). Such processes do not always work in a facilitating fashion, though: Changing cultural roles initiated through international human rights norms prove particularly contentious when confronted with pre-existing patriarchal gender norms, as pointed out in the chapter by Manuela Picq focusing on indigenous women in the Andean region.

Nationalism may be the most compelling force for identity-movements in existence, but it is only partially concerned in this work where it expresses the cultural and/or spatial autonomy of a minority vis-à-vis the government. Globalization has significantly challenged the dominance of nation-state discourses and weakened the autonomy of most countries on the globe, weaving them into an interdependent web of economic and social transnational relations. Here, it will not be treated in its role as a master-identity for a nation-state as this has been sufficiently explored in the ethnic nationalism literature (Anderson 1991; Brubakers 1995; Jenne 2007), but rather explored in its meaning for sub-nations within existing state structures which may feel emboldened by the weakening of traditional state governments and the facilitated cross-border linkages with their kin. Nationalist policies as expressed by cultural minorities are crucial aspects as they express opposition to the majority government or collective action aimed at self-expression (see the chapter on the Hungarian minority by Eloisa Vladescu).

Similarly, religion is a universally recurring identity position that has fundamental implications for majority-minority relations and thus will be explored within this project in the framework of Turkey's Gülen Movement, analyzed by Nuray Ibryamova. Religious adherence has become one of the strongest identity markers in a world of various religious-ideological markets and the ability to spread promotional messages more easily than ever. The playing up of religious identities provides stability and cohesion for communities in a seemingly plural, secular and dangerous world, and religious motivations often contribute to the (de)legitimization of existing political systems.

With respect to a further differentiation of the fundamental qualities of identity politics, the question becomes apparent whether democratic governance (i.e. the guarantee of popular sovereignty, civil liberties and functioning state institutions, among others) makes a difference in how identity-based political groups behave and attain their objectives. While it is our conviction that liberal democracies enable to a greater degree the formation of identity-based groups because of the existence and promotion of a pluralistic civil society consisting of a variety of actors, the absence of such guarantees also provokes political activity in non-democracies such as, for example, Arab countries (Mandelbaum 2007). In that sense, identity politics are prevalent and active in both, democratic and autocratic countries, but they face different challenges from state governments depending on the political ideology. Consequently, we opted for the inclusion of cases displaying both, democratically and (semi-)autocratically led country examples, as the government structure is a determinant variable and thus part of our theoretical model below.

As pointed out earlier, this project builds largely upon social movement literature, but with the salience of individual and collective identities at the heart of identity politics, social constructivist thought, rather than primordial essentialism offers ontological answers to the (re)construction of these identities which are expressed in identity politics. Not only that, the ongoing transformation of society by governments, elites and civil society determines the necessity and place of identity politics in public life. In this context, social relationships are based fundamentally on the formation and maintenance of social identity groups and networks through which individuals and groups go about satisfying needs and values. By including states, their structural non-state environment consisting of norm-creating and -diffusing IGOs and INGOs as well as the identity movements themselves advocating media-supported rules of engagement, we recognize the added value of constructivist ontology for this kind of comparative analysis (Green

2002). Although individuals negotiate their various identity-facets in many different interactions in daily life, a 'primary' identity is theorized to frame others (Castells 1997), which allows for collective identities to become regularized over time so that individuals' roles in them become institutionalized (Tilly 2005). The resulting movement-organizations are an expression of this identity as related to the larger social environment and the role expectations associated with them.

Yet in order to avoid an 'essentialist trap', one should keep in mind that identity, in contrast to its institutionalized representation, is never a fixed concept of social life. In complex social systems individuals tend to associate with a wide array of ever-changing identity groups. With respect to any particular issue, individuals may be involved in a broad spectrum of social relationships associated with differing identities. The range of identities is limitless, but for the purposes of this study, culture, race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and clan are among the most relevant. Individuals may also associate together in response to negative identities, that is, identities they see as threatening. Despite the sometimes held post-modern notion that identities are too fluid as to be conceptualized, a lot of stimulating work has recently been produced that aims at conceptualizing identities for research (McDermott et al. 2006) and that operationalizes context-based collective identities (Rousseau 2006). This project, however, is mainly concerned with the repercussions of identity-maintenance and promotion in interaction with other actors such as states, (I)NGOs, IGOs etc. rather than on their intrinsic origins. Having reviewed some fundamental concepts surrounding identity politics and the corresponding theoretical backdrops, we concentrate in the following section on the configuration of such political expressions as they play out in variously globalized settings.

The Configuration of Political identities in their Environment

An important cornerstone for understanding the role of identity movements in their political and societal environment is the way they function in aggregating and articulating interests. In this regard, Almond, in his seminal work on comparative politics, found it helpful to differentiate four main types of structures involved: institutional groups, anomic groups, associational groups and non-associational groups (Almond 1960, p. 33). Institutional groups are formally organized bodies with professional staffs whose main missions are something other than interest articulation, and yet they can and often do serve as a base of operation for a subgroup to engage in such political activities,