

Section 2 - Teoria Politica (Political Theory)

Chairs: Alessandro Campi, Antonio Florida

Panel 2.7 Identities and Identifications: Politicized Uses of Collective Identities

Identity is one of the crown jewelries in the kingdom of 'contested concepts'. The idea of identity is conceived to provide some unity and recognition while it often entails the complete opposite, namely separation, differentiation and antagonism. Few concepts have been used as much as identity for contradictory purposes. No matter what, starting from the seemingly fragile individual identity as a self-solidifying framework, identity presents us its multifaceted nature, especially in social and political sciences that aim to better understand the socialized in-group and inter-group identities, namely the collective and multi-layered identification, socially constructed through family, religion, ethnic group, regions, nation-states, supra-national entities etc. Politics-wise, identity shows up in the core of contemporary debates and makes everything either too dangerously simple or too complicated to cope with. Constructivist and de-constructivist approaches have led to the same conclusion: the eternal return of the topic as a relevant, not to say influential, factor. As a result of the diverse aspects of identity, the concept needs continuous refinement. By approaching and addressing its inherent complexity, a dynamic analysis should be provided in political research (which has often left the issue to sociology). The latter is highly necessary vis-à-vis the changing and uncertain outcomes of the recent global crisis. Yet, it cannot be trivialized. It must commence with two dialectical interrogatives: 1. if identities are socially constructed and are not natural formations, in what way and to what extent do they hold responsibility for inclusion/exclusion, self-other dichotomies? Looking at identities in social research provides explanatory tools for a wide variety of events and social dynamics to be better contextualized; 2. Since identities reflect the complex nature of human societies and engender far-reaching processes (e.g. shifts in political regime, armed conflicts etc.), what are the dynamics between the former and politics?

That said, studying identities usually generate reasonable comprehension for processes that cannot be explained by tracing pure rational driven pursuit of interests. The feelings of attachment, belonging, recognition, the processes of values' formation and norms integration, the logics of appropriateness generated in social organizations are all arenas which rely on a certain type of identity or identification. Multiple identifications overlap, interact, include or exclude, conflict or enhance trust and cooperation. Identities create boundaries and borders; define the in-group and the out-group, the similar and the excluded, the friend and the foe, the 'self' and the 'other'.

Beyond their dynamic fuzzy nature that escapes exhaustive explanations, identities are effective instruments of politicization of social life. The construction of social forms of organization and of specific social practices together with their imaginary significations requires all the time an essentialist or non-essentialist legitimating act of belonging; a social glue that extracts its cohesive function from the identification of the in-group and the power of naming the other. Identities are

political. Multicultural slogans populate extensively the twenty-first century. Yet the distance between the ideal and the real multiculturalism persists while the virtues of inclusion coexist with the adversity of exclusion. Thus dealing with identities means to integrate contestation into context. Due to the confusion between identities and identifications some scholars have demanded that the concept of identity should be abandoned. Nonetheless, identity-related issues keep emerging out of political discourse, as identity-based claims have turned out to be efficient tools for politicization of a 'constraining dissensus' (e.g. nationalism, populism and other forms of ideological radicalization). While the universalizing terms which have supposedly replaced national identities, current affairs demonstrate the (re)making of identities that tend or intend to obscure the former either by offering local and subnational identities or supranational and federalist identity projects. Therefore, identities are often conceptually used as rather intentional concepts, - they don't say much about their sphere but rather define the sphere itself-, thus make explicit the aim of their usage. It is not 'identity of' but 'identity to'.

The purpose of this panel is to develop a new research network that is dedicated to exploring the conceptual, empirical and methodological challenges and opportunities identity-related research can offer to the wider field of political studies. The panel 'Identities and Identifications: Politicized Uses of Collective Identities' wishes to contribute to the debate about the dialectical and dynamic role of identity in politics as well as the other way round. Furthermore, it seeks to apply a trans-disciplinary framework of a concept that has received little attention in mainstream political research. Consequently, it may provide the right occasion for both scholars of political and social sciences to interact on this increasingly relevant subject. Hence, this research network will bring together those working on empirical and theoretical studies that examine a range of different uses of identity, in order to develop new ways of thinking about, and applying the concept of identity in research.

Key-words: identity, identification, politics, political theory, methodology

Profile of the participants and type of papers

The Panel 'Identities and Identifications: Politicized Uses of Collective Identities' aims to scrutinize the state of the art in collective identities research, to bring into debate the processes of identity-making\building in both constructivist or de-constructivist dimensions. The aim is to open the floor for dynamic multi-dimensional and inter-disciplinary understandings of identities in their historic formation as well as in the way they shape the present and future of political life. As the panel aims to bring together political and social researchers who are willing to share and open to debate by proposing their research on identity related topics, we invite papers that explore the current state of identity within the realm of politics in Europe and around the world. The panel particularly encourages disciplinary, trans and inter-disciplinary approaches (namely political theory, political sociology, political anthropology and political philosophy) which use different methodological assessments and modalities, such as single case studies and\or cross-sectional analyses, and that address political identities and identifications. Some politically and inter-related questions concerning the issue can be of help:

- How does identity influence the politics of exclusion or inclusion within national\ international politics?
- How do identity related concepts such as race, religion, gender, sexuality and class structure get politicized in different contexts and at different levels (national/transnational)?
- How do identities shape alliances or conflicts between different sociopolitical collectivities?
- What are the strategies, tactical repertoires and identity-building practices politics forge in times of crisis?
- What are the methodological tools that must be developed to better introduce the concept of 'identity' to political research?

This panel aims at providing a critical reflection on both the historic and conceptual use of identity and identification in politics as well as at facilitating empirical and theoretical analyses of future directions for identity studies to take in social and political research.

Chairs: Alon Helled