Determinants/conditions of identities' construction, their co-existence or conflict

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The Fluidity of Identities and the Limits of Fluidity

In grappling with understanding identity social science has alternatively emphasised the determining stamp of social structural location and the creative processes of individual actors (Jenkins, 1996; Williams, 2000). The theoretical tradition of symbolic interactionism has long discouraged a view of social structure and individuals as independent entities one of which acts on the other. Rather individuals and social structures are mutually interdependent accomplishments. In accomplishing social structure and identities, individuals do so 'as both acting subjects and objects of their own and others' attention' (Williams, 92, 2000). The current 'state of the art' of understanding identity formation stresses the fluidity, complexity and context sensitivity of identities. Individuals have multiple identities and even within one setting may appeal to a range of identities. A range of competing views persist among analysts with some theorist retaining a sense of an individual core identity and others stressing that identities are not something people 'have' or 'are' but a resource that people 'use', something that they 'do'. Bauman, like a number of authors, takes the view that claiming identities involves identifying 'outsiders'. This is a position repeated, for example by Delanty, 'all identities are based on some kind of exclusion, as the identity of the self can be defined only by reference to a non-self' (2000, 115). However, some authors would contest that this is always and necessarily the case.

The creative role of individuals in identity constructions, is often theorised as limited by the cumulative effect of both opportunities and choices, and of constraints and lack of opportunity within and across settings. Creative agency and the constraints and opportunities of particular settings frame the process of identity formation. Constraints and opportunities have been variously theorised as resources within situations and structured by wider social processes, resources brought to situations structured by the biography of the individual prior to the situation and pre-existing cultural narratives or scripts again dependent on wider social processes. Resources can be material, goods and money, they can also be emotional structures, social and cultural capital.

The relationship between specific micro social settings in which identities are interactionally deployed and wider social processes that impinge on the micro social opportunities for deployment are variously theorised and remain contested. It has long been argued that the resources that individuals bring to situations vary systematically along lines of structural inequality such as gender, race, ethnicity, social class. The work of Pierre Bourdieu is one of a great many attempts to theorise how such inequalities become embedded in the bodies and pre-dispositions of individuals. In social psychology 'social identity theory', associated with the work of H. Tajfel, attempts to explain how social groups have psychological consequences for individuals' conceptions of their selves. Some of these attempts have been accused of having an essentialist and realist conception of identity. 'The concept is essentialist in the sense that identity is taken to be a property of individuals or society: and realist in the sense that it is assumed that there is some kind of correspondence between identity and some aspect of social reality (e.g. the real groups that make up social structures or
nations).’ (Widdicombe, 1998). Social constructionist, ethnomethodologist and conversational analysts are more concerned with the minutiae of everyday interaction as the sites that reveal how people deploy identities, making themselves and social structure come alive.

In terms of understanding the consequences of identities for social cohesion, inclusion and exclusion, it is essential to continue to do theoretical work on the relationship between micro and macro social processes. However, it is important that research focusing on the issue of European identity does not become dissociated from these wider theoretical debates and that methodologies are adopted with full knowledge of their location with respect to particular theoretical positions.

**The Significance of Personal Relationships**

Personal relationships play a more or less significant role in different understandings of identity formation. Relationships that are invested with emotion, that are relationships of love, intimacy and care, are viewed as particularly consequential for identity formation in a number of theoretical traditions. These are typically face-to-face relationships of considerable intensity with those whose opinions are particularly valued. For some people, personal relationships are relationships in which 'authenticity' is particularly sought, that is in which there is some sense of revealing the 'real' self. Indeed authors such as Giddens have suggested that disclosure of the self has become the basis of intimacy in contemporary personal and familial relationships (1994, 1992, 1991, Jamieson, 1998).

Face to face relationships, talk and other forms of unmediated communication are the paradigmatic context in which people create, sustain and deploy identities according to symbolic interactionist, social constructionists and conversational analysis traditions. (Of course, mediated communication such as the telephone and email also allow processes of identity creation but they allow deployment of a narrower range of skills than the face-to-face encounter.) Within face-to-face relationships, a privileged theoretical position is often given to personal relationships. Given that it is through such relationships that identities are typically deployed, arguably no study of identity should neglect everyday interactions with 'nearest and dearest', those who are 'close' emotionally and physically.

**Constraints and Opportunities of Youth**

Youth remains a critical life-cycle phase for the development of identities, but the constraints and opportunities of youth have been the subject of radical reorganisation across Europe. There are extensive literatures on the changing fortunes of young people in each nation state in Europe and there is much variation. However, there are common features. The extension of young people’s education and training across Europe has prolonged a sense of 'becoming' in which identity issues are likely to be heightened for young people. Familial and domestic transitions are less rigidly ordered by age and stage also making for prolonged and less certain transitions. The heightened emphasis on choice and individualism of Western culture and the specific emphasis in youth on career education, vocationalism and self-development accentuates a sense of personal responsibility for identity-making at all ages and particularly in youth.
At the same time, young people in different localities still have to negotiate very different constraints and opportunities. For example, there is considerable variation in rates of youth unemployment and the precise education and welfare package offered to young people (Chisholm et al. 1995; Nagel & Wallace, 1997). There also remain marked differences between Northern and Southern Europe in terms of patterns of leaving home and young people's access to living independently of family households. These are partly the consequence of differing welfare regimes and the distribution of housing resources but also reflect cultural differences in attitudes to family, gender and generation (Iacovou, 1998).

Moreover, young people continue to experience rather different opportunities and constraints not only between locations but in terms of different access to familial resources, offering different social, economic and cultural capital. Across all of Europe, less fortunate young people are more likely to experience their youth in negative terms as an exclusion from full citizenship. The extent to which young people perceive themselves to be suffering from prolonged exclusion from full adult citizenship has implications for their identification with a local, national or European state and their citizenship practices and ideals. The extension of young people’s education and training, which prolongs a sense of ‘becoming’ for some also prolongs a sense of exclusion from full adult citizenship, with the possible consequence of political disaffection. In Germany, The available research suggests that young people who are the most antagonistic or indifferent to Europe are more generally disaffected and dislocated and are at the same time seeking identification with 'pan'-German ethnic nationalism (Gallenmüller and Wakenhut, 1994; Kohr, 1994; Lipperts, 1994) although they are not necessarily the most deprived economically (Butz and Boehnke, 1997). Studies of young people have began to tackle these issues (Breakwell and Lyons, 1996; Bynner, Chisholm and Furlong, 1997; Chisholm et al., 1995; Huici et al. 1997; Ros and Huici, 1996; Wallace and Kovatcheva, 1998) but as yet there is no significant body of thorough comparative research.

In the 1980s, Bauman joined those speaking of a period ‘after class’, referring to a generation of young people ‘squeezed finally out of the role of producers and goaded into a status determined by consumption alone’ (1982, 179). Many theorists of late twentieth century post-industrial societies have continued to question the empirical significance of social class and to problematise the concept. It is no longer assumed that persistent class inequalities have theoretical primacy over other categories underpinned by systematic inequality such as gender, ethnicity, age, sexuality and able-bodiedness. At the same time there are many recent critics of the 'decline of class' thesis and attempts to move beyond critiques of class analysis (for example, in Britain see Beynon, 1999, Butler and Savage, 1995, Bradley, 1996, Crompton, 1993, Goldthorpe and Marshall, 1996, Scott, 1996, Skeggs, 1997). Beynon (1999) and others note that in the British context notions of consumption and classlessness were strategically combined in political rhetoric during the revitalising of objective class divisions of the Thatcher era. Empirical work continues to suggest that an orientation to life that assumes a right to choice remains class based, rooted in the more privileged experiences of middle-class lives (Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989). In her ethnography of working-class women from the North West of England, Beverley Skeggs reasserts the centrality of class to subjectivity ‘even if we do not feel impeded by it or choose not to recognize it, or to avoid it through disidentifications and dissimulations’ (1997, 7).
International studies of young people's identities must have sufficient understanding of the local opportunities and constraints of young people to provide appropriate context. This must necessarily include attention to the particular circumstances of the young people who are the subjects of the study. The most salient identities for young people cannot be read off of personal circumstances and local structures of opportunities and constraint, however. The significance of any particular identity cannot be taken for granted and must be established through research.

The concept 'national identity'
As David Pearson notes, 'Nationality, 'race' and ethnicity are not natural categories or predetermined identities, they are political constructs with shifting memberships and meanings. They are ways of naming oneself and others, of representing identities and interests within different orders of collectivity' (Pearson, 2001, 16). Pearson refers to three types of collectivity, abstract categories that have no social dimension, groups which interact and are social collectivities rather than merely analytical categories, and communities that have the additional characteristics of being sufficiently close-knit and conscious of each other to display a communality of kind. To call oneself 'European' is more likely to be an abstract classification than a declaration of a sense of membership of a group or community, although, of course, this remains an empirical question. In his analysis of European integration and citizenship, Delanty (2000, 105-122) argues that the European Union has very little by way of political, cultural, civic or cosmopolitan community.

Contemporary analysts of nationalisms, often categorise nationalisms as more or less 'ethnic' or 'civic' - according to the centrality of claims referring to cultural and historical characteristics (shared origin, language, traditions) versus political aspects (territory, society, citizenship) in the definition of the nation (McCrone, 1998; Smith, 1986). These different conceptions of the nation and of citizenship are reflected both in the political discourse and in the attitudes and behaviours towards national ingroup and outgroup members. The dominance of the ethnic conception is often related to the negative outcomes of intolerance and chauvinism, while the dominance of the civic conception is related to trends of civic participation and social integration. In late twentieth century Europe, there are clearly examples of cultural valorisation of place and people that stimulate ethnic divisions and conflict, mitigating against civic participation, tolerance and co-operation across perceived boundaries. There are also nationalist movements that seem compatible with a supra-national project such as the European Union, being more grounded in a desire to enhance the civic participation of a people in their own governance. However, the notion of a distinction between 'civic' and 'ethnic' nationalism has been criticised as weakly founded empirically, and as an ideal type that may encourage suspect claims to 'good' nationalism. Critics note, for example, that cultural claims to be a distinct people are typically deployed in 'civic' as well as 'ethnic' nationalism and that such claims can easily blend into statements about natural ethnic differences.

There is necessarily a great deal to unpack when people label themselves a particular nationality - are they referring to an abstract categorisation, a group or a community and do their understandings of nation have a predominantly 'ethnic' or 'civic' resonance?
Intersections between local, regional and national identities

The relative salience of regional, national and European identity against other sources of identity such as gender, ethnicity, religion and social class, is an empirical question. At a theoretical level, a weakening of the importance of affiliation to place has been suggested as a consequence of globalisation. For example, Bauman suggests that it is not migration that is surprising in the late twentieth century but commitment to any particular locality (Bauman, 1992, 1996, 1998). ‘The urge for mobility, built into the structure of contemporary life, prevents the arousal of strong affections for any of the places; places we occupy are no more than temporary stations’ (1992 p.695). A number of commentators have similarly emphasised a sense of being disembedded from place as a feature of the late twentieth century (Giddens, 1991, 1994; Beck, 1992). However, there is very little empirical evidence of a general weakening of attachment to localities.

Bauman identifies a number of social divisions based on access to consumption and relationship to place. The mobile are divided between the privileged elite of globetrotting wanderers or 'tourists' who consume other places but have homes to go to and the underprivileged or displaced 'vagabonds' who have neither homes nor access to such consumption. The located are divided between those who can become tourists if they choose and those trapped in homes that are literal or metaphorical prisons. The trapped carry the stigma of exclusion from all but their belittled place, reacting by self-deprecation or self-defensive, and sometimes ugly, tribalism.

The weakening of attachment to the nation state as state is also a postulated effect of globalisation. Some authors have argued that local identities have become more important as nation states have been weakened by transnational corporations and political entities. Perceived relationships of core and periphery, can take on particular significance. Claims for local autonomy and resurgence of local identity is often associated with perceived histories of subordination. In our proposed study we systematically exploit relationship between core and periphery which have had different consequences in terms of the mobilisation of local, national and European identities. Our design begins with examples of coupled nations or nations and regions with a history of relationships of economic and political dominance and subordinance and opposing nationalisms (Vienna and the Vorarlberg region of Austria, England and Scotland, Madrid and Euskadi, West Germany and East Germany, the Czech Republic and Slovakia) but whose cultures, nevertheless, offer young people two contrasting patterns of alignment to national and European identity.

Delanty (2000) discusses the concept of post-national citizenship in the context of the European Union. Refering to the work of Habermas, he speaks of a legalistic 'constitutional patriotism', that is commitment to and identification with constitutional norms rather than the state, territory, nations or cultural traditions, as the possible basis for European identity. He concludes that 'European identity, conceived of as an identity in itself, is not a concrete identity rooted in cultural traditions but is focused on a commitment to discursively mediated principles and is an expression of multi-identification: one can simultaneously be a European and member of a community or nation. If we see things in this light, there is no serious trade-off between national and European citizenship’ (2000, 116).
A number of authors have deployed standard questions designed to give preliminary insight into competition or complementarity between local nationalisms and European identity and between ideal types of citizenship. For example, the 'Moreno' question for deriving a measure of dual (Moreno, 1997) and comparative identity (Huici et al., 1997): that is, 'Do you consider yourself to be only x, more x than y, as x and y, more y than x, only y?, and measures of ‘social distance’ which involve questions about willingness to associate with others. However, such questions necessarily remain at a very surface level and a great deal more needs to be done to unpack the deployment of local, national and transnational identities. Research needs to get closer to the everyday uses of identities in natural settings. In British studies, this is more nearly achieved in ethnographic explorations of how young people construct identities, noting the interplay of such identities as class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and nationality (e.g. Hall et al. 1999; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Hey, 1997) and only partially developed in the limited number of studies of children’s sense of national identity (e.g. Carrington and Short, 1995, 1996, 1998; Rutland, 1999; Jahoda, 1963).


