

TITLE: *Understanding Identity and Belonging*

TEACHER: doc. Alessandro Testa, PhD

OUTLINE

The interest in the concepts of “identity” and “identity politics” and the centrality that specific, discreet identities have acquired in the public sphere in recent times are unprecedented. Why this shift, why now?

This course offers an introduction to the analytical study of collective identities and their psycho-social foundation, that is, a sense of “belonging”, from the perspective of social sciences and anthropology more in particular. It will introduce the critical study of identity and belonging to students that are perhaps not familiar with it, but also foster the understanding of a variety of social phenomena and dynamics related to identity construction, negotiation, and expression. Identity, understood not as an essential aspect or a natural fact, but as a historical, contingent, relational, and processual phenomenon, is in fact now recognised as an extremely important dimension at different levels: for the individual, for supra-individual configurations (such as work, family, the locality), but also and perhaps especially for greater social/collective spheres, which express themselves in terms of identities that can be sportive, religious, regional, national, or even supranational (e.g., European or cosmopolitan).

We shall draw attention to the historical, cultural, and institutional processes that have led to the emergence and crystallization of specific collective identities, both as bottom-up historical phenomena (e.g., the collective national movements of the 1840s) or top-down political initiatives (e.g., the recent EU identity policies). Special attention will be given to the symbolic substances identities are made of (language, traditions, collective memories, histories, rituals, among others) and how such aspects are incorporated in – and expressed by – social actors, for example through body expressions (tattoos, hairstyle, clothing style) and collective forms of actions such as rituals. Analytical concepts like “nested identities”, “group dynamics” (“in-group” vs “out-group”), “presentation of the self”, and others shall be presented and analysed in the classroom, and also operationalized vis-à-vis concrete examples. To this end, an array of empirical case studies will be presented that will be chosen

from the pertinent literature as well as from the lecturer's historical and ethnographic investigations in several European contexts.

STRUCTURE

Tentative course structure

- 1) Introduction: Identity and belonging, individual vs social
- 2) Identity of the self, identity of the body; family identity
- 3) The Dynamics of Identification and differentiation: Framing and Alignment
- 4) What is social or collective identity made of? Language, traditions, memories, histories, networks, institutions, and more
- 5) Nested identities, identity markers, and sense of belonging at the micro- and meso-levels: group, neighbourhood, village, locality, city, region
- 6) Nested identities and identity markers at the macro-level: class, politics, religion, and sport fandom
- 7) Identities that shake the world: nation, nationhood, nationality, national identity, nationalism, and cosmopolitanism in different scholarly traditions (primordialism, modernism, and ethnosymbolism); case studies
- 8) More case studies and further theoretical discussion
- 9) More case studies and more discussion (maybe)
- 10) Conclusions and final discussion with the students

TEACHING AND LEARNING METHODS

The main teaching method will be direct instruction through lessons.

The students will also be asked to actively participate in the teaching and learning processes. They will be encouraged to ask questions and contribute during the lessons and will also be given the opportunity to express their opinions voluntarily about the readings that will be handed out and read *in itinere*. Groups of students will be formed and asked to present and discuss some articles chosen from the course literature – this may also be done by individual students.

The course will be offline only.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance and participation are considered as very important will be taken into consideration in the evaluation process (up to 10% of the evaluation). The attendance for this course, for instance is mandatory, unless differently agreed between the teacher and students who for demonstrable and serious reasons cannot attend to the lessons in person. In this case, the student will immediately inform the teacher and a solution will be found together. Even one unjustified absence will impact the evaluation.

EVALUATION METHODS

Assessment will be undertaken through several methods, namely the evaluation of a student's participation, a short mid-term test, and a final, longer written test. Both tests will be written in the classroom. Instructions about the tests will be given in due course during the semester.

The mid-term test shall be written *in itinere*, approximately towards the middle of the course. No plagiarism or usage of the AI will be tolerated.

The final exam will consist of a longer written test that will take place in the classroom. Two terms will be offered for this test: the first one will be held during the last lesson of the course, before the Christmas break; the second one in January. Students will be informed about the details to take the final test during the lessons prior to the final one. Students will only be allowed to bring their hand-written notes (or printed digital notes), sheets of white paper to write on, a pen, and a dictionary of English (paper version). No electronic devices may be used during the test. The overall final assessment will also take into account the attendance and the active participation of each learner.

Evaluation will be broken down as follows:

- Attendance and participation in the classroom: 10%
- Mid-term test: 25%
- Final written test: 65%

LITERATURE

Compulsory readings

(All students willing to take the exam will have to read the following texts)

- Entries "Identity" (pp. 551-555), "Identity, Social" (pp. 555-556), and "Self-Identity" (417-418) in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, II ed.
- Eidson, J. R., Feyissa, D., Fuest, V., Hoehne, M. V., Nieswand, B., Schlee, G., et al. (2017), "From identification to framing and alignment: a new approach to the comparative analysis of collective identities", in *Current Anthropology*, 58(3), 340-351.
- Smith, D. Anthony: Chapter 3: "Paradigms" 2013 in his book *Nationalism* (2nd Edition), Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Alessandro Testa, "Ritual Creativity, National Identity, and Nationalism", in K. Rati and I. Kosteletzky (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Ritual Creativity* - forthcoming
- Wilken, L. (2012), 'Anthropological Studies of European Identity Construction', in: J. Frykman, M. Nic Craith, and U. Kockel (eds), *A Companion the Anthropology of Europe* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell), 125-144.

Additional readings

(every student will have to choose and study at home, or present in the class, at least one of the following texts in addition to the compulsory ones)

- S. Adkim, Chapter 1 "Introduction and Literature Review", in *Embodying and Expressing Identity through Tattoos*, PHD Thesis 2018, pp. 1-17
- Blok, Anton. 1998. "The narcissism of minor differences." *European Journal of Social Theory* 1(1): 33–56.
- Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Marek Jakoubek 2019: "Ethnic Groups, Boundaries, and Beyond". In id., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries Today. A Legacy of Fifty Years*. Routledge, London 2019, pp. 1-19.

- Viktoria Kaina, Ireneusz Pawel Karolewski 2009: "EU governance and European identity", *Living Reviews in European Governance*, Vol. 4, (2009), No. 2

- Martin Lindhardt, "'In Denmark we eat pork and shake hands!' Islam and the anti-Islamic emblems of cultural difference in Danish neo-nationalism", *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 2022, Vol. 25(4) 1139–1155

- S. Macdonald, Chapter 1: "The European Memory-Identity-Heritage Complex" in *Memorylands: Heritage and Identity in Europe Today*, Routledge, New-York-London 2013, pp.

- J. D. Medrano, P. Gutiérrez, "Nested identities: national and European identity in Spain", in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, n. 24 (5), 2001, pp. 753-778.

- Eugenia Scabini and Claudia Manzi, "Family Processes and Identity", in S.J. Schwartz et al. (eds.), *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*, pp. 569-588

- Alessandro Testa, "The Politics of Culture and Identity in European Public Rituals", chapter in Alessandro Testa, *Ritualising Cultural Heritage and Re-Enchanting Rituals in Europe*. Carolina Academic Press, Durham, pp. 151-168

- Alessandro Testa, Mariann Vaczi 2023: "Behind the Quest for the Nation: The Politics of Identity and Culture in Post-Franco Catalonia". In A. Testa, M. Vaczi (eds.), *Popular Culture, Identity, and Politics in Contemporary Catalonia*. Tamesis (Boydell & Brewer), Suffolk, pp. 1-18

- Alessandro Testa, "The Ritual Making of Central Catalonia 1: National Identity and the Hanging of the Donkey". In A. Testa, M. Vaczi (eds.), *Popular Culture, Identity, and Politics in Contemporary Catalonia*. Tamesis (Boydell & Brewer), Suffolk, pp. 35-54

- Alessandro Testa, "The Ritual Making of Central Catalonia 2: *Comparses* and the Dynamics of Inclusive Nationalism". In A. Testa, M. Vaczi (eds.), *Popular Culture, Identity, and Politics in Contemporary Catalonia*. Tamesis (Boydell & Brewer), Suffolk, pp. 55-76

- John Tomaney, "Parochialism – a defence", *Progress in Human Geography* n. 37(5), 2012, 658–672