

The Origins of Ethnic & National Identities

1. Where do ethnic and national identities come from?
2. Why are they strong sources of identity?
 - (Why not something else, like class or kinship?)

- Ethnic group =
 - *Narrow*: racial or linguistic group
 - *Broad*: based on any visual/political/cultural, commonality, real or imagined—race, language, religion, tribe, or caste
 - Or, a group that is differentiated from other groups on somewhat “visible” differences like language, dress, etc. (and usually demands political autonomy)
 - *Analytical* (?): Based on descent

The Origin of Ethnic Identities

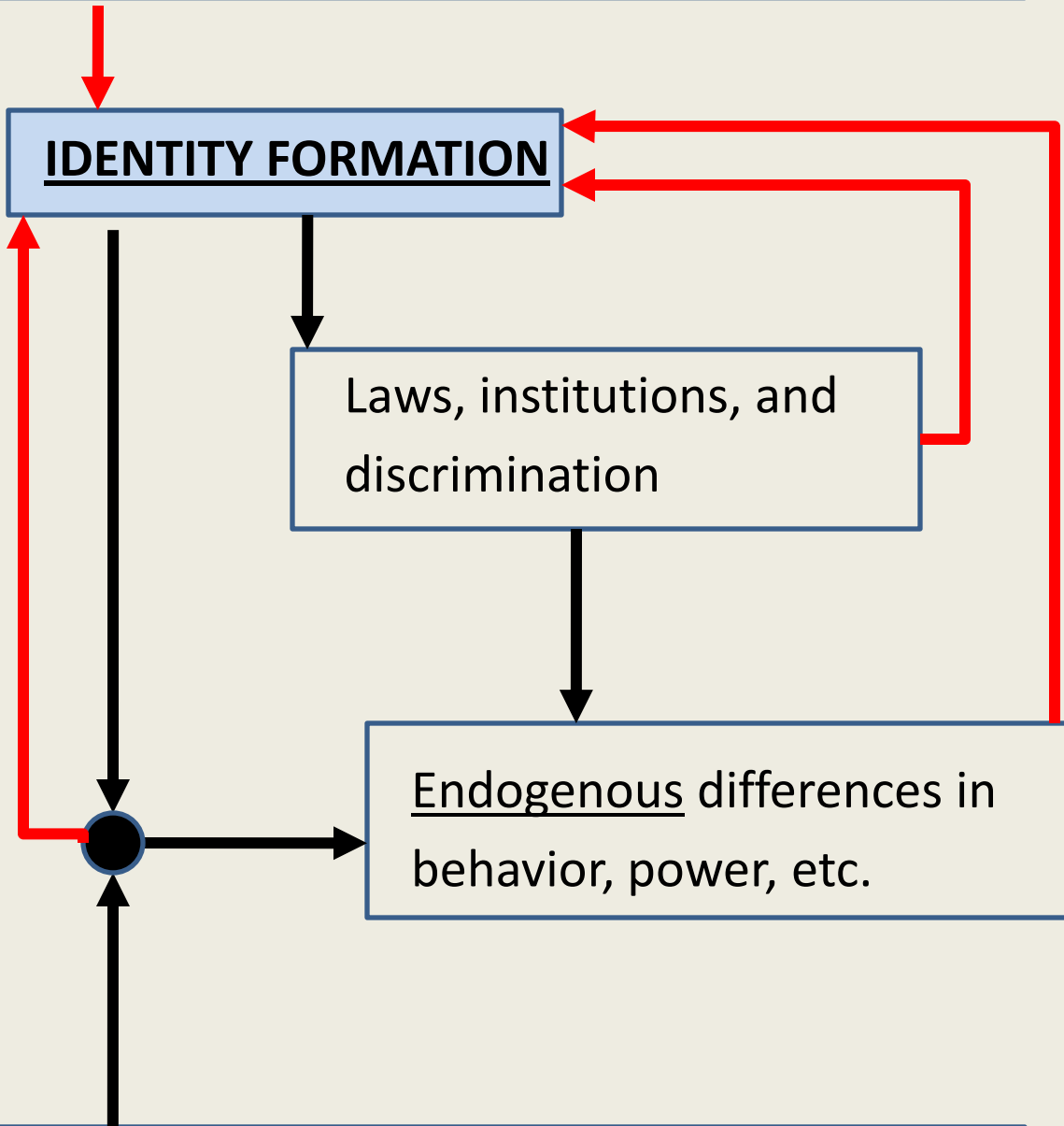
Exogenous differences in behavior, traditions, appearances, beliefs, language, power, etc.

IDENTITY FORMATION

Laws, institutions, and
discrimination

Endogenous differences in
behavior, power, etc.

ego-centrism (self-promotion, justification)



The Origin of Ethnic Identities

- Ethnic identities emerge not only because it's a “natural” response to real human differences but also because it motivates behavior that reinforces identities
- Other processes that promote collective (not necessarily ethnic) identity:
 - “Social Identity Theory”: fundamental desire for social self-esteem in creates social differences and group identification
 - “Mutual dependence theory”: people form collective identities because they depend on each other, because they have a common situation or predicament

The Origin of Ethnic Identities

Economists expect free markets to weaken ethnic stratification/identities because discrimination is costly. But, **economic discrimination and stratification can occur even in free markets** because:

- a) Strong preference for discrimination
 - *To minimize, need neutral state & well-enforced anti-discrimination laws*

- a) “Transaction costs”
 - Market transactions are not frictionless buying & selling... it is costly to negotiate and enforce deal/contracts (requires trust)

 - May be lower within ethnic groups, reinforcing discrimination & identity

 - *To minimize this, need well-enforced, universal contract law and property rights*

- Expansion of free markets (globalization) can also increase inter-group identification by new competition

The Origin of Ethnic Identities

To what extent are ethnic identities the result of “rational” behavior?

- In social science, rational behavior is about finding best way to pursue goals (given constraints, costs and benefits)
- Identity *strengthening* might be “rational” in that it is a goal-directed response to social environment
 - E.g., minimizing transaction costs leads to ethnic discrimination which reinforces identity
- What about identity formation to begin with?
 - Rational or psychological?

Group Action and Mobilization

- Is it rational for people to act to promote the group? Particularly when it is costly not just in time & effort but also safety and security?
- **“Free rider problem”** – individuals reap group benefits but let others bear the costs of pursuing the “group’s interests”
 - “collective action problems” can greatly undermine group action and success, especially for large groups
- Overcoming FRP:
 - Rewards and punishments for individuals (e.g., esteem within group, positions of power, etc.)
- FRP may be less severe with ethnic groups because rewards are more about *identity*... but still an obstacle

The Origin of Ethnic Identities

- Primordialist in that identities are deeply rooted in history, entrenched, not likely to change much
- Constructivist in that it is the result of human interpretation & manipulation
 - Elites—who create laws & provide discourse—fuel the construction of identities (both salience and content)
 - Constructivism is important because it draws attention to laws, interpretation, elites, etc.

Origins of Nations

Anderson: *Nations emerged because of “print capitalism”*

- Technology (printing press) & profit motive & big potential market (vernaculars)
 - Awareness of all the others in one’s particular language-field (and that only those people belonged)
 - A new fixity to language, which helped in the long run to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation
 - Created languages of power different than those of the past
- Nationalism developed as *accident* of technology, economic system, and European society

Origins of Nations

Other factors:

- **Reformation** elevated vernaculars and local political control
- **Industrialization, direct rule, and state-building**
 - Political control before industrialization tended to involve indirect rule. Industrialization & communication helped direct rule...
 - Rulers do war, state-building, and ideology (nationalism) to promote their own control
 - Flags, hymns, “Unknown Soldiers”
 - Writing history
 - Peripheral subjects respond with their own nationalist reactions
- **French Revolution**
 - Diffusion of popular sovereignty
 - Counter-Enlightenment (in Germany)

Origins of Nations

- diffusion, appropriation, geo-political change
 - Decline of Spanish Empire leads to nation-states (although with common language)
 - Fascism, totalitarianism, “nationalism of exclusion”
 - Decline of colonialism and British Empire
 - Pan-Africanism and Pan-Arabism
 - Decline of Soviet Union
 - End of Cold War
 - During Cold War, nationalism was muted (except anti-colonial & pro/anti-Communist)
 - Since Cold War end: rise of ethno-nationalism. How far will it go?
- When is a nation?