Identity and Power in International Relationship

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Abstract

Identity has been under focus in social science in recent years. There have been continuous debates on it since 1990. What is the effect of identity on power in international relationship? The main reasoning of this article in answering this question is that identity has gone a way from its conventional meaning and has gained a multi-diversion post-reference, because power is a social product which implies differently as a result of a change in the social basis of international relationship. Power is no longer according to a certain homeland or on the base of financial factors; it is also based on non-financial factors including norms, dialogues, science, and information. Moreover, technology has changed the old hierarchal order, formed new identities, and deeply effected on the abilities of state ideologies, priorities, and interests. Power is a controversial issue because of its various applications in different forms. Therefore, there is no common definition for it, so talking of power; one observes the formation of a new phenomenon i.e. “identifier power.” The article first discusses the importance of identity in international relationship. Then, it presents the details. Afterward, the effect of identity on power is discussed in two parts. It will show how identity changes power in international relationship and international relationship as a field of humans’ science.

Keywords: Power, Identity, Identity-based power, international relationship, structuralism, security.
Introduction

In today’s literature, there are a few concepts with various meanings and applications including identity. Being in contact with some far and near synonyms such as (subject ego, object ego, we, self, perception, etc.), identity is an inter-disciplinary concept and seems to affect fields ranging philosophy - as the origin of all sciences – to geography, politics, management, etc. (3). In international relationship, identity has been the center of attention since after the cold war so that some scholars talk of the return of identity into international relationship. Talking about its importance in international relationship, it is safe to say that it is impossible to separate them. This includes the new studies and the classic as well. Focusing on this importance, this article tries to the following questions:
1. What is identity and how did it enter the field of study of international relationship?
2. Have main theories on international relationship paid attention to identity?
3. What is the position of identity in new theories of international relationship?

Meaning of Identity

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “Identity” is lexically derived from the Latin word “Identitas”, and semantically has the same meaning. Its first meaning is the same, and the second is different (4). As we will see later, the apparently different meanings have two main and complementary aspects for identity (5). Apart from the lexical meaning, general definition of “identity” is our general perception of our serves in relation to others (6), so it can be said to have a close relation with conception because our identity is formed by our conception of ourselves and others. This concept first used in philosophy with an automatic approach was introduced by William Jones in the American psychological study as an equivalent of personality. In fact, the level of identity analysis in psychology was the level of knowledge. At this level, identity meant the nature and the nuclear part of one’s personality. In this meaning, identity is a method used in organizing one’s physical aspects, ideology, knowledge, experiences, and skills distinguishing them from others. This meaning of identity first used in psychological studies and at a personal level, was introduced to social studies by such people as Herbert Mid. Soon, theorists including Henri Tajfel tried to introduce a general viewpoint. Tajfel’s famous theory known as “the theory of social identity”, one’s identity is believed to depend on his membership in a group; entering a group, one collects information on his environment, and the distinctions between their group and others to form their own identity via the similarities and distinctions. Using inner-group and inter-group concepts, Tajfel, in fact, replaced certain kinds of group identities (including ethnic and national identities) (7). Although it is not clear when exactly the concept of identity entered international relationship, what is certain is that identity is applied with its both personal and social aspects in the field as scientists have been incarnating state as a human being discusses certain aspects of state.

In this viewpoint, state is seen through considering its source of power, culture, and other distinctive characteristics. Alexander Wendt – the structuralism theorist in international relationship – considers personification and humanization as the most important reason of using the psychological aspect of identity (8). He believes that this consideration of state is so centralized in international relationship that it is impossible to introduce an aspect without it (9). Identity with its social implication has also been used in international relationship studies for studying ethnical, racial, and nationalistic groups. Yet, identity has rarely used in the fields.
The importance of identity in international relation studies:

Separating the concept of identity from international relation, in other words, it is an internalized concept in international relations. Disarmament, institutionalism, democratic peace, and many theories of war and peace depend on the concept of identity in some way (10).

According to the democratic peace theory, countries avoid fighting each other because of having the same identity. However, the comprehensive and yet implicit effect of identity on international relation made it impossible to figure out the concept of identity (11). The important matter is that the difficulty of the concept made some researchers use it in general (12). On the contrary, they use the concept in international relation as an independent variable and study its relationship with issues like war and political parties. One of the most important applications of identity is its use in feministic theories and writings (13).

The results of a field study on 5 reliable magazines on international relation in 1990-2002 about the degree of attention to the concept of identity in international relation suggests that the articles are highly increasing because of two factors:
1. the increase in post-cold war ethnic clashes.
2. the increase in the dissatisfaction toward neo-realism and power-based structuralism and the English school (14).

Although the above shows the importance of identity in international relation, what is worth to study here is the concept of identity as the theoretical basis as it became a common subject in universities in 1990s. Before that, in 1980s, when new social movements started in societies that had not financial descriptions, and how people and groups defined “self” and “other”, and the roles that methods and actions played in defining “self”, made theorists pay attention to social movement as an identity factor and social scientists gradually started to show and interest in the issue (15).

The development and expansion of processes known as globalization created an integrated identity on one hand, and hybrid or global identities confronted a challenge. Antony Giden’s discussion of modernization and autonomy is an emphasis of post modernists and automacy is an emphasis of postmodernists on breaking the nature of sexual identities, and the focus on recreating nationalism and ethnocentric has been a sign of importance of identity in socio-politic interactions in recent decades.

The advent of multiplex identities, ambiguity, and riot on the identity borders between countries, the increasing role of identity-centered conception in decision destruction of the conventional contact beneath political identity and nation-state, the grow of a new collective identity and new sorts of violence based on policy of identity, all, show the effect on new international structures, institutions, processes, and agents. On the other hand, the actor’s identity is formed by interactions, systems, norms, values, culture, ideology, fundamental believe, and internationalized ideas rather than financial structures (17); its understanding needs attention to semantic bases. Therefore, identity as a semantic factor plays an essential role in formation of an international event and it’s basic on theological units. In fact, identity gains its importance from ontological basis in international relation.

Identity in international relation theories

All macro and micro-theories of international relation occupied this concept, so discussing the interactions between theories of identity and the theories of main streams in international relation is misleading. Actually, the only difference is the rather more clear emphasis is of the first set of theories on the concept of identity. In other words, as Williams says, the main stream theories are purposely try to avoid emphasizing on the concept of identity and instead
try to emphasize on behavioral concepts of states, and the suppositions related to the nature and formation of states (18).

This is while identity is said to have been neglected in main stream of international relation although many discussions of classic and neoclassic realists (such as the focus on the importance of ideology in formation of foreign policy with discussions on revolutionary states (19)) as well as matters discussed in liberalism and neo-liberalism (such as socialization in Cont Watt discussions) (20) suggest that semantic factors also play a role in explanation of international relation from the rationalist’s viewpoint. But these factors play no explicitly key role in these theories, although it might be possible to claim that in some cases it is important that these theories consider a role for semantic and even identity factors.

A) Positivistic theories

Positivism: According to the positivist viewpoint, states are the main actors of international relation and rationalistic existence acting in an anarchistic system and whose main challenge is their national security. So in the first glance, because of the commitment of realists to state and the relationship between them and denying certain identity-creating groups such as women, ethnic and language groups, etc., there is no place for discussing identity (21). Morgenta believes that each nation’s mental and personality features are distinctive and remain constant against changes. Morgenta’s believe that unities are formed against an enemy state or group suggests an identity viewpoint (22). This branch of realism provides a situation for the entrance of identity into developing theories (23). This does not however suggest that neo-realists neglect identity because they always pay attention to issues related to identity groups especially nationalistic issues although without focusing on identity. For example in his study on the role of nationalism in formation of militias Barry R. Posen tried to show the importance of identity in the framework of neo-realistic theory, and put such variables as identity, security, and determination of anarchistic structure of international relation (24). Neo-realists do not neglect identity groups because they do not care for these issues, but because they do not consider these issues as important as structural factors in forming or continuing war or peace.

Liberalism: Pluralistic approach (including liberalism and its subgroups such as neo-liberalism) is different from realism. Despite the diversity in liberalism, a glance at 4 categories of these theories suggests the significant use of identity in these theories. In the democratic theory of peace, it is believed that in democratic states form peace in a region and never fights each other. Kant’s theory of democratic peace is in fact presented the basis of the meaning of “we”, and “others” in the process of identity-creation (25).

Cross-nationalistic theory: According to Ferguson and Moonerbach’s viewpoint, who are its recent agents an increase in states’ permeance as a result of expanding cross-nationalistic relationships decreases state’s potency as the most important source of identity in the westphlian era, and confronts an individual with different sources of identity. As a result of the collapse of inner and outer borders, new borders are made to separate a kindred from a stranger (26). Convergence and institutionalism theories also give their ideas with a focus on different degrees of common feelings of identity and “we” between a group of countries. For example, in his theory of relationship, Dobeech uses socio-political concepts to suggest how new socio-political identities through common identities. In fact, he distinguishes two political communities on the basis of degree and intensity of a common identity.
Post-positivist theories

Post-positivist theories claim that mainstream theories face a challenge in understanding a theory and reality, and avoid developing or changing the agenda in international relationships. They believe that positivists see the world in a special way and are epistemologically limited. This makes mainstream theories consider the world as separate pieces of reality that need describing, while post-positivists believe that a theory should create reality by itself.

In the third debate of international relationship that led to the recreation of the depressed international relationship (Guillaumer, 2003:3) (28), semantic factors including identity and culture were the center of attention. Effective articles that Crato and Lipid wrote in their book “Return to identity and culture” had an important role to play in the third debated and suggested the attempt made by writers to enter this new field in post-cold war relationships was vital for culture and identity. One important question was “do state have the prefabricated identity in international relationships or do they create their own identity via interactions with other actors?” structuralisms talk of the contact and interlock between the pass of history, identity and state agents which empower interactive process backed on culture. It is the temporary and variable nature of identity that according to Koslowsky and Kratochwi (1995) (31) makes a fundamental change possible, and creates new sources of identity such as nationality, religion, sex, etc. (Mansbach, 2002:105). The changing fundamental subjects in international relationship, and creates a new conceptual system to describe international phenomena (33).

Structuralism: Among post-positivistic theories, the structuralism theory significantly focuses on the importance of identity in understanding international relationship. Emphasizing on existence of reality, and the role of social interaction, structuralism pays a special attention to identity. Defining identity, structuralisms consider social actors have a social identity that is derived from their social interactions (34). They conclude that identity is generally a social concept in a fundamental framework. Since a state and nation’s identity is formed and defined in relation with other states and nations (35), the identity of political actors is also defined with that of their compartments beyond their borders. So, structuralisms emphasize on the actor’s identity formation by focusing on the importance of identity in the formation of interests and actions.

Post-modernism

Another branch of post-modernists emphasizing the relation between power, and recognition, reject this positivistic idea that there is no relation between power and recognition. They believe that power creates knowledge and depends on by itself, so there is nothing beyond power. Post-modernists is a form of social products imposed on people’s lives and society, so identity is based on power (36). They believe that mankind’s human is constantly recreated, and social environments are products of certain kinds of power (37). As mentioned above, post-modernist believe that identity becomes stable by creating artificial borders beyond which strangeness is depressed.

Critical Theory

Critical theory has comprehensive aspects beyond theory and concept. Each aspect shows an importance and role in international relationship. The main aspects of critical theory are the believe in that events are historical, having normative challenges, the belief in a change, seeing phenomena from a historical sociology, and the attempt to find the historical roots of phenomena. These theorists do not believe that human’s nature is constant. They say social conditions shift it, so they consider the identity of actors as social products (39). They see
globalization as a historical process and a field of identity reformation, and try to add ethics to policy. They say the prerequisite of globalization is common interests, so that people feel sympathy to each other (40).

**Identity based approach**

In its simplest definition, identity is the nature of anything, or in a philosophical view, it is what makes something as it is. Wunt believes that there should be a more clear and suitable definition, so he defines identity as a characteristic in a purposeful actor which creates behavioral and emotional intends, so identity is rooted in an actor’s self-conception, but the implication of this conception depends on whether other actors accept and actor in the same way. This is a sign of inter-subjective aspect of identity i.e. other people’s conception besides one’s own conception has an effect on identity, and the inner and outer structure of both stabilizes identities (41).

This definition suggests a non-essentialist view toward identity. In non-essentialist perception, it is supposed that each unit has an essentialist identity or has a set of features that are recognized and are used as an identity basis which is used by an actor or others to describe him/her; while in a non-essentialist conception, it is emphasized that identity is created (see Hall, 1996) (42). On one hand, these discourses (rules, culture or semantic structures) empower an actor’s existing identity. From this viewpoint, identity is not something constant and based on its main basis appearing without any change through the time although it is more or less fixed at times. Some (e.g. Wunt, 2005) believe that if there be no regulating rules in the nature of actors’ interactions, and they do not change through time, identities will remain more or less constant.

On the contrary, some (especially post-structuralisms) never suppose that identity is indeed fragmented: it is never an integrated unit. From this view, identity depends on how history, language and culture are used in becoming a process rather than being a process… so identities become constant from inside rather than outside, they are the products of narration of “self”, but the necessarily fabricated nature of this process is by no means a sign of its financial or political effect (Hall, 1996:4).

On the other hand, it is noticed that actors create their identity and that of others on the basis of the meaning they assume for their actions and those of others, and define themselves in relation to the other (others) and specify their relation with them (Wendt) (43).

These practices are in general, verbal, discursive, etc. establishing, reproducing or changing identities, so the creation of social identity is related to practice i.e. special cultural practices that form identities and agencies (Biersteker and Weber, 1996:12).

The creation of an actor, and its identity needs assuming borders between yourself and others, in other words, identities need differences. It is supposed that differences are the basis for creating “self”, and also “other”, so according to the definition, “other” is different. If the difference be big, i.e. the identity of “self” depends on “other” and yet, different from it. In this case, identities are product of differences. On the contrary, in some perceptions, it is emphasized that difference and its meaning are also a product as identity is. If differences be historical, we can consider our relationship with others more developed and flowing (Grossberg, 1996:93-96) (45). Moreover, in Wunt’s perception (1992) also it is “other” that can be different in different degrees and its degrees of difference are historical. It might be possible to say that actors in international relationship also have these two conceptions of difference and identity in form of “self” or “other”. One on the basis of a story conception of difference, and as a result, a different definition based on difference or paradox, and the other based on a strong conception of the existence of “other” and as a result, assessing its
difference with “self” in the next instance. If we consider international relationship with each of these conceptions of identity, and its consistence or ability of making something consistent, its relation and difference with identity and the function of otherness, we can see new horizons of the concept of power in them. Sometimes, the way identities are formed on the basis of main subjects in international relationship is important; other times, the role that identities play in giving new conceptions or applications to them or forming new perspectives that can solve problems in international relations is important.

Identity, power and international policy

If we define policy according to Carl Smith’s implication on the basis of the distinction between friend and enemy or the power of decision-making about an exceptional matter, we can study the effect of identity-based look at power. This part shows how identity can help change the role of nation state and how an identity-based approach gives us a new implication of these concepts.

Identity and power

In social science literature, power is divided into two forms in the first step: one as a feature i.e. the ability of an actor and another as a relationship in matters such as national power (e.g. Morgental, 1993) are seen as a feature. In Robert Doll’s definition (1991), power (influence in his words) is known as A’s ability to force B to do something that would not be done in other situations. Barnett and Duvall (2005) define it as an impact on the ability of actors in making their situation and destiny. Although at the first glance, there looks to be a direct relation between ability and power enforcement, it is now generally accepted that ability (contrary to the neo-realistic view like that of Walters (1997)), is not necessarily able to turn into power.

Although according to Joseph Nye’s concept of self power (2004), the factor of power is somehow the center of attention (47), on the basis of this conception, the effect of a minor shift in identity on an action is more than its direct effect. The problem with this view is that it can not correctly realize the contrastive and interactive logics of identity creation, and defines culture and identity in limited nationalistic frameworks or essentialist structures. For example, this view can not describe the creation of the cross-national Al-ghaede militia in the framework of any country’s interests (see Murshed, 2003) (48).

In their complicated conception of power, Barnett and Duvall divide it as interactive power or “power over”, and morphogenetic power or “power to”. In morphogenetic power, impact on others is possible through creation of the social identity of the actors. In fact, the morphogenetic power clarifies who or what the social actors and the possible options are, so morphogenetic power is the ability to create the identities of others according to specified objectives (Barnett and Duvall, 2005:42-6). They also divide power into structural, institutional, coercive, and creative power. Creative power means producing social subjects through systems of knowledge, and discursive practices. Creative power describes how social relation practices and institutions create certain actors (Barnett and Duvall, 2005:55-6). As seen, on the basis of ability and power relationships in this conception, the later is not directly formed from the former, and power relationship is not necessarily formed by a volunteerism feature.

According to Joseph Ney’s new view of power, on the basis of the identity seen in the views of the world’s superpowers (e.g. the USA), power is intelligent; it is somehow defined in the compound framework of hard and soft war and by using the contemporary worlds facility to gain advantage of a specified strategy defined in the framework of new collective
universal identity of all cross-national and nationwide groups. On the other hand, the new identity practice is planned in form of utopian liberal realism. The new power-identity relation in recent international relations is mentioned as an identity-creating power leading to an identity-creating order discussed below. As mentioned above, sometimes, an actor’s total abilities is the source of his/her identity; and other times, there is a direct relation between ability and power enforcement, and sometimes ability is not capable of forming a power relation; in this view, custom is the source of identity and knowledge i.e. since the actor is the dominating power, so the factors of his power are the source of his power. In another view, any interference in identity will lead to an identity disorder simply because the contrastive-correlative logic is not observed in identity creation process. In such a view, identity has no clear source. In the third view, there is the matter of correlative power-identity relation in which identity is the source of name and other. This relation becomes cooperative relation entailed by all particles effective in international relation. Drawing borders between differences and similarities through cooperation in form of a general diplomacy to gain a world without any identity challenges provides all needs in gaining specified objectives. An ideology seeking biased interests will never lead to a global peace, but to opposite identities. For example, injecting democracy to Iraq by the US via violence led to no humane interests. In the new identity view talking of the identity-power correlation, the actor with a high ability sees himself in contrast to the interests of other countries (e.g. Obama’s speech in the 70th general meeting of the UN), and looks down at the world, while talking of the try to develop a global peace. So we can say that considering the concept of identity in talking about the concept of power has been so that we can talk of the formation of a phenomenon called identification power in the international community implying that national, cross-national, and sub-national actors join in a constant relation with others and if actors can turn conception i.e. share their conception with others, then they can have an effect on the interests and behaviors of others.

Identity-based order and identifying power

The American sample of order in the post-cold war international order can be referred as an identity-based order in which monopole hegemony, global, regional, and even local movement are planned and controlled. Although power actors are defined monopolarly and the distance to monopolarity is important because other actors can preserve and expand their positions in the international community. The actors are defined in the framework of this through the hegemonic power at three levels: role-creator, actor, and audience.

The purpose of this order, in general, is controlling violence, removing negative effects of anarchy in the international community (terrorism, climate, and virtual space); the effects are mostly identified and hegemony power over other states in the international system in economic and military fields makes it the biggest power in the system, so the monopole system is defined. If the hegemony power does not overcome violence and anarchy, its values and structures will not be actually enforced.

The identity-based order which defines the framework of treatment of international actors (whether state or non-state actors), is based on a set of norms, practices, patterns, rules, and criteria designed, justified and controlled by the dominant global actor to gain his interests. Power doesn’t mean that a state can use its power whenever and however it likes, but the hegemony power enables him to be in a better position to select the method. In the international community, the USA does not gain every thing it likes but it can provide most things it wants and it is the most influential state.
Besides we consider identity-based order a suitable thing, the order forms international correlations, exchanges between actors, and universal behavior. So rather than being derived from all eoritarian wishes, hegemonic leadership is known as an international necessity and a universal responsibility. The continuity and fortification of identity-based order seem inevitable via hegemony-based stability.

Hegemonic leadership act positively and negatively against any challenges to norms that form order. Although this mechanism provides the topmost interests, in case it remains constant, it will eradicate the order, because the shortcoming of this order is that the hegemonic state would like to take more duties and responsibilities that weaken it in a long run. Moreover, the anarchy which even if the hegemonic state acts moderately, other states fear its uncontrollable power.

The paradoclassic point of the US foreign policy in the international community is that although it is known as the serious supporter of today’s nation-states, the identity-based order that reflects the US hegemony collapses and neglects the basic principle of international order i.e. nation-state via policies including anti-terrorism war, expansion of human rights, expansion of democracy, humanistic interfere, and defending various freedoms. The formation of dominance under this identity-centered order suggests that states have unequal rights rather besides unequal powers.

The identity-based order based on the US hegemony has denied basic principles of international relation so that events, movements, and phenomena have lost their local features. The above descriptions suggests that identity-based order has only come true through the US interests and apart from being unable to be imposed on others, it developed large disorders in many cases in the international community. the USA had better note the following tips to preserve and expand its own interests in international community:

A) Although it denies its imperialist objectives, the USA is well known as hegemonic imperialist. although part of the problem involves any other hegemonic power in international community, the future of the international system based on the identification power the US hegemony depends on whether groups and states seek their identity in cooperation with the USA or they try to gain their identity through a conscious or unconscious disagreement with it.

B) The USA should recognize what it has to do and what is beyond its ability. A balance between the above is vital. otherwise, it will spoil its financial and intellectual resources.

C) Moving toward the creation of an empire finally leads to the internal destruction in the USA because in the long run, they try to be the topmost power destructs internal frameworks and regulations.

D) The USA can not act non-democratically while it claims to observe democracy in the long run; it should diffuse its values through voluntary ways rather than imposing them to others. Since the USA can not handle all international affairs, referring to multipolarism and reinforcing the roles and positions of international institutions can help it.

E) In order to control attempts for equality of power by other states contrary to its hegemony, the USA has to include great powers especially China and Russia in its desirable international system. This is being done about China and India because of the bilateral economic interdependence between them and the capitalist world.
F) Finally, expanding international economic stability, the USA has to overcome challenges in the way of solving the issue of poverty and the gap between the poor and the rich. This can be done by fulfilling the wish of developing countries to enter the capitalist world

Conclusion

What is worth mentioning here is that on the one hand, the concept of identity has brought conceptual changes to concepts and issues of international relation because of its constantly flowing nature, while it promises a new definition of international relation as a branch of human science, because if identity-based view creates a new branch, it can certainly expand it too. In fact, the concept of identity is a factor of passing in international relation from the limitation of glossary is the past into today's flowing era. The occurrence of events such as the end of the cold war in international relation made scientists give special care to this concept.

We have so far seen that concerning the position of identity in international relation, there are differences related to positivist and post-positivist theories. However, contrary to suppositions, all theories of international relation mentioned the concept of identity.
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