Multiple Territorial Identities And Social Cohesion

Abstract

Multiple territorial identities reflect the sedimentation of shared loyalties and political aspirations through the various levels of government. The 'Moreno question' was set according to a scale of five categories, which provide data on levels of identity belonging, intensity and sharing in contexts of political duality. After briefly discussing the 'Moreno question', this contribution analyses the implications of sub-state identity polarization concerning secession in the case of Catalonia and Spain. It concludes by noting that social cohesion is regarded as a desirable aim to be achieved depending not only on the politics of recognition but also on government institutions as facilitators of social trust.

Introduction

Since WWII, the revival of ethno-territorial identities has coincided with an increasing challenge to the centralist model of the unitary state. Models of 'command-and-control' majoritarian democracy, as well as of Jacobin vertical diffusion of power have been regarded to be in terminal retreat. Such developments have taken place in parallel to bottom up supra-nationalization, a process transcending the boundaries of member states as in the case of the European Union (Loughlin, 2012), and top down decentralization in plural polities, which often comprise communities and countries with differences of identity, history, language or traditions. Federalization and subsidiarity have sought legitimacy by accommodating institutional responses to the stimuli of their internal diversity.

In general, multiple identities reflect the sedimentation of shared loyalties and political aspirations through the various levels of social adscription and political life. Sub-state identities, in particular, are often culturally or historically constructed, and may survive alongside a sense of identification with and belonging to the nation-state or to larger continental frameworks. The markers of such identities are not set in stone. For social actors there is political capital in seeking to shape these identities. Where a people no longer identify with the political institutions governing them, the legitimacy of that system of government will be called into question. Nationalist parties, in particular, may thus engage in articulating identification with and belonging to the communities in whose name their claims for political autonomy are made.

Self-identification and the 'Moreno question'

How to interpret the changing nature of people's self-identification and sense of collective belonging is not an easy task for social scientists. In the last decades, sub-state and state levels of political life have been analysed through the lenses provided by the concept of dual identity. This concerns the way in which citizens identify themselves in sub-state minority nations or regions within multinational democracies. It incorporates in variable proportions the ethno-territorial (regional) identity and the state (national) identity. As a result of this compound ethnicity, citizens share their institutional loyalties at both levels of political legitimacy without any apparent fracture between them (Moreno, 2006).

Arguably, the quest for self-government and home rule by regions and sub-state communities has proven to be in accordance with the variable manifestation of such duality in citizens' self-identification: the more regional ethno-territorial identity prevails upon modern national state identity, the higher the demands for political autonomy. Complete absence of one of the two elements of dual identity would lead to a socio-political fracture and demands for self-government would probably take the form of secessionist independence. Alternatively, forced assimilation would seek to impose homogeneity and acculturation. In other words, when citizens in a sub-state community identify themselves in an exclusive manner, the institutional outcome of such antagonism will also tend to be exclusive. Based upon the previous workings of political sociologist, Juan Linz, the so-called 'Moreno question' was set according to a scale of five categories, which provide data on levels of identity belonging, intensity and sharing in contexts of political duality.

The central idea of the 'Moreno question' has been geared towards the selection by the emphasizes respondents of one of the five main categories in the following scale, first applied in the case of Scotland in 1985: (1) I am Scottish, not British; (2) I am more Scottish than British; (3) I am equally Scottish and British; (4) I am more British than Scottish; and (5) I am British, not Scottish (Moreno, 1986).

Several studies have confirmed that ranking high in sub-state (regional) identity makes you more likely to support secession, and vice versa. However, effects are not linear when taking into account contextual circumstances (Rodon and Guinjoan, 2018). Indeed, identity exclusiveness and demands for independence form a binary relationship in which any of the two elements may foster causal processes in a non-linear mode. Certainly the two of them can reinforce each other, but no interconnection can be set a priori. Accordingly, the political mobilization of people's identities is subject to contingent factors. Among these, sociotropic behaviour is of paramount importance. Perception, after all, cannot be considered as stable and linear.

Likewise, identity cannot be synonymous to belonging. Behind this equation there is a long-standing academic discussion about primordialism (and even biological determinism) and social constructivism. Primordialism points out that there is an inexorable relationship between the individual and the nation. Accordingly, life courses of individuals are tied to the past of the nation they belong to. Past, present and future visions are conditioned by attitudes and knowledge rooted in the national collective. Social constructivism, instead, emphasizes the moulding of collective identity by means of social interactions among individuals along historical processes of sharing knowledge and living together (Connor, 1994).

Catalonia and Spain

In the illustrative case of Catalonia and Spain, the effects of the economic crisis unleashed in 2007–08 may have contributed to the political mobilization of Catalan ethno-territorial identity. This occurrence was further exacerbated by a centre-periphery conflict between the regional and central governments. Along this line of argument, the intensification of Catalan self-identification was also part and parcel of the economic quest put forward for the cause of independence. The secessionist 'window of opportunity' provided by the so-called 'Great Recession' was maximized by sub-state nationalist discourses geared to the achievement of future scenarios of prosperity (Serrano, 2013). This economic 'rationalization' of the goal of separation of Catalonia from the rest of Spain could have greatly influenced the mobilization of Catalan forms of self-identification – primarily of those individuals expressing identities of 'Only Catalan' and 'More Catalan than Spanish' (Muñoz and Tormos, 2015). These authors pointed out that preferences for independence were strongly associated with the judgement that living standards in Catalonia would improve after independence. However, regression analyses underscore the overwhelming effect of identity on preference for independence over the status quo. They made it clear that, on the likelihood of preferring independence over the status quo, identities have much greater positive effects than either preference for control of tax revenues or the likelihood of economic gains from independence.

The argument about which factor comes first and is more prevalent – identity or autonomy demands – is rather circular (McCrone and Bechhofer, 2015). Identity can also have a much greater impact for political mobilization than a positive evaluation of the economic consequences of independence over the status quo (Sinnott, 2006; Burg, 2015).

If identification with the political community could facilitate the perception of a 'common good' and improve the performance of any given political system, the perception of a good performance of the political system could also foster collective pride and strengthen such identification (Martínez-Herrera, 2010). Strategies for managing diversity in multilevel polities can provide resources for institutional legitimation. Likewise, they may emphasize integration and inclusion of ethno-cultural differences by promoting the constitutional autonomy and empowerment of those groups or territories involved (Choudhry, 2008). A primary concern put forward by the advocates of the politics of recognition within multinational polities is precisely that the promotion of collective rights in multicultural societies can be fully compatible with political liberalism (Taylor, 1994).

Conclusion

Empirical studies on the interrelation of multiple identities, diversity within states and the preservation of social cohesion have been inconclusive. Approximately half of those studies confirm (or refute) the hypothesis that the politics of recognition and diversity have a negative impact on social cohesion (Schaeffer, 2013). In the same vein, the determinant most affecting the legitimacy of social solidarity and the redistribution of public spending – including those societies with a higher degree of internal heterogeneity – is the capacity and quality of government institutions as generators of social trust (Rothstein, 2015). In general terms, policies seeking to maintain some common bonds and unity are aimed to avoid the idea that too much emphasis on diversity may neglect the common bonds that unite communities and individuals. Different schemes are more likely to work more effectively in some contexts than in others. The institutional designs to be applied may account for different degrees of stability, social justice, legitimacy, equity, recognition, social integration and accountability in a general

framework of growing interdependencies.

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