

Chapter 1

Politics According to Traditional International Relations Theory

The discussion in this chapter is concerned with the different understandings of politics on which traditional international relations theory has built up the conceptual groundwork to understand political phenomena. For traditional IR theory, the vision of politics centred on the state as the main, if not the only legitimate, important actor in the international arena underpins most analysis of international politics today, and this vision remains largely uncontested. In this chapter I begin by exploring and building on the premise that traditional IR theory has insulated its theoretical assumptions about politics within the liberal framework dominant in the Western world. Then I argue that by having a narrow vision of politics to which liberals grant universal validity, liberal thought and international relations theory leave a great deal of political activity underexplored, which excludes or downplays phenomena like collective identity formation.

From a liberal perspective, politics is too readily understood as an activity that is always at least partially linked to bureaucracy and the affairs of the state and therefore, this view remains deeply rooted in state-centred forms of politics. By contrast, this chapter attempts to promote an alternative understanding of politics as the realm in which humans gather together to develop forms of individual and collective expression and thus, reassert their identities. Politics here is seen as a concept in constant flux which should be analysed as a non-fixed concept given that it always involves and is in fact based on human interaction.

One consequence of the rather limited liberal traditional IR theory understanding of politics, is that political phenomena such as collective identity formation are neglected because, as I will show, for IR theory, the best conceivable way of valuable

analysis is thought to have relevance only at the state level. However, the rise of postmodernism in IR literature has challenged existing interpretations of how political phenomena in the world come to be analysed. Postmodernism is posing a great challenge by questioning the foundations in which IR theory and political science have rested for a long time.

Classical theories of international relations have faced a challenge in the last decade by emerging theoretical formulations such as Postmodernism, the English school and Social Constructivism among others. These approaches ground their claims against IR theory on the peculiar meaning assigned to three specific concepts which are believed to dictate most of contemporary political analysis. These are the concepts of the ‘state’, ‘sovereignty’ and ‘political community’ which -albeit distinctly- possess a common link with collective identity and its relations to politics, which have been employed to explain the activity of politics by assigning it a fixed and stable meaning. This fixity is subject to significant challenge for, as I argue later, politics and identity are concepts in motion, in constant remaking.

It is within postmodernism that certain concepts like ‘the political’ are being rethought, articulated and ‘deconstructed’ in order to develop alternative views on how politics is understood.¹ This postmodernist interpretation of ‘the political’ seeks to enhance the conflicting nature of human relations and explore the tension that construes a binary opposition. The interest in examining binary oppositions such as bourgeoisie/proletariat echoes the master/slave dialectic enounced by Hegel in which every part of the binary necessarily depends on the other to exist.² The binary opposition identity/difference developed by postmodern scholars such as Ernesto

¹ Derrida is a contemporary French philosopher who inaugurated the school of deconstruction. Deconstructionism, a body of ideas closely associated with post-structuralism and post-modernism, is a strategy of analysis that has been applied primarily to linguistics, literature, and philosophy. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976).

² For a discussion of Hegel’s ideas see Alexander Kojeve, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel* (London: Basic Books, 1969).

Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, William Connolly, David Campbell and Judith Butler³ to name but a few, has revived the interest in the study of the role which the concept of antagonism plays in the activity of politics. The presence of antagonism in the international arena has been analysed from perspectives so diverse ranging from realism to liberal constructivism. Some key elements of these traditional perspectives in IR will be dealt with throughout this chapter. As I will show, none of these approaches have attempted to link the conceptual relationship between antagonism and the construction of collective identity. In most realist IR literature, antagonism is inescapably associated with war as “policy conducted by other means”.⁴ By contrast, political liberalism and liberal constructivism, in favouring a modern notion of liberty which values freedom from politics, have aimed at making politics safe by deeming antagonisms as sources of possible social unrest and thus intend to establish procedures to mediate or abolish the presence of conflict.⁵ Since politics, by nature, involves the presence of antagonisms, postmodernism, rather than analysing collective identity formation as a mere societal construct, seeks at identifying the conditions which make identity possible in relation to what comes to be considered ‘difference’ in the face of conflict.

The view developed in this dissertation does not intend to downplay the inextricable relation between ethics and politics. Rather, it underscores the important role that ethics and politics play in the construction of collective identity as a political phenomenon. It addresses the points at which politics and ethics overlap and how such a conceptual demarcation becomes necessary to grasp the dynamics of human interaction.

³ According to the postmodern view, identity is inessential, inherently unstable, constituted through relations of difference and exclusion. See the influential works of David Campbell, *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity and Justice in Bosnia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), chapters 1-3. Seyla Benhabib, “Democracy and Difference: Reflections on the Metapolitics of Lyotard and Derrida,” *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 2, no. 1 (1994): 1-23. Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000). Ernesto Laclau, “Deconstruction, Pragmatism, Hegemony,” in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (London: Verso, 1996).

⁴ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. A. Rapoport (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), 34. For more on this topic, see Bethke Elshtain, ed., *Just War Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1992), and Kalevi J. Holsti, *The State, War and The State of War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁵ This point is developed at length by Hannah Arendt in *On Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1973).

In attempting to provide a view that extends beyond the limits of liberalism, the problem I identify in relation to existing literature on identity politics lies precisely in an apparent conceptual confusion concerning the ontological value of certain understandings of conflict and antagonism, whose role in human relations, I will show, is necessary and ineradicable.

This is precisely the point at which liberals attempt to displace politics from both domestic and international affairs in order to replace them with a discourse of ethics.⁶ The unrecognised influence that the liberal discourse on ethics and virtue has upon so many branches of mainstream international relations theory has resulted in a hegemonic ethical view of world politics. This certainly permits in principle the possibility of articulating different views and opposing interpretations on how political phenomena in the world should be analysed. However, as I show, in practice, much traditional international relations theory operates so fully and exclusively upon on the basis of concepts derived from classical liberalism that it can be argued that traditional international relations theory fails to recognize its own rather restrictive limits.

In the first section of this chapter, I introduce an alternative notion of politics and focus on the concepts of the state, sovereignty, politics and community in the way they are typically understood in traditional international relations theory. Here I develop a critical review of both realist and social constructivist accounts of the activity of politics and also point out the elements that traditional international relations scholars need to consider for a critical view in reformulating concepts such as ‘politics’. The solution I offer to this problematic extends beyond the sphere of traditional international relations theory and looks to postmodernism as an important school of thought whose insights on the construction of collective identity because it is analysed through

⁶ See R. B. J. Walker, *Inside/Outside International Relations as Political Theory* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

relations of self/other, which in my view amounts to a more compelling understanding of the activity of politics.

Section two examines those aspects of postmodernism that make it a more compelling approach to analyse the construction of identity. My contention is that a methodology based on discourse analysis can appropriately respond to the challenges posed by the very concept of identity. Taken together, these points lead to a notion of *politics as action*. The views of postmodernism on the state and sovereignty will be explored in some detail here to expose the conceptual fallacies which have rendered traditional IR inadequate. A key point of postmodern thinking has been devoted to challenge and question the role of binary distinctions deeply rooted in our political discourses today, such as identity/difference.

Poststructuralist thinkers have attempted to uncover such dualities by means of an alternative methodology termed ‘deconstruction’ which has been pursued in political theory by poststructuralist thinkers, most notably Jacques Derrida.⁷ A few remarks on the deconstruction of binary oppositions are warranted in order to show a fuller picture of the scope of postmodern thinking regarding identity. In his influential *Inside/Outside*, R.B.J. Walker attempts to expose the passivity of current political thinking, he sustains that “the character of international relations has been understood as a negation of statist forms of political community, as relations rather than politics, as anarchy rather than community.”⁸ The implications of such a claim are serious, for they suggest that by concealing and marginalising the essence of politics from the realm of international relations, IR theory may well offer a description of *relations* amongst states, but it is not clear that it accounts for a compelling explanation of international *politics*.

⁷ This is especially brought out in *Of Grammatology*'s second part which deals with Rousseau and his understanding of language with its cultural origins. See especially Part II, chapters 2 and 4.

⁸ Walker, *Inside/Outside*, 164.

1. Politics according to IR Traditional Theory

I have chosen to start with a review of certain key elements of classical international relations theory's account of politics, particularly with realism and liberal constructivism, because some of their theoretical formulations on identity have dominated the debate within the discipline and deserve a closer analytical approach. Realism is organized around a vision of world politics understood from state-centric notion of a struggle for power in an anarchical world. Hans Morgenthau coined the claim that "the idea of interest is indeed the essence of politics and is unaffected by the circumstances of time and place."⁹ However, the conceptual foundations on which realism rests 'anarchy' and the 'balance of power' are, as Stefano Guzzini suggests, "categories too void to capture important characteristics of international politics."¹⁰ Realists have aimed at displacing most social issues within the state into a less prominent category of 'low politics'.¹¹ Indeed, identity politics is often analysed as a secondary element seen as a *consequence* of state and inter-state behaviour. For realists, the state as a rational actor can succinctly play a crucial role in subsuming national or ethnic conflicts under discourses of national security.¹²

Constructivism rests on an irreducibly intersubjective dimension of human action: the capacity and will of people to take a deliberate attitude towards the world and to lend it significance.¹³ From a liberal constructivist standpoint,¹⁴ dominant writers

⁹ Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, 4th ed. (New York: Knopf, 1967), 5.

¹⁰ Stefano Guzzini, "The Enduring Dilemmas of Realism in International Relations," *European Journal of International Relations* 10, no. 4 (2004): 5.

¹¹ Paul R. Viotti, *International Relations Theory, Realism, Pluralism, Globalism, and Beyond* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1999), 7.

¹² For a discussion on how realism subsumes identity into domestic affairs see Maheshwar Singh, "Ethnic Conflict and International Security," *World Affairs* 6, no. 4 (2002): 345-380.

¹³ John Ruggie, "What Makes the World Hang Together? Neo-utilitarianism and the Social Constructivist Challenge," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 473-489.

¹⁴ Constructivism has been divided in multiple categories such as "conventional" or "critical", "thin or thick" so we are bound to talk about a variety of constructivisms. See Ted Hopf, "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory," *International Security* 23, no. 1 (1998): 136-175.

include Alexander Wendt who maintains that “[i]dentities are the basis of interests.”¹⁵ For Wendt, identity is the result of social construction. However, similar to the poststructuralist theories examined below, constructivists are willing to concede that role identities are not based on inherent properties and as such exist only in relation to Others.¹⁶ Notwithstanding this, the conception of politics adopted by Wendt and John Ruggie,¹⁷ among other leading constructivists, falls short of seizing the conceptual value of the us/them relationship. Arash Abidazeh asserts rightly that because constructivists are “concerned to explain *how* states come to acquire their identities, [they] have been open to the possibility that state identities need not be adversarial.”¹⁸ Such a perspective suggests that constructivists downplay the conceptual value that antagonistic relations bear in the making of social identities. This view, in turn, overlooks the possibility that relations of otherness can develop into relations of enmity bringing about adversarial forms of politics, even when constructivists do acknowledge different levels of otherness.

However, the position taken in constructivist analysis suggests a willing analytical wariness of the contingency that results from the possibility of otherness turning into enmity. This is due to the fact that the reality posed by the very concept of conflict is ultimately mediated by rational actors, such as the state. For constructivists then, the ultimate end of politics is to make human relations safe because all factors are taken to be stable. Liberal constructivists have argued that conflicting relations emerging from self/other relations can be easily accommodated through the

¹⁵ See Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 391-425

¹⁶ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 227.

¹⁷ For an excellent analysis of the origins and development of constructivist frameworks, see John Ruggie, “Introduction: What Makes the World Hang Together?,” in his *Constructing the World Polity: Essays on International Institutionalization* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

¹⁸ Arash Abizadeh, “Does Collective Identity Formation Require an Other? On the Alleged Impossibility of Human Solidarity,” *American Political Science Review* 99, no. 1 (2005): 45-60.

development of shared norms and understandings.¹⁹ While this appreciation of differences reflects a concern for regulating the scope and intensity of conflict to avoid unnecessary upheavals in both domestic and international arenas, this branch of constructivism also reflects a liberal understanding of politics in which the high stakes of politics are diminished by rationally implemented procedures.

By the same token, assumptions about the creation of collective identity formation continue to be analysed as a consequence of the modern institution of sovereignty. This assumption remains largely dependent on a traditional understanding of sovereignty which realists and constructivists appear to take for granted. The problem with so-called neo-realist thinkers such as Kenneth Waltz and John Mearsheimer is that they build their theories on the assumption that sovereignty is a natural and ever-present aspect of political life.²⁰ For Adrian Kuah “this has led to a dehistoricised abstraction of sovereignty as an eternal attribute of international relations.”²¹

In traditional IR theory the concept of sovereignty remains regarded as an organic development which came about as the product of the Westphalian interstate political order. The consequences of this thinking have driven neo-realist thinkers to ground their vision of international politics upon the primacy of state sovereignty.²² The result of this presupposition leads to the emergence of another binary opposition – anarchy and sovereignty- currently so entrenched in the mind of IR theorists. This consistent and widely unquestionable status of sovereignty is believed to be strong enough to set in motion any possible ways of thinking politically on the international level. Devetak observes that “[a]narchy takes on meaning only as the antithesis of sovereignty ... [both are to be taken] to be mutually exclusive and completely

¹⁹ Alexander Wendt "Collective Identity Formation and the International State" *American Politics Science Review* 88 (1994): 395-421, and Ruggie, *Constructing the World Polity*, (New York: Routledge, 1998).

²⁰ See John J. Mearshimer “The False Promise of International Institutions,” *International Security* 19 (1994/1995): 5-49.

²¹ Adrian Kuah, “Sovereignty and the Politics of Identity in International Relations” (Working Paper 48, IDSS, NTU, Singapore, 2003), <http://www.ntu.edu.sg/idss/WorkingPapers/wp48.pdf> (accessed on March 29, 2004).

²² Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979), 88-90.

exhaustive.”²³ Thus, for realists and neorealists, sovereignty becomes engrained as a logical expression of an international order that is organized by political entities with particular interests and ideologies

In line with ongoing debates in IR theory, liberal constructivism can be counted as another perspective in which sovereignty has been conceived from a state-centric perspective. Liberal constructivists recognize that sovereignty has forged collective understandings of ‘inside and outside’ and would concede that the current international order is most readily understood as a collection of sovereign states.²⁴ Constructivism, however, has emerged as a theory that acknowledges the conceptual links between sovereignty and collective identity formation –albeit differently – to the approach I explain below. Wendt has argued that collective identity is shaped and remade on the basis of intersubjective understandings. He concedes that social identities emerge from interaction among the members of society which is grounded on a common experience constituted by shared meanings.²⁵ Wendt treats sovereignty as an institution which rests on the *mutual recognition* of its practitioners making it a necessary feature in the understanding of the limits of state identity. Sovereignty, therefore,

exists only in virtue of certain intersubjective understandings and expectations, there is no sovereignty without an other... [Sovereignty involves] a mutual recognition of one another’s right to exercise exclusive political authority within territorial limits.²⁶

In a similar fashion, a widely acknowledged disregard for the concept of community is fairly salient in recent IR theory literature.²⁷ The relevance of theorising ‘political community’ has nevertheless been reflected²⁸ in recent attempts to incorporate

²³ Richard Devetak, in Kuah, “Sovereignty and the Politics of Identity.”

²⁴ See notably John G. Ruggie, “Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing Community in International Relations” *International Organizations* 47, no. 1 (1993): 139-174.

²⁵ Wendt, *Social Theory*, 341-380.

²⁶ Wendt, quoted by Arash Abizadeh, *Does Collective Identity Presuppose an Other?*, 50.

²⁷ For a detailed explanation of how ‘community’ has received little attention in Political theory, see Raymond Plant, “Community: Concept, Conception and Ideology,” *Politics and Society* 8 (1978): 78.

²⁸ For an extensive development of the resurgence of political community as a concept see the works of: Andrew Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community* (Cambridge: Polity, 1998), and Robert

alternative political meaning to human groupings in the face of political theories strongly inspired by state-centric notions of politics. The task of integrating community into IR theory seems urgent because world politics have been challenged by the impact of globalization and the simultaneous fragmentation it entails. Since, for IR theory the quintessential political community is the state amidst an anarchic world, collective identities have been studied chiefly at the state level, as is the case with constructivists like Wendt and Ruggie.²⁹ Wendt maintains that “[t]he difficulties of achieving pure collective identity make it unlikely that the motivational force of egoistic identities among states can be eliminated, as the recent debate over the Maastricht Treaty made clear.”³⁰ Taken together with other aspects of Wendt’s argument, this indicates that the main concern of IR theory regarding identity should focus primarily on the constitution of the identity at the state level. In doing so, the constructivist approach leaves aside the study of the concepts that make the collective identity formation a phenomenon inextricably tied to a conception of politics as action.

To engage with questions about community in IR theory is to confront a central problem that the notion of transnational identities poses. Peter G. Mandaville uses the term ‘translocal politics’ to point out that the hegemony of the territorial nation-state has limited the political imagination in IR to understand where ‘meaningful’ politics take place.³¹ This is so particularly because ‘political community’ has generally been at best linked, if not equated with ‘state sovereignty’,³² and once again, this latter concept has

Cox, “Social Forces, Status and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory,” *Millennium: Journal of Social Studies* 10, no. 2 (1981): 126-153.

²⁹ John G. Ruggie, “Continuity and Transformation in the World Polity: Toward a Neorealist Synthesis,” in *Neorealism and Its Critics*, ed. Robert O. Keohane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

³⁰ Alexander Wendt, “Collective Identity Formation,” *The American Political Science Review* 88, no. 2 (1994): 386.

³¹ Peter G. Mandaville, “Territory and Translocality: Discrepant Idioms of Political Identity,” Columbia International Affairs, <http://www.ciaonet.org/isa/map01/index.html> (accessed on January 7, 2006).

³² Monopoly sovereignty - i.e. sovereignty as indivisible and unlimited - takes opposite forms inside and outside the sovereign nation state, absolutism inside and "anarchy" outside. The modern paradigm treats as axiomatic that sovereignty inside the nation state is unitary and unlimited and that sovereignty outside is non-existent, i.e. a condition of “Hobbesian” anarchy prevails. See Ernest Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1946).

meant, to follow Walker's generally accepted view, "the primacy of the people and primacy of the state as the locus of power and authority."³³ In this sense, my suggestion for IR theory is that the collective identities of political communities need to be examined in a context both within and beyond the state to inform a wider perspective through which theoretical relevance for locating the political can accrue. These 'local' forms of social configuration exhibit the nature of politics in its most basic form by showing the construction of collective identities as one of its primary results. Mandaville shares a similar understanding of the importance of political communities when suggesting that such collectivities "create new forms of politics whose dynamics hinge on spatial instantiation rather than on the persistence of a fixed territorial space."³⁴ In this sense, the analysis of local politics considered beyond the spectre of the liberal nation-state can acquire a trans-national dimension, which discloses the emergence of different social phenomena to which little attention is paid in IR theory.

It seems to me that these gaps I have pointed out in IR Theory could lead the unwary into deep conceptual pitfalls in understanding political phenomena in the discipline. If it is correct that coherent understandings of the central disciplinary concepts are pivotal points for developing coherent theories of politics, then perhaps realism and constructivism can be seen as less than successful, since they give insufficient attention to concepts like identity and politics. As I have indicated in the main hypothesis, if the confrontation of concepts is secluded from the study of politics, it is likely that any further research on identity remains locked with an understanding of politics that refuses to acknowledge that politics and identity are interconnected in concept and action. One initial conclusion that can be drawn at this point is therefore that these fissures need to be rearticulated and reintegrated through the application of concepts that are sufficiently sensitive to help us explain political phenomena more

³³ Walker, *Inside/Outside*, 63.

³⁴ Mandaville, "Territory and Translocality."

accurately. The point I wish to make here is that the problematic presented by IR theory in relation to the state, sovereignty and community has an underlying *cause* which has not been explored deep enough and which has important repercussions for rethinking identity.

The underlying causes I have identified as important here include the ontological subject of study and the accuracy of the methodology employed. In summary, constructivism poses the following ontological propositions. First, the role of ideas is more important than the role of material forces: how actors identify their material structures. Wendt maintains the dichotomy between materialism and idealism and emphasises in many instances the role of ideas rather than that of material forces.³⁵ Wendt defines idealism in negative terms: (1) “It is not a normative, but a scientific view how the world is. (2) Similarly, it does not assume any normative or moral commitments about human nature. (3) It does not mean that shared ideas have no objective reality. (4) It does not mean that social change is easy or possible in a given context, which is socially constructed. (5) It does not mean that power and interest are unimportant.”³⁶

Constructivists like Wendt and Ruggie have thus been blamed for treating identity as a concept out of reach of all human agencies, namely, for acknowledging identity formation as being created chiefly as a social construct denying any account of political will.³⁷ Moreover, if human agency is abducted by this approach, the consequences of such a theoretical move leave the construction of identity devoid of potential political meanings.

³⁵ Alexander Wendt, “Collective Identity Formation and the International State,” *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 2 (1994): 389.

³⁶ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 25.

³⁷ See Roxanne Lynn Doty, “Immigration and national identity,” *Review of International Studies* 22 (1996): 235-255. Also see David Campbell, *Writing Security* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

2. Classical IR Theory: International *Relations* without *Politics*

2.1 Politics as Action

Following classical tradition in political theory it is possible to trace back what ‘politics’ originally meant for the Greeks and how, as a concept, it has been subject to an evolutionary process and yet remains as the concept to address a distinguishing quality of humanity. For Aristotle, the activity of politics is reducible to a pursuit of the good within the community,

since we see that every city-state is a sort of community and that every community is established for the sake of some good (for everyone does everything for the sake of what they believe to be good), it is clear that every community aims at some good, and the community which has the most authority of all and includes all the others aims highest, that is, at the good with the most authority. This is what is called the city-state or political community.³⁸

In place of going over ground already documented concerning the history of this concept, I wish to begin here by stressing how distorted our understanding of ‘politics’ has become under the modern liberal notion of politics.³⁹ Recent attempts by thinkers engaged in writing critiques against liberalism to varying degrees such as Hannah Arendt, Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss, and Martin Heidegger⁴⁰ have grasped the nature of the political and politics in ways that reveal that the concept *per se* involves a sensitive

³⁸ Aristotle, Book I.1. 1252^a 1-7, *The Politics*, trans. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1998).

³⁹ This point is, of course, not new. Hannah Arendt devoted large portions of her writing to this general idea, to its historical development and to formulating a clear distinction between action-as-*praxis* versus action-as-fabrication or *poiesis*. See her *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), esp. chapter 4, “Action.” For an accessible reading of her view of what is and is not politics see Philip Hansen, *Hannah Arendt: Politics, History, Citizenship* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), chapters 2-3. For arguments that highlight the historical distortion of the concept of politics and explore and extend Arendtian notions of politics into the realms of contemporary democratic participation see Seyla Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

⁴⁰ For a detailed discussion of politics and postmodernism see William Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).

description of human interaction. These views on politics highlight how it necessarily relates to action (*praxis*) and the possibility for humans to express themselves and disclose *who they are*, by contrast, liberal ‘politics’ is understood as an activity tied to institutions, procedures, bureaucracy and constitutional order. The fabricatory, or *poietic*, nature of this activity might, according to Arendt, disclose ‘the what’ but not ‘the who’. For liberals, politics therefore becomes a particular sphere of life from which citizens can easily disengage and is confined to public participation in elections and other democratic devices.⁴¹

It is against this view of politics that Arendt, Schmitt and Strauss, among others, have launched a powerful array of re-interpretations of what politics really is. On this account, what is at stake is not simply short-lived party-political competition or formal representation of the interests of the *demos*. Rather, the stakes of politics characterize precisely what it is to be human.⁴² For Schmitt, politics is grounded in the relationship between friends and enemies. Consequently, for him the activity of politics involves, and is indeed based on, a particular form of *antagonism*. The distinction between the positions of Arendt and Schmitt can be situated in the particular context of ‘action’ they pursue in their works.⁴³ Whilst Arendt is deeply concerned with ‘participation’, ‘sheer human togetherness’,⁴⁴ and disclosure of one’s unique, individual self,⁴⁵ Schmitt places the emphasis on the conflict existing between friends and enemies, and stresses the need for conflict to arrive at a final solution and conclusion. If this closure is not found, as Benjamin Ardití rightly states, “conflict becomes the end of the political... For then one

⁴¹ This point is elaborated at length by Emma Norman, “The Political Self” (Ph.D. diss., University of Essex, 1999). Published in Spanish as *El yo político: Concepciones contemporáneas del yo. La política y la autonomía* (Mexico, D. F.: Ediciones Coyoacán, 2005).

⁴² Norman, “The Political Self,” 134.

⁴³ Norman made this observation, “The Political Self,” 134.

⁴⁴ Hannah Arendt says that the revelatory quality of speech and action comes about in "sheer human togetherness." Neither the doer of good deeds who must remain anonymous nor the criminal who must hide from others can reveal their identity. "Because of its inherent tendency to disclose the agent together with the act, action needs for its full appearance the shining brightness we once called glory, and which is possible only in the public realm." Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 180.

⁴⁵ See Arendt, *The Human Condition*, chapters 4-6.

would be forced to conclude that the *raison d'être* of friend-enemy oppositions is the perpetuation of a friend-enemy opposition.⁴⁶ The ‘political’ in this sense challenges the most widely accepted liberal understanding of conflict which assumes that conflicting relations are self-perpetuating in themselves and thus need to be tamed via institutional procedures and relegated to the private sphere. It should be noted however, that although Schmitt and Arendt have different views regarding the concept of the political, what I consider to be most salient in their approach is the attempt to rescue such an important notion indispensable in my view to understand a process like collective identity formation. In the next section, I explore the conditions that make postmodernism a more reliable resource to account for the construction of collective identities as political phenomena than traditional IR theory. For the sake of brevity, I restrict my analysis to employ certain aspects of a methodology based on discourse analysis, which I show can throw more accurate insights when attempting to explicate the rise and fall of identities.

3. The Challenge of Postmodernism to IR Identity Theory

In the previous sections I examined how classical IR theory has dealt with the problems that sovereignty, a classical understanding of the state and community pose to developing a coherent understanding of collective identity. The apparent inability to grasp the significance of political phenomena seems to be rooted in a limited political imagination which confines politics to relations between states. I have also reiterated that politics as a concept represents the human freedom to relate to others through speech and action with the aim of establishing relationships that reinforce collective identity, especially in situation when the stakes for winning or losing are high. Therefore, reducing the stakes of politics to relations between states or the rational

⁴⁶ Benjamín Ardití, “Tracing the Political,” *Angelaki* 1, no 3 (1995): 22.

politics of bureaucratic modernity is indeed an assault not only to political theory but bears important consequences for how we conceive ourselves as humans.

Postmodernist approaches tend to examine politics taking into account the impact of human agency in modifying collective experiences and stresses how the meaning of political phenomena develops and is altered over time. One of the aspects that distinguish postmodernism from traditional IR theory can be observed in the way postmodernism has dealt with the analysis of political phenomena through non-empirical methodologies. For the purpose of this thesis, I employ some aspects of “discourse analysis” as a methodology, since it responds more adequately to the challenges posed by the much contested notion of identity. Indeed, My broadest suggestion in this chapter is methodological in the sense that I hope to show that it succeeds in providing compelling explanations of political phenomena because ‘discourse analysis’ appears more sensitive to capture, or at least reveal, the unfixity of concepts which remain largely analysed by empirical data in traditional IR theory. I argue this is the case particularly with collective identity formation as a political phenomenon that is a concept always developing, in constant flux, as a result of the instability of antagonisms. In this sense, traditional IR theory falls short of resources to cope with the task of capturing the instability of concepts due to the methodology applied to collective experiences because they insist on studying political phenomena through empirical data. In other words, a postmodern perspective grounded on ‘discourse analysis’ can fill crucial theoretical gaps in the study of world politics.

A heated dispute in the literature has revolved around the question of which methodology could be most appropriate to analyse political phenomena.⁴⁷ For this reason, a special focus in the rest of this chapter is dedicated to the relevance of

⁴⁷ Some of most comprehensive debates on methodology for social sciences are documented in Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1988), and in Kageyama, Yasuyuki, “Openness to the Unknown: The Role of Falsifiability in Search of Better Knowledge,” *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 33, no. 1 (2003): 100-121.

methodology for the purpose of analysing the concept of politics and its relation to collective identity. Two important streams of thought surface on each side of the debate. Traditional theorists, including realists and constructivists, attempt to explain international politics, including identity, by using empirical data. Postmodern theories take an opposing approach by explaining political phenomena through analysing discourse.

The major differences between the approach to identity based on ‘social construction’ and the approach grounded on discourse analysis are chiefly concerned with the role assigned to ‘ideas’. Even though both constructivists and postmodernists depart from a dichotomy between material and idea, constructivists like Wendt focus on the role of ideas as constitutive of material forces. That is, Wendt posits ideas as meaning-generating elements of ‘brute material forces’.⁴⁸ There is nonetheless some ambiguity in the way he insists that idealism is a scientific view of how the world is. This ambiguity disconnects the world of ideas from political action and tends to come to conclusions in political and social analysis grounded on meta-theoretical assumptions. By contrast, postmodernists have concentrated their attention on the roles of ideas in the material world, the meaning of which can be disclosed through an analysis of discourse.⁴⁹ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have made a compelling proposition to understand how postmodernists interpret ideas via discourse by arguing that “[i]deas do not constitute a closed and self-generated world, but are rooted in the ensemble of material conditions of society.”⁵⁰ From this perspective, ideas and discourse are different yet interdependent concepts because the latter seeks to offer a valid interpretation of ideas, a procedure that constructivism attempts to show by using empirical data.

⁴⁸ Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, 25.

⁴⁹ For an excellent analysis of national identity using a postmodernist methodology grounded on discourse analysis and Deconstruction see David Campbell, *National Deconstruction* (Minneapolis: Minneapolis University Press, 1999).

⁵⁰ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, “Postmarxism without Apologies,” *New Left Review* 166 (1987): 79-106.

David Campbell, a prime exemplar of one who uses the approach of discourse analysis in IR theory, develops a challenging approach to the paradox of identity/difference. He articulates the notion of ‘threat’ as a constitutive element in the discourses that serve to construct national identity in the case of the USA’s foreign policy. The relevance of his theory lies in that he focuses on the practices in which American foreign policy is carried out as an instrument to secure American identity. Whilst he vindicates the idea that the “other” needs to be external, he explores the discursive practices inherent in foreign policy discourses to demonstrate that the ‘external other’ has the potential to turn itself into something very similar to Schmitt’s concept of ‘enmity’ when discourses portray otherness as a dangerous threat. Thus Campbell asserts that “[d]anger is not an objective condition. It is not a thing which exists independently of those to whom it may become a threat.”⁵¹ Campbell’s argument stresses the demarcation existing between the inside and outside (i.e. U.S. capitalist world versus Soviet communist other). Discourse analysis is methodologically relevant for the appraisal of antagonisms as a development of discourse and how discourse itself has the potential to turn otherness into enmity via political rhetoric. Since conflict or antagonism is not considered an objective phenomena, empirical methods fail to explain identity as a result of the subjectivity inherent in every antagonism.

The work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe begins to become important at this point. They developed a groundbreaking version of discourse analysis, the basic tenet of which consists in the hermeneutic interpretation of *meaning* to shift the analytical focus from a positivist concern with objective facts to the discourse-theoretical concern with the conditions of meaning and identity.⁵² As a methodological tool, discourse analysis has been successful in explaining the connection of ideas with

⁵¹ Campbell, *Writing Security*, 1.

⁵² Jacob Torfing, “Discourse Analysis and the Post-structuralism of Laclau and Mouffe” (Symposium: Discourse Analysis & Political Science, University of Essex, United Kingdom, 2002), <http://www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/publications/eps/onlineissues/autumn2002/research/torfing.htm> (accessed on September 5, 2005).

linguistic forms of expression. All objects and practices are seen as discursive; they only acquire meaning through their articulation in particular discourse. Thus, identity and meaning or politics and meaning are seen as inescapably relational entities; we are only able to explain and understand a political process if we can describe the discourse within which it is occurring.

In this version, “discourse analysis foregrounds language use as social action, language use as situated performance, language use as tied to social relations and identities, power, inequality and social struggle, language use as essentially a matter of “practices” rather than just “structures”, etc.”⁵³ Taking this idea further, Laclau and Mouffe contend that

[t]he fact that every object is constituted as an object of discourse has nothing to do with whether there is a world external to thought, or with realism/idealism opposition... What is denied is not that such objects exist externally to thought, but the rather different assertion that they could constitute themselves as objects outside of any discursive condition of emergence.⁵⁴

What can be gathered from this is that discourse brings to light the distinction between the realm of ideas and the world of real objects. The way ideas acquire a specific meaning in society is seen a consequence of the historical context in which a specific notion is developed. The development of discursive practices becomes ingrained *not* only in the languages with which people conceive reality, but also, in the consequential political practices associated with a particular concept. For example the use of discursive strategy during the Bush Government and their attempts to gain hegemony around the articulation of concepts like ‘terrorist threat’, ‘counterterrorism’, ‘attack’, ‘war’ etc are but one example of the use of discourse affecting international relations. Of particular theoretical use is the notion of identity as being constituted through excluding or marginalising others.

⁵³ Stef Slembrouck, “What is Meant by Discourse Analysis?,” Ghent University, 2004, <http://bank.rug.ac.be/da/da.htm> (accessed on August 20, 2005).

⁵⁴ Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Social Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (London: Verso, 1985), 108.

For instance, Mexican foreign policy is currently at an impasse regarding immigration issues with the U.S. government.⁵⁵ In the aftermath of 9/11 the language has changed completely for talks on security concerns, and attempts to regulate the flow of Mexican immigrants. More alarmingly, the treatment of Mexicans in the U.S. is now conducted in the name of counterterrorism.⁵⁶ The continuing debate over immigration issues drove Mexican Foreign Minister Luis Ernesto Derbez to declare that legalization of an immigration agreement could take up to 30 years, arguing that “our societies are not yet ready to sign [a deal] but what they are ready for is the *concept*.⁵⁷ In a similar way to George W. Bush infamous international reductionism, “You are either with us or against us,”⁵⁸ the American government has used the binary schemes of ‘U.S. citizen’ versus ‘alien’ to distinguish between the bearers of rights and those from outside. In current political rhetoric however, an ‘alien’ always has the potential to turn into a terrorist, even when a U.S. citizen could have the same potential.

The above examples demonstrate that a discourse-based analysis can be very productive, at least in interrogating aspects of political phenomena. Discourse analysis in this context sheds some light on the evolution of discourse-orientated concepts in the formulation of antagonisms in the U.S. government. The construction of the Mexican illegal immigrant narrative has been shaped in the past 50 and so years. From 1950 onwards, being Mexican has meant to be a stranger in terms of language and perceived as an economic threat in the labour market.⁵⁹ Drawing on Cambell’s concept of threat,

⁵⁵ “Half an Enchilada: Mexico and the United States,” *The Economist*, January 23, 2003, 31-43.

⁵⁶ Michele Waslin, “The New Meaning of the Border: Mexico - US Migration since 9/11” (paper presented at the conference on Reforming the Administration of Justice in Mexico, at the Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, May 15-17, 2003), <http://repositories.cdlib.org/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1040&context=usmex> (accessed on December 20, 2005), (my emphasis).

⁵⁷ Waslin, “The New Meaning of the Border.”

⁵⁸ George W. Bush, Addresss to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People. 21 Sep, 2001. available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010920-8.html> (Accessed on 4 Feb, 2006).

⁵⁹ Juan Ramón García, *The Mass Deportation of Mexican Undocumented Workers Immigrants in 1954* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 180.

discourse analysis is useful in tracing the conditions under which ‘Mexican’ as a concept of collective identity develops from a threat to the economy to a threat in security issues over more than five decades.

This is but one case that illustrates why the use of discourse is so crucial in practical issues of international relations and thus why discourse analysis can be extremely useful to provide an alternative perspective to more traditional theories of international relations. This example also shows the implications that fixing these concepts has for conceptualizing a concept like identity, which as in the case with politics, is always in flux. What is important about Laclau and Mouffe’s point, and the ideas of Derrida on which much of it is based, is that there is *no fixed meaning* to many politically important words, although we are often led to believe the contrary. There is no single ‘correct’ meaning behind such ‘floating signifiers’ like “democracy” or even “politics” and, as such, they can be used to relate differently to other terms (e.g. ‘state’, ‘political actor’, ‘(civil) society’, ‘nation’ and especially ‘sovereignty’) depending on which understanding of the term is used. The meanings of these terms are therefore “undecidable”.⁶⁰ In other words, the relation between the concepts (signifieds) behind the words (signifiers) is an ambiguous one that is constantly open to challenge and change: what Laclau and Mouffe term “rearticulation”.⁶¹ It is a *recognition* of the possibilities for rearticulating different meanings that, according to these authors, permits the poststructuralist possibility of escaping total structural determination,⁶² or as I have termed it earlier, for (re-)introducing a level of political will. As we shall see later in this thesis, the “unfixity” of discourse understood in this manner can also illuminate how collective identities are formed and transformed.

⁶⁰ Laclau and Mouffe, Foreword to the 2nd edition [1994] of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, xi.

⁶¹ For a detailed explanation of Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 110. Also see Ernesto Laclau, *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time* (London: Verso, 1990).

⁶² “The world is less ‘given’ and must be increasingly constructed. But this is not just a construction of the world, but of social agents who transform themselves and forge new identities as a result.” Laclau and Mouffe, *New Reflections on the Revolutions*, 40.

For now, the point to be made is that an analysis of the discourse in both the theory and the practice of international relations suggests that this ‘unfixity’ has *not* been sufficiently recognised, although it is perhaps in the process of ‘catching on’. Taking the theoretical route for the moment, while a measure of bickering over definitions can be observed, there is a strong tendency for dominant IR theories, particularly those associated with political realism, to correlate or even conflate ‘politics’ with ‘the state’. This is an excellent illustration of first, how ‘fixity’ of discourse (or a hegemonic discourse)⁶³ can and has been imposed and second, the restrictive consequences of doing so for a theory. The activity of politics as a focus of study is therefore limited to debates and discourses among states. In doing so, certain concepts, practices and processes are, at worst, dismissed or, at best, relegated to other fields of social sciences leaving a variety of unanswered political questions that in fact pertain strongly to the IR discipline. Such is the case with the concepts of politics and collective identity formation.

Discourse Analysis offers a response to the challenge of identity by permitting a critical reading of sovereignty which demonstrates that its links with collective identity can also be interpreted as a product of the discourse to which this concept has been subjected. As with ‘politics’, the concepts of the state and sovereignty must be understood as cause and *effect* of discourse and therefore with meanings that are open to change in sync with contemporary changes on the inside (local) and the outside (global), and the in-between translocal.

The paradigm of sovereignty is challenged by postmodernists in their attempt to unveil the repercussions that sovereignty has reached as a reified historical event.⁶⁴ Roxanne Lynn Doty, for instance, recognizes the distinction between national and state-formed identities, and argues that the idea of national identity constitutes the very

⁶³ Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 112.

⁶⁴ See Richard Ashley, “Untying State Sovereignty,” *Millenium* 17, no. 2 (1988): 227-262.

foundation of the state.⁶⁵ Furthermore, she regards that the primary role of sovereignty consists in its ability to “impose fixed and stable meanings about who belongs and who does not belong to the nation, and thereby to distinguish a specific political community – the inside – from all others – the outside.”⁶⁶ Indeed, sovereignty in this sense forges the dividing line over which discourses of antagonism will emerge. Antagonism is a discourse-theoretical signifier which, as a non-fixed concept, requires a decision to grant meaning to its undecidable situation.

The relationship between ‘sovereignty’ and ‘collective identity’ has a double dimension that forces us to think of both terms beyond the uncontested notion of sovereignty-as-power. Postmodernist Cynthia Weber, for example, sees sovereignty “as the site of political struggle.”⁶⁷ From this it can be derived that the struggle implicated in the process to attain any kind of collective identity, makes identity simultaneously “dependent on its ability to define difference.”⁶⁸ For many postmodernists, sovereignty is an action which requires a time and a place to occur.⁶⁹ Sovereignty involves the human agency responsible for externalising the Other. The externalization of difference through the sovereign act carries along the discourse that internal sovereignty⁷⁰ decides the internal organization of the community. In this sense, internal sovereignty is seen solely as a capacity to exercise power over a circumscribed community.

In a very liberal fashion, the institution of Westphalian sovereignty conflates internal and external meanings of the word. As far the external meaning is concerned, the liberal understanding of sovereignty reduces its meaning to a theoretical justification

⁶⁵ This point is elaborated by Kuah in “Sovereignty and the Politics of Identity.”

⁶⁶ Roxanne Lynn Doty, “The Double Writing of Statecraft,” *Alternatives* 21 (1996): 122, 171-189.

⁶⁷ Cynthia Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3

⁶⁸ William Connolly, *Identity/Difference, Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 64.

⁶⁹ See Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), Cynthia Weber, *Simulating Sovereignty: Intervention, the State and Symbolic Exchange* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁷⁰ Internally, a sovereign government is a fixed authority with a settled population that possesses a monopoly on the use of force. S. Krasner, “Compromising Westphalia,” *International Security* 20, no. 3 (1996): 472-496.

for the justness and legitimacy of liberal institutions around the world. The internal meaning is reduced to establish the limits of the state. In doing so, liberal thought operates with a conception of sovereignty that excludes a crucial meaning sovereignty possesses, the highest quality of which lies in its capacity to externalize difference in relations to one's group identity. Although it can be argued that this perception of sovereignty is meta-theoretical, this conception of sovereignty has a deep connection with how political action is organized. Arash Abizadeh's argues for a conception of collective identity on the global scale that leaves behind the conceptual presupposition that collective identity needs an external other. His point of departure is to create a common sense of identification among all people as members of humanity. However, this argument fails to permit the possibility that sovereignty might possess an unfixed character in constant flux which is articulated over time in connection with the discourses of difference. Thus, saying that internal and external sovereignty are contingent is saying that these two distinct concepts' meaning remains interdependent in fixity. This is a point often missed in current IR literature, which overlooks that 'translocal politics' take place in 'political communities' beyond the state and in fact account for international politics.

Contrary to classical notions of sovereignty entrenched in the Enlightenment project of modernity; I wish to suggest here that a critical reinterpretation of sovereignty can reveal that the notion of identity is located at its very core. I am inclined to agree with Kuah's observation that, "sovereignty has become so embedded in the collective consciousness of its universal practitioners that many of its basic tenets are taken for granted as natural reality."⁷¹ If he is right, and if it is accepted that identities are construed in relation to difference, then sovereignty appears to present a pivotal link between identity and difference. Sovereignty is analysed in postmodernism in the abstract as a mechanism to structure the limits of identity. But for classical IR theory

⁷¹ Kuah, "Sovereignty and the Politics of Identity."

and its state-centred discussions the state has been regarded as *prior* to sovereignty,⁷² and therefore, prior to the *political*.

It should be clear by now that the concepts of identity and politics need an urgent rethinking in the discipline of international relations theory. This chapter has laid the groundwork for the premise that international relations theory leaves a great deal of political activity underexplored. However, the conceptual foundations of liberalism do not provide liberal thought and IR theory with the tools to tackle these issues appropriately because its tenets remain too dogmatic. While many of the postmodernist objections to the liberal conceptualization of politics and identity can be criticized and contested as well for going too far in producing scepticism, some aspects of postmodernism can be rescued as methodological tools to question many of the concepts from which political analysis continue to work. In this chapter I hope that I have shown that ‘discourse analysis’ can illuminate the sources of antagonism inherent in the identities which otherwise would be taken as fixed and given. Further, I hope to have established a theoretical ground that relates the concepts of politics and identity as two concepts that require each other. I hope it is now beginning to become clear that whereas the concepts of politics and identity are held in ‘positive tension’ politics as a concept is what mediates the tension between identity and difference. This reading of IR theory has aimed at removing the conceptual blinkers to see that the influence of liberal thought as I stated in the first hypothesis, operates with a narrow vision of politics to which liberals grant universal validity. Therefore, liberal thought and international relations theory leave a great deal of political activity underexplored, which excludes or downplays phenomena like collective identity formation.

It is precisely at this point that the relevance of the work of Carl Schmitt appears most useful in uncovering the connection existing between sovereignty and identity. This connection is elucidated in the friend-enemy distinction which captures the

⁷² See Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*.

elements (i.e. sovereignty, community, identity) from which to grasp political phenomena grounded on an ethic-free notion of antagonism *qua* politics. In the next chapter, I offer an exegetical interpretation of Carl Schmitt's *Concept of the Political* to reinforce my central argument that the concepts of politics and identity are inextricably related and I also inquire into the ontological value of 'conflict' and 'antagonism' to demonstrate that the liberal misunderstanding of the philosophical character of conflict restrain liberal thought from finding alternative meanings to its own concepts.