Chapter 1

Citizenship and Diasporic Politics: A Brief Introduction

ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces readers to classical and contemporary definitions of citizenship, the development of the nation-state, and the concept of national identity as well as other forms of identity construction. The chapter also focuses on diaspora literature and introducing the classical and contemporary characterizations of diaspora and theories on diaspora politics. Concepts such as hybridity and transnationalism are briefly presented as these concepts feed into the contemporary definitions of diaspora, which are less focused on a place of origin or homeland attachment. The chapter also delves into the Othering of national politics toward diasporic communities, providing examples from recent American policy.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of citizenship has certainly been tested in the 21st century and development of the transnational state, with available technologies increasingly blurring the boundaries of nation-states, governance, influence, and what it means to belong or the concept of home. Citizenship, in the broadest international relations terms, is belonging (legally and politically) to a state and was a byproduct of establishment and proliferation of the nation-state.

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as the legitimate form of government (and arguably, the most fair division of previously occupied lands). With the French Revolution the idea of the nation-state, a politically organized area in which a nation and state occupy the same space, became the aspiration of political elites around the world. The idea that the map of states should look like a map of nations was consciously promoted by European philosophers and elites, who viewed the opportunity to create the map as a way of controlling the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states after the fall of the monarchies in Europe. The problem for these elites was that nation-states, or well-defined, stable nations living within distinct boundaries, were an ideal that didn’t actually exist. Nations are created, not born of some specific ancestral group.

Since nation-states, thought necessary to maintain the territorial integrity of the states of Europe, did not really exist, they had to be created. In some cases, this meant privileging one ethnic at the expense of others. In other cases, it meant absorbing smaller entities into their borders. It often meant redrawing national borders to fit nations, most often determined by language. But mostly the creation of nation-states took the form of an explicit attempt by elites to create a single national identity out of the diverse peoples within their borders. They did this by promoting a sense of shared history and culture (whether based in fact or not) through public education, and through the promotion of national languages and alphabets, symbols, holidays, songs, and dress. As Nititham argues, “Assumptions about an entire nationality, a minority ethnic group or a categorization of people are not just linked to people’s individual thoughts; these reflect a collective history and the popular imagination. The power and value placed upon these adjectives gives them real meaning, sometimes with joyful memories, in other cases, painful ones” (2008, P. 74).

The first political organization of states based on the ideas of territorially and sovereignty date back to the early city-states of the Fertile Crescent. The philosophical origins of the modern state begin already with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. The concept of the nation-state and nationalism took hold in Europe in the nineteenth century and was exported around the world through European colonization. Even so, the modern concept of state grew very slowly at first and has expanded rapidly only very recently. As of the time of the Declaration of Independence, there were only some thirty-five empires, kingdoms, and countries in the entire world. By the beginning of WWII, that number had only doubled to around seventy. Following WWII, many former European colonies, finally achieved independence and consciously choose to retain their colonial borders, languages, and the very concept of statehood.
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