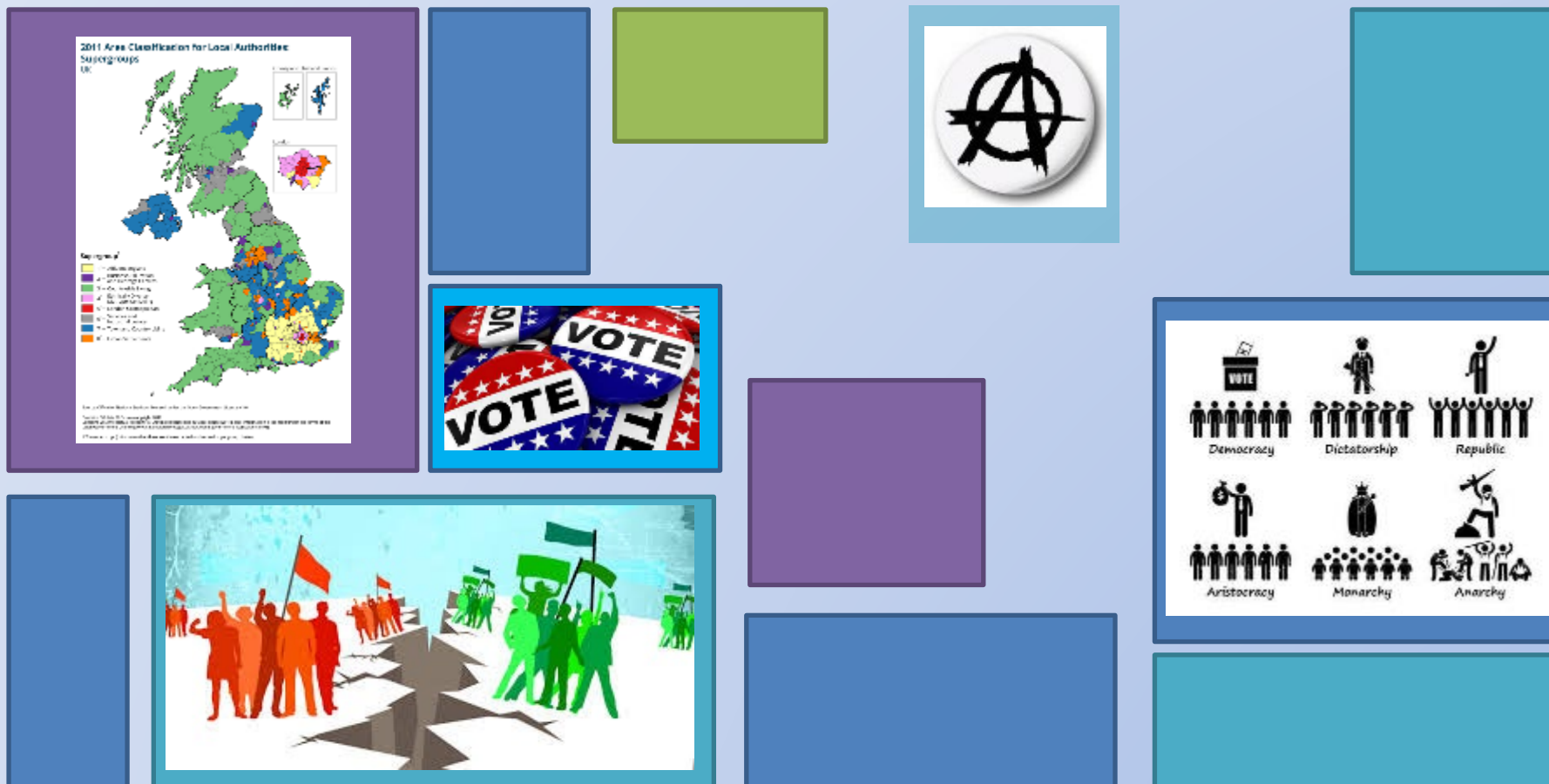




ECED7007 : Political Influences in Inequality & Diversity

Theme 5: National Identity, Race, Ethnicity and 'Othering'

Supplementary: The Rwandan Genocide

The Rwandan Genocide



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Theoretical Perspectives on Ethnicity

1. Primordialism
2. Constructionism
3. Instrumentalism

(Yang, 2000: 42)

Primordialists

- Ethnicity is an ascribed identity or assigned status that is somehow 'given' to us
- It is sometimes inherited from one's ancestors
- E.g. if your forebears are Chinese then you will have inherited physical and cultural characteristics from them
- Thus, from a primordialist perspective, ethnicity is a 'very deeply rooted, primal bond to one's ancestral bloodline'

(Yang, 2000: 42)

Primordialists

- Therefore a common ancestry determines ethnicity
- People belong to an ethnic group because members of that group all share common biological and cultural origins

(Yang, 2000: 42)

Primordialists

- The arguments put forward by this school of thought stress the role of primordial factors, lineage and cultural ties in determining ethnicity
- These bonds will give rise to and sustain ethnicity i.e. if you follow this school of thought your ethnicity is innate – it cannot change even over generations

(Geertz, 1973; Isaacs, 1975; van den Berghe, 1981 *cited in* Yang, 2000: 42)

Primordialists

Tend to focus on:

- Ancient beginnings
- Evolution of an ethnic group over time
- And see ethnicity as a natural state of being

Some Primordialists view ethnicity as defined as;

- Defined by or intimately connected with
- Blood ties
- Or Kinship

Primordialism assumes that ethnic identity is;

- Fixed at birth
- And cannot change

Primordialists

- Socio-biologists attempt to use;
- Scientific approaches such as Darwinian and natural selection
- Evolutionary biology
- And Genetics
- To explain social behaviour

(Joireman, 2003: 34)

The Rwandan Genocide

- In 1994 the majority Hutu population in Rwanda organised themselves and in the course of two months proceeded to murder 800,000 Tutsi people living among them – the overwhelming majority of the Tutsi population
- The genocide was conducted in a methodical way, often through the leadership of the local town governments

(Joireman, 2003: 34)

The Rwandan Genocide

- Hutus were encouraged to kill their ethnic Tutsi neighbours as a collective action for the public good
- The underlying causes of this violence were differences between the two ethnic groups that were both ancient and sustained
- *Primordialist perspective: The Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda were unable to live together in peace because their inherent ethnic identifies set them at odds with each other*

(Joireman, 2003: 34)

Primordialists

- This type of explanation of the Rwandan genocide as one of the most notable and clear examples of ethnic based violence observed in recent times
- is considered as a primordial justification (i.e. the clear ethnic differences were what caused the genocide)

(Joireman, 2003: 34)

Social Constructionism

- Social constructivism
- Theoretical school of ethnicity
- Focuses on the fluid nature of ethnic identities
- It does identify the role of political and economic factors in moulding ethnicity

(Joireman, 2003: 34)

Social Constructionism

- However it acknowledges the origins of ethnic groups in shared;
- Language
- Religion
- And/or physical characteristics
- Which create a set of identities ‘from which one can choose’
(Joireman, 2003: 54)

Social Constructionism

- People choose an ethnic identity based on their sense of identity plus their own preferences
- These are formed by;
- Economic influences
- Political influences
- and even social conditions

(Joireman, 2003: 54)

Social Constructivism

- Therefore social constructivism is more concerned with the emergence and disappearance of ethnic groups and movements
- And the political economic and social factors that cause these changes

(Joireman, 2003: 34)

The Rwandan Genocide

- In 1994 800,000 Tutsis were killed in Rwanda
- They were killed by Hutu people who desired to end the dominant role that Tutsis had played in the government and armed forces of Rwanda
- Moderate Hutus who opposed the violence or were involved in political alliances with the Tutsis were also killed

(Joireman, 2003: 34)

The Rwandan Genocide

- The reasons behind the genocide were the struggle for political power coupled with a desire for revenge on the Tutsi who had been favoured in terms of educational opportunities and political leadership during the colonial era
- This favoured position of the Tutsi was based on German and Belgian beliefs in the superiority of the generally taller and lighter skinned Tutsi
- *Social constructionist explanation: Thus, in the case of Rwanda the ethnic violence that developed referenced an earlier era in which ethnicity was both constructed and manipulated to divide and conquer the country*

(Joireman, 2003: 34)

Social Constructionism: The Formation of Ethnic Identity

Ascribed Traits + Social Inputs = Ethnic Identity

Ascribed Traits

- Appearance
- Place of birth
- Language

Social Inputs

- Ancestral myths
- Subjective beliefs
- Political power of group
- Economics
- Religion
- Language

Instrumentalists

- Ethnicity as the means to some specific political end (i.e. a 'tool' to be manipulated)
- It is focused on the goals for ethnic groups rather than the origins of those groups
- Instrumentalists believe ethnicity is changeable and 'strategic'
- It is **NOT** a characteristic acquired at birth and consistent over time
- Ethnic identities may be important at some times and in some circumstances and completely absent at other times

(Joireman, 2003: 54)

Instrumentalism & Politics

- Instrumentalism is a belief that ethnic identities develop and nationalism ensues mainly in the pursuit of particular political goals
- Thus they believe that ethnicity is manipulated and used by elites to achieve political goals or some form of political mobilization
- In this sense it is another 'trope' of the populist politician

(Joireman, 2003 : 54)

Instrumentalists

- There is an acknowledgement of the existence of object markers of ethnicity such as;
- Symbols
- Customs
- Language
- or even appearance
- However they focus on behaviours rather than appearances as defining an ethnic group
- They believe that it is possible to define a person's ethnic identity by examining their actions and choices

(Joireman, 2003: 34)

The Rwandan Genocide

- When Rwanda became independent in 1962, power was supposed to change hands from the Belgium colonial administration to the hands of an indigenous government composed mostly of Hutus, the group that comprised the majority of the population.
- This peaceful transfer of power was blocked by the minority Tutsi groups in the Rwandan population (about 15%) who wanted to retain control of positions they had long held under the colonial administration as the favoured ethnic group

(Joireman, 2003: 34)

The Rwandan Genocide

- Civil war broke out, forcing many Tutsis to flee the country into neighbouring Congo and Uganda as refugees
- The Hutu took over the government and remained in power until 1994, challenged by armed Tutsi opposition movements from the early 1990s forward
- Violence broke out between Hutus and Tutsis in 1973, when the Tutsis were expelled from universities and public jobs because they exceeded ethnic quotas which had been set

(Joireman, 2003: 34)

The Rwandan Genocide

- As a result of the restrictive quotas and the violence more Tutsi left Rwanda
- In 1994, the Hutu people, led by members of the media and their own local governments, killed 800,000 Tutsi Rwandans and moderate Hutus over 100 days;
- Most of the killing was done with machetes in local communities by community members.
- *Instrumentalist perspective: The Hutus were led into the genocide violence by a desire to retain power and control of Rwanda*

(Joireman, 2003: 34)

Instrumentalists Explanation

- Some would argue that the behaviour of the Hutus illustrates the instrumentalist theory of ethnicity
- Instrumentalism is a belief that ethnic identities develop and nationalism ensues in the pursuit of particular political goals rather than for any other reasons
- They therefore see the use of ethnicity as a tool to achieve an ends
- But, does this tell the whole picture?

(Joireman, 2003: 34)

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