Global Identity Formation

At the end of this session, you should be able to understand

- The impact of colonial rule on ethno-racial identities, traditions, values, and cultural practices in LDC’s, see guest lecture by Professor Femi Vaughan/Dept. of Africana Studies on “Local Politics & Colonization in British West Africa”
- Identity formation in a globalizing world
  - The Issue of Culture: The Dialectics of Gains and Losses
  - How Identities have changed
  - Challenges to Nation States
  - Sociological and Political Theories, Explanations, and Open Questions
  - Problems in Understanding the Issues

Colonial History in Nigeria

- 1000 years of pre-colonial history of Yoruba, Hausa, and Ibo ethnic groups
- West Africa as a center of the Portuguese, Dutch, and British slave trade
- Berlin Conference in 1884/5 to partition Africa among European colonial powers—Britain claims Nigeria as colonial possession
- British Governor Lugard develops an indirect system of self-rule of natives incorporating the interests of local tribal leaders, Christians, and Muslim merchants that becomes a model of British colonial rule for other parts of Africa
- The very fluid system of "self-rule" actually distorted the indigenous political system and manipulated native actors and their traditions for the benefits of Britain. It's philosophy was based on the "divide & rule" imperative
- In some parts of Africa the native peoples responded with uprisings, such as the Mau Mau peasant rebellion of the Kikuyu people in Kenya 1951-54 or the Miji Miji rebellion against German colonial rule in Tanganjika
- Colonial powers developed different types of colonial rule: French, Belgians, Germans, British, Italians, Spaniards, and Portuguese. In places where "settler colonies" were established (South Africa) racism was a more prevalent system of rule while others resorted to more direct brutal exploitation and oppression
- The effects of centuries and decades of colonialism are still visible in Africa and also explain difficulties to adjust to the global trends.

Unresolved Legacies of Globalization: Colonialism

- Assumption of “natural” ethnic & racial differences
- Colonialized often treated ‘less than human’ or as inferior ("racism")
- Ruthless seizing & exploitation of land and resources
- Arbitrary borders and territories carved out of continents→creation of “minorities”
Pseudo ‘agreements and treaties’ & establishment of alien colonial power structures with far reaching consequences

The Issue of Culture: The Dialectics of Gains and Losses

- Globalization influences "culture and identities" because it opens up new markets and prepares the grounds for increased cultural exchange and interaction of all sorts
- Tools: Open Trade, Deregulation of national markets, air travel, new communication technologies, capital flows and investment, consumerism, transnational communities
- Particularly people in the post-colonial world of newly established nation states are in search for new national identities
- Globalization is often seen as a threats to national sovereignty, traditional cultures and local values because it creates new habits, tastes, idols, and ideologies
  - global consumerism
  - new diasporas and transnationalism
  - a new “culture” of human rights & democracy
  - rising awareness of global ecological threats
  - anti-globalization movements (Seattle, Zapatista, etc)
  - resurgence in ethnic and religious identities
    - Cultural politics and identity politics
    - Emergence of religious ‘fundamentalisms’
    - Violent ethnic conflicts

How have identities changed?

- In Traditional societies there were ‘fixed and essentialist’ conceptions of identity, such as those based on kinship, age, residence, language.
- In Modern societies there were ‘monolithic identities such as nation, class, race, and gender’
- In Late Modern societies there are ‘multiple and fragmented identities’

Challenges of Nation States

Above trends challenge nation-states claims to provide a sense of community via "national identity." Examples:

- Break up of Nation-states along ethnic lines
  - Soviet Union: Russia, Azerbaijan, Georgia…
  - Yugoslavia: Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia…
- Ethno-nationalist movements and threats of secession
  - Quebec (Canada), Scotland (United Kingdom), Tamils in Sri Lanka
- New Forms of Violent Conflicts
  - Rwanda: Tutsi vs Hutu
- Indigenous People’s Movements
  - Latin America, North America, Australasia
Sociological and Political Theories and Explanations
- McWorld vs Jihad? (sub-national vs. transnational identities)
- Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” (separation vs. unity)
- Homogenization (McDonaldization) or heterogeneity/differentiation?

Questions raised
- Can there be a Chinese, South Asia, Islamic, Buddhist Modernity that is different from the American or European experience?
- Can people retain a cultural particularistic identity and embrace universality?

Problems in Understanding the Issue
Scientists and Politicians have had difficulty understanding this issue.
- Ethnic and cultural divisions do not fit “the model” of Western rational thought
- “Modernization” theories expected dissolution of differences
- “Neo-liberal” theories expected markets and self-interest to overcome ‘traditional interests and non-rational behavior’
- “Nationalism” explanations expected national identity to overcome sectarian interests
- Religious fundamentalism threatens separation of church and state