Culture, Security, Identity: A Blog from Newcastle University

https://www.e-ir.info/2013/02/09/culture-security-identity-a-blog-about-world-politics-from-newcastle-university/

CSI NEWCASTLE, FEB 9 2013

CSI-Newcastle is the community of international relations scholars and postgraduate research students based in Politics at Newcastle University. International relations research at Newcastle University has long been characterised by theoretical, methodological, and empirical pluralism. We are deeply interested in the critique of dominant narratives and discourses of international relations but eschew doctrinaire approaches that are blind to the particular, to issues of race, class and gender, or that insist upon the deployment of simple problem-solving theories. Our critical ethos entails on-going investigations into the underlying assumptionsthat underpin mainstream analyses of international relations in our attempts to understand the workings of power and domination. We recognise that high and low politics, like high and low cultures, are all zones of political contestation and draw no distinctions between them in terms of their relative importance.

In this blog we will post on a series of themes that are in common to our work:

Culture

For far too long culture has been either neglected in political analysis or used as a simple, reductionist catch-all explanation. Our starting point is that approaches to explaining difference such as the 'clash of civilisations' reproduce a dangerous Manichean world view. We recognise that culture, for all its complexity and difficulty as a concept, is central to the making and contesting of meaning in international relations. We will draw upon cultural artefacts to examine the intertwining of culture and politics in order to explore the benefits of the cultural and aesthetic turns in the study of international relations.

Security

Security, insecurity, risk, and danger are at the heart of everyday discourse of politics that present the world as an inherently unstable, unworkable and threatening place. These narratives and discourses are not neutral and descriptive but seek to create particular understandings of the world. In so doing, security serves to silence dissenting views and criticism. The 'with us or against us' logic of the last decade in mainstream security discourse has jeopardised the potential for a richer understanding of complex problems. We aim to unsettle and contest common sense resolutions to security issues. We will interrogate the various wars being waged by state and non-state actors whether against crime, insurgency, the environment, poverty, or ignorance. We will explore questions of ethics and representation for a wide range of security issues.

Identity

Inseparable from the two themes identified above is the question of identity, one that animates politics in all its dimensions. Like culture, identity is a complex concept and one often cynically used by political elites to divide the world into permanently antagonistic groupings. Whether associating Muslims with the illicit use of violence, those engaged in legitimate political protest with threats to political order, drug users with organised crime, or the poor with fecklessness, we will challenge the ways in which identity is used to settle difficult political issues through the

assignation of responsibility to individuals and groups often unable to speak back to power. We treat identity as mobile, fluid, constructed and always in the process of negotiation in order to explore the ways that identity is stripped of its political contestability in much mainstream political discourse.

Over the coming months, we look forward to engaging with these themes and sharing our expertise with the e-ir.info online community.

Simon Philpott, on behalf of the CSI-Newcastle collective.

—

Simon Philpott *is a Senior Lecturer in International Politics and the co-ordinator of the International Politics Research Cluster at Newcastle University, UK. Read more of CSI-Newcastle.*