



FORUM

University of Edinburgh
Postgraduate Journal of Culture and the Arts
Issue 22 | Spring 2016

Title	The Problem of Ideology
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Publication	FORUM: University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Journal of Culture & the Arts
Issue Number	22
Issue Date	Spring 2016
Publication Date	30/05/2016
Editors	Emma Sullivan and Matthew Tibble

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The Problem of Ideology

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This article discusses the role of ideology in International Relations. It seeks to rectify potential weaknesses in any ideological analysis using two approaches. Firstly, applying a more thorough and precise definition of ideology. Secondly, identifying the historicity and complexities within an ideology, distinguishing between core and peripheral principles, and their shifting interaction over time.

‘The concept of ideology and ideological thinking is a slippery one.’
(Cassels, xii)

To argue for the continued salience of ideology in contemporary academic discourse is no easy task. The role of ideology in decision-making, international systems and societal norms receives scant attention in theoretical and methodological debates, particularly in International Relations (IR), and is largely left to historians and regionalists. This can be explained by four notable developments across the paradigmatic spectrum of IR and politics, - developments which both reflect and have influenced trends in other academic disciplines and popular assumptions in cultural discourse.

First, the rise of neo-realism since the 1970s contributed to a prevailing view that ideologies were less influential in the international system than interests and security. Despite the backdrop of the ideological Cold War, global events appeared to corroborate realist positions. For example, numerous works on the Middle East, considered in the mid-20th century to be the archetypal site of ideological contestation, continue to this day to alternate between claims of the death of Arab nationalism or Islamism; failure to institutionalise ideologies at the state level, and the seeming betrayal of ideological principles for the sake of pragmatism and regime interests (Dawisha; Tibi; Roy).

Second, with the end of the Cold War and Fukuyama’s declaration of ‘the end of history’, the study of ideological conflict appeared to have less currency – such conflicts were deemed to be a passing, albeit necessary teleological phase of human progress (3-18). Of course, the end of history translated as the ‘triumph of Liberalism’, itself an ideology; yet liberal theorists tend to circumvent ideological debates, partly because to acknowledge them would detract from Liberalism’s universalist claims.

Third, alternative approaches – such as constructivism, and particularly critical theory – where one might look to find challenges to objectivist and materialist paradigms in Politics and related disciplines, have done little to dispute the peripheral role of ideology as a credible explanation for political action. Thus constructivism is largely concerned with ideas as a non-conscious, intersubjective phenomenon, which tends to narrow their influence to identity or perception. As for critical theory, it has, unlike the

above three theoretical approaches, engaged more robustly with ideology, notably via Marx and Engels, Mannheim, Gramsci, Althusser and latterly the Frankfurt School. Marxist theory set the tone in defining ideology in a largely pejorative sense¹, positing that ideologies are instrumentalised to imbue the masses with false-consciousness as a tool of manipulation (Marx, Engels 59-61). Using the analogy of a 'camera obscura', Marx and Engels argued that ideology is used by the elites to invert the material realities of the world, and in so doing, distorting the image to smooth out contradictions and injustices. Ideology, then, is at the heart of the debate in many critical approaches, but often in a way that discredits any function it might have other than to deceive or dominate the unknowing masses. Thus what emerges is an unlikely convergence between realists and critical theorists in their assumptions about the status quo in world politics – i.e. that it is predicated on material interests.

However Raymond Geuss, himself associated with the Frankfurt School, did acknowledge that the function of ideology can be more complex, and subsequently identified three different approaches to ideology: the first is to view ideology in a purely pejorative sense; the second is to view ideology in a positive sense, with a specific ideology in mind, and with intent to prescribe; and the third is to steer clear of a normative position and to recognise the descriptive value of an ideological framework when studying human behaviour. This latter position recognises that ideologies are prevalent in an array of human activities – from politics to economics to culture – regardless of the purpose they serve, and for that alone they are worth studying.² By descriptive value, it is meant that ideologies reflect the way a society and its political system operates, and enables both analysis and comparison by categorising systems and values. On 'descriptive' ideology, Geuss states:

...typically it will include such things as the beliefs the members of the group hold, the concepts they use, the attitudes and psychological dispositions they exhibit, their motives, desires, values, predilections, works of art, religious rituals, gestures, etc. (5)

Clifford Geertz took this further to argue that ideologies are metaphors and symbols for reality, and provide meaning to social complexities - thus they are not to be seen as distortions but rather reflections of society, and an attempt to bring some order to understandings of it. According to this approach, to argue something is 'ideological' is neither pejorative nor a validation, rather the concept is deemed important for its explanatory use. To a lesser certain extent, as Mannheim and Gramsci conceded, it offers a positive acknowledgment: that ideologies are often constructed to enable a group 'to satisfy their wants and needs and further their interests' (22). Thus ideologies are utilised by states, organisations and societies to identify a consistent set of beliefs about the world they live in, which then helps to guide decisions as well as prevent contradictory ones.

So, despite the indifference from some of the above theoretical stand-points, there is a strong case to be made for analysing ideology and its impact on politics and society. However, notwithstanding the need

¹ It is worth noting that many critical theorists have veered far from the Marxist model and have offered robust critiques of Marxism itself – but the intellectual roots of critical theory can be traced to the 'false consciousness' thesis of Marxism nevertheless.

² See Stephen Humphreys who makes the same case for taking ideologies 'seriously'(60).

to move beyond the paradigmatic shackles outlined above, anyone wishing to use ideology as an explanatory factor in any study should still approach it with caution – particularly when identifying the role of ideology *in conflict*. There are several pitfalls that one ought to be aware of in an ideological analysis, two of which I discuss in the remainder of this article. I argue that these potential analytical weaknesses need to be rectified via a two-pronged approach: 1) application of a more thorough and precise definition of ideology; and 2) identifying the historicity and complexities within an ideology, particularly distinguishing between core and peripheral principles, and their shifting interactions over time. The rest of the article will be structured according to these two pitfalls and remedial approaches.

1. Defining Ideology³

The first pitfall to address is conflation between any ‘idea’ and ideology. It is necessary to determine whether what is under scrutiny should even be included under the banner of ‘ideology’. How and why should it be treated as something distinct (but not exclusive from) interests, or identity, or a political theory, worthy of its own analytical category? Moreover, why should it even matter to identify and draw such distinctions? Are there any implications in overlooking ideology when seeking to understand or explain?

Numerous definitions of ideology exist, some too simplistic, others too dense for use as a workable framework of analysis. Drawing upon, distilling and in some areas expanding on these definitions, I delineate below a seven-point typology of ideology, that enables one to identify the difference between ideology and identity; ideology and mere interests; and ideology and political theory. This also allows us to dismiss some of the misnomers which are at times used to *negate* the presence of ideologies in a given situation.

(i) Firstly, an ideology is a set of both explanatory and normative beliefs pertaining to society and politics. Thus they ‘purport to explain *why* the world is as it is, *how* it came to be so, and what the *goals* of political action should be’ (Halliday, Alavi 5). The explanatory rubric of ideologies demonstrates the close connection between ideology and history – constructed history, certainly, but such histories are not merely created and used to justify ideological agendas post-conception, but already exist in prior form as experience, collective memory and actual events and changes, which constitute ideologies and appear to embed them in social and political reality; history, therefore, confers on ideologies both the claim to truth, and with that, the right to prescribe based on ‘lessons of the past’ and the wisdom of experience.

(ii) Following on from this first feature, ideology is also an expression of human agency and intent. Those who advocate ideological beliefs do so with deliberate purpose to cultivate a particular course in the political and social spheres; then there are those who are not ideologues but at least consent to the

³ This typology is an expanded version of my earlier, less-elucidated list in *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations: Conflict and Cooperation* (15-16).

activism of others on their behalf and cooperate with the ideological programme. This agency may be channelled into maintaining the status-quo, as is the case with conservatism, but it still involves decisive choices over which norms to pursue. Often, however, ideology is a vehicle for *change*, utopian even, (Humphreys 61) but importantly promotes idealism as a realisable objective - operationalised via social and political movements. This is one factor or several factors that differentiate ideology from political theory on one hand, and mere interests on the other.

In connection to this utopian turn, ideologies usually purport to offer a 'morally correct' set of values, such as justice through equal distribution of wealth, freedom through self-determination, civilising through imperialism, or human rights through democratisation; thus altruism is often a core justification. However, given that it is an articulation of intentionality, an interesting dilemma emerges over the moral or egotistical nature of ideological thinking. Thus on the one hand, the agency that is inherent to the concept of ideology appears to fix it to rational-choice theory and individualism in IR, which has developed quite firmly into a materialist school of thought and as an extension of classical realism or liberalism. The forging of this connection can be traced to thinkers Hobbes, Locke and Voltaire, among others, who argued that human desires, stimulated and were the driving force behind reason, without which it would be stunted. Rational decision-making, therefore, no longer refers only to the presence of reasoning, but has come to be synonymous with pragmatism for the sake of material gain and survival (Parekh 58).

On the other hand, within the philosophical strain of political theory, such rationalism has been argued to be a process of *morality*. Kant distinguished between the 'political' (that is, action and intentions reacting to instinct and human needs/desire for power) and the 'moral', this representing an action and intention made after a reflection of what is right (Hutchings 7-8). It is not necessarily the outcome, therefore, that determines whether an action is moral or power-political, but the internal process that produce the action – simply put, acting on reason, as opposed to instinct and necessity, is a crucial facet of moral action.

This dual interpretation of the presence of reason can be used to validate the *potential* for ideologists to seek to act as moral agents in the international sphere, while also pursuing pragmatic pathways in the operationalisation of the ideology. This enables analysts of ideological agency to overcome the impasse, and to some extent false binary, between idealism and pragmatism.

(iii) Ideologies tend to be promoted as universal messages, favouring a solidarist system (either internationally or domestically depending on the ideological goals and interests of the state) rather than a pluralist one, at least in relation to alternative ideologies and political structures.⁴ Ideologies have even been embedded into systemic orders so that a differing narrative is interpreted not merely as a challenge to the ideology in question, but as a threat to stability and order – liberal democracy and

⁴ See Kenneth Minogue, who likens ideology to religion on account of its claims to an insight of true knowledge superior to all its competitors, plus its claims to a criteria that can distinguish between what is true and false (8-10).

nationalism are two such ideologies that have been naturalised within international political and economic structures, to the extent that nationalism, for example, is now often included among the primary institutions of international society in English School debates (Linklater, Suganami 146). This demonstrates that ideologies begin as universal messages, and if successfully universalised, can appear to assume an ontological character.

(iv) Despite the universalising nature of ideologies, there are always competing and varying narratives within them, creating an *internal* pluralism in which ideas both oppose and overlap, introducing a greater complexity to the broad concept upon which they are based. For example, the competing principles in different strains of Arab nationalism complicate the concept of nationalism, or independence, with principles of anti-colonialism, secularism, socialism, Arabism, pan-Arabism, and in some variations an internalised orientalism. This means there can be different interpretations of, and within, the same ideology, which can focus on different issues at different times (Festenstein, Kenny 42-3).

(v) Connected to the previous feature, ideologies are not timeless, essentialist concepts, but are constituted by their broader social contexts (Halliday, Alavi 1-7). Thus the principles and goals that shape them cannot be abstracted from the spatial, temporal and socio-political contingencies that are always reconfiguring ideologies. Consequently, ideologies can undergo adaptation and transition and will shift over time. This does not negate the role of ideologies, or necessarily reflect a crude manipulation on the part of ideologists to suit and pursue their own interests. Rather it demonstrates that ideologies need not be rendered obsolete by socio-political change or pragmatic realities, nor indeed are these concepts mutually exclusive.

Furthermore, it supports the notion that ideologies can have a positive or indeed necessary function in organising and mapping the beliefs and experiences of society, creating priorities out of a tangle of interests and issues that then facilitates political decision-making.⁵ The shifting of *core* ideological concepts to the *periphery*, and vice versa, reflects the changes in the concerns and priorities of its adherents; the very fluidity of ideologies does not necessarily confirm an internal weakness in their original policies, but according to Michael Freeden reflects the continued dependence by society and decision-makers on an ideological framework to interpret and make sense of social changes and patterns (*Ideologies and Political Theory* 75-82).

(vi) As far as it is possible to make a clear demarcation between politics, society, culture, and economics, ideologies are not confined to the realm of politics. In fact they routinely draw from and depend upon all these sectors to advance their agendas and legitimacy. However, although ideologies incorporate a

⁵ Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*; and his *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*. In support of this point, Kant further attacked the traditional view of rationality by refuting its ontological basis, arguing that there did not exist an internal world truth and 'order', but rather it was the perceiving (i.e. thinking) subject, who by making sense of her experiences and giving them meaning, imposed an order to the world that would otherwise be a chaos of experience.

range of sectors, they are still ultimately concerned with the way in which their principles can effect (or prevent) change by engaging with power. In that sense, ideologies *politicise* all the above spheres and thus I argue, ultimately, ideology is a political phenomenon.

(vii) Finally, ideologies are dependent on societal co-option; in other words they are, or at least their proponents seek to transform them, into popular movements. The justification and continued relevance of any ideological agenda rests on the transmission of ideological values from top to bottom for the sake of legitimacy, but this also works the other way around through a bottom-up process: the executive is reassured and encouraged in its ideological zeal by popular mandate, even in authoritarian systems. Indeed, an ideological policy can only be sustained in such security-driven environments through this societal connection.

In turn, it becomes clear that the search for the roots of ideological consistency and adherence lies not only with the elites of the ideology itself - be they intellectuals, or state leaders - but also lies with its societal following. Furthermore, revisionist ideologies originate in the quest for an upheaval of the prevailing social and political systems in the desire for change – specifically a change that is adopted by many and, theoretically, benefits the majority. As discussed above, ideologies are essentially idealistic in their goals, driven by claims to morality (Carr 25-6). Thus in such a context, regardless of how removed an ideology may be from this overriding principle *in praxis*, it must retain the claims to a collective ethos in order to even exist – indeed the success of any ideology is determined by ‘the degree to which they [articulate] with social movements’ (Halladay, Alavi 5-6).

Moreover, it is in many circumstances meaningless to separate ideological motives held by the regime from its search for popular legitimacy, as if the latter necessarily negates the former. A movement driven by ideology is not devoid of pragmatic considerations as a result, for real ideologues will seek to propagate their vision to greater numbers as a means to its eventual realisation. With that propagation can come a real adherence to those beliefs and norms; and it is questionable whether any group or individual, whether a social movement, government or a leader, would be able to sustain such a high level of cognitive dissonance between internal power-political motives and a false external moral outlook. The most contentious of ideological actors in this respect are authoritarian ones. However, without the electoral checks and balances of a democratic system, authoritarian regimes in particular rely on ideology as a connecting force between regime and populace – from an entirely functional point of view such connections are indispensable to the management of an ideologically-inclined system.

One might ask, why is it necessary to produce an accurate, applicable, definition of ideology – should it not be obvious if and when ideologies are being operationalised? Would we not expect ideologues to make this known in the most public of ways from a desire to proselytise their agenda and recruit more followers? Not necessarily so. In some cases ideologies are so well institutionalised and embedded in systems of hegemony that they shape not just the thought and actions of loyal ideologues, but also the ‘everyday’ discourse, opinion, expectations and practices of society, such that alluding to the presence of ideology is no longer necessary, nor indeed desirable - particularly when considering the dominant

narrative that labels ideologies as sources of deception on one hand, or dogma and irrational behaviour on the other.

2. Ideological Principles, affiliations and rivals

We come to the second pitfall in using ideology in any analysis: once ideology is identified as a feature of political action, there is always the danger of reification and essentialist pronouncements. And when the context is one of conflict, the danger is not merely academic – essentialism has the potential to exacerbate conflict and deepen mistrust. Speaking of a clash of ideologies can all too easily morph into a bleak, self-perpetuating, Huntingdonian assessment, which caricatures actors, simplifies ideas into monolithic blocs, and removes the key role of contingency (and thus the potential for change) from the equation.

One consequence of this essentialism is that ideologies are all too often construed as inherently conflictual. But this overlooks the extent to which ideologies can also foster cooperation with other forces of different ideological outlooks. When and how ideology shifts from being a source of conflict to being a force for alliance can be understood through a more complex reading of ideologies, namely via the differences between core and peripheral principles, and in turn their shifting importance. This enables one to make sense of seemingly contradictory ideological alliances, or to understand why ideological groups that apparently converge on some principles still compete and clash with each other.

The above typology on the nature of ideologies enables us to identify when an ideology is in motion, be it manifested in domestic or foreign policy, in popular discourse or by ideological activists. However, one feature of the typology requires further explanation, this being point five above, regarding the adaptable and contingent nature of ideologies. Without deeper explanation, this could be misunderstood as implying that ideologies are ever-shifting, thus rendering the study of any ideology and its impact over a long time period as problematic. However, since ideologies are conceptualised and promulgated as a clear set of principles, any adaptation is likely to occur in a more structured way.

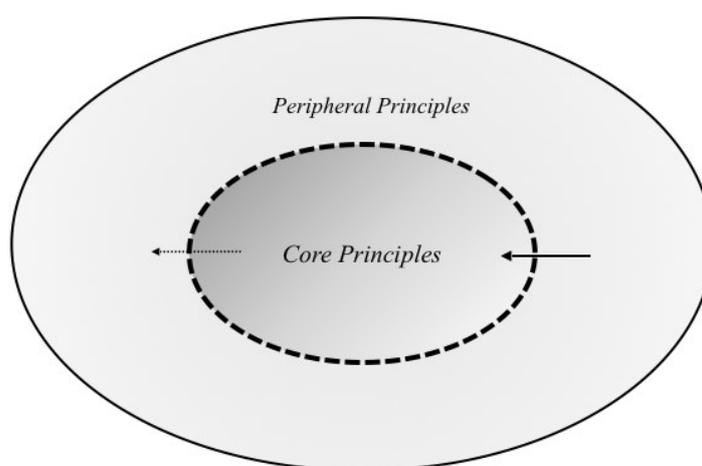
To aid this explanation, I build on the work of Michael Freeden to argue that ideologies are comprised of *core* principles and *peripheral* principles (*Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* 62-3). The core principles are the *raison d'être* of the ideology, and are less likely to change or shift in importance. They are still grounded in historical context, and their relevance is still dependent on particular political or social circumstances; but both context and circumstance are deeply embedded, structurally, empirically and as an inter-subjective social consciousness – such sedimentation of an idea is hard to alter. Thus, core principles are both embedded and contingent.⁶ These core principles are the most important standard against which an actor's adherence to an ideology should be measured. Moreover, in order to

⁶I discuss historicity and contingency of ideologies in greater length in *The Role of Ideology in Syrian-US Relations* (18-20).

identify what those core principles are, one needs to return to the historical-sociological roots of the ideology – the purpose for which it was conceptualised and formed.

Beyond these core principles, there are also *peripheral principles*. These are unlikely to have constituted the original purpose of the ideology. They are also more contextually restricted – temporally, geographically or within a particular socio-political setting. Often peripheral principles are adjoined to the ideology because they support and strengthen the core principles and goals.

Fig. 3: The Core and Peripheral Principles in an Ideology

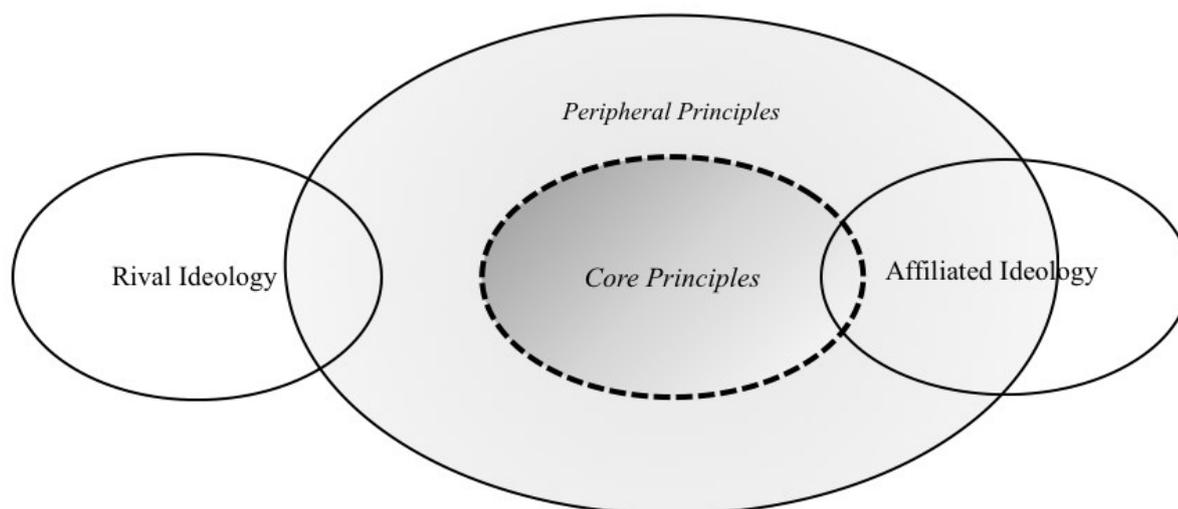


The above diagram illustrates the relationship between core and peripheral principles in an ideology. In a scenario in which pursuit of a peripheral principle might threaten or contradict a core principle, then it would be compromised if needed; and if it is deemed no longer useful to the core goals of the ideology, it may be discarded altogether. The boundaries between the core and peripheral principles are not fixed and unchangeable. Peripheral principles can increase in their ideological value and can become core principles. The reverse can also occur, with a core principle becoming relegated to a peripheral principle; but due to the embedded nature of an *original* core principle, this is far less likely.

Furthermore, the principles of a given ideology are not exclusive to that ideology. They will not be shared *entirely* by another ideology, otherwise the distinction between the two would be rendered obsolete. However, there can be overlap between some principles, be they core or peripheral. As a result, ideologies can sometimes be confused with similar or overlapping ideologies, and can be interpreted as being the same or as always connected. This is not necessarily the case, and overlapping ideologies can remain estranged regardless of the connections. In fact these can often become competing or rival ideologies. As they might share principles that appeal to the same social constituency

and claim to have similar (if not identical) goals, the competition for legitimacy and support can be fierce (for example between Arab nationalism and Islamism) (Browsers 3).

Fig. 4: The Relationship between Ideologies



Where there is regular overlap however, ideologies might avert conflict and instead become affiliated; and if the affiliation is long-standing, the coalition of ideologies can come to be identified as a broad ideology in and of itself (as seen with the coalition between Arab nationalism and socialism in the 1960s, or the coalition between liberalism and capitalism). Once again, however, whether ideologies are affiliated or cease to be so depends on the historical context and a number of contingent factors as discussed earlier.

Application of an ideological framework

Three examples can be highlighted here to demonstrate the value of this approach, particularly when seeking to understand the role of ideology in conflict situations. The first relates to the continued relevance of Eurocentric imperialist ideology. The abolition movement, the rise of Wilsonian liberalism, the defeat of Nazism, decolonisation, and the emergence of the post-War universal declaration of human rights, have contributed to assumptions that western imperialist ideology is a thing of the past. The imperialist separation of humanity into hierarchies of civilised, barbarian and savage was publicly recognised as ignorant and racist by western elites. Time allowed old imperial powers to distance themselves from their nations' colonial policies that subjugated, stole, tortured and massacred in other parts of the globe. Political elites in tandem with intellectuals separated Europe from its past, and from accountability, by citing the watershed of modernity - creating an imaginary boundary between a backward, ignorant past, and a mature, enlightened present. This manufactured divorce from imperialist ideology allows those states or societies to claim adherence to universal, moral, progressive

values that uphold equality and freedom *for all*, while racist or colonial principles and practices are still perpetuated under a guise of ideological neutrality, or under more acceptable, more ‘civilised’ ideological umbrellas of nationalism, laicite, capitalism, conservatism or liberalism. The erasure of imperialist ideology from contemporary political, cultural and academic discourse precludes the identification of racist or colonial roots and meanings still to be found in a whole range of arenas - from policy, to media narratives, to educational curricula and popular culture (Hesse 288-313). In this way, ideologically-loaded claims against refugees, migrants, black people, the ‘orient’, Jews and other marginalised groups are - though not wholly uncontested - adopted as truths, common sense or just by a significant proportion of people (Boswell 537-557).

In this case, it is not only important to recognise that ideology is present in a theatre of supposed neutrality; it is also important to interrogate the extent to which strains of a more archaic, indeed shunned ideology, may still run through a ‘modern’ and polite version, either within its peripheral or even core principles.⁷ To what extent have European nationalism or liberalism, for example, been able to move beyond their ideological predecessor?⁸ Or has imperialism remained on the political and cultural landscape as an *affiliated* ideology, with all three of these ideologies built on shared assumptions of the ‘Other’, something that rises to the surface with disturbing regularity and hostility on issues such as Turkish accession to Europe, or the recent refugee crisis. Without recognising and taking seriously the persistence of historical ideologies that in fact never faded away, they cannot be challenged or deconstructed.

The importance of identifying the presence of ideology can also be seen in the Syrian conflict. A notable dearth of specialised knowledge on Syria’s historical adherence to a self-proclaimed anti-colonial Arab nationalism, and a failure to take its role in Syrian politics into serious consideration, fuelled hostility and suspicion in the region through careless rhetoric and policies on the part of western states. The notion that ideology was still a concern and an asset for the Syrian regime was oft-dismissed, by both academics and the regime’s opponents, contributing to over-optimistic prognoses for the 2011 uprisings (Dabashi; Bayat). Early demands for regime change by the United States, France and Britain were swiftly exploited by the Ba’thist Syrian government to consolidate its support base and sow doubts amongst the wider population towards the uprisings. Instead of using it as an effective last resort, the western powers’ early threats of intervention gifted the regime with justification for its non-cooperation; the strategy also enabled the regime to portray the protestors as colluders in a global conspiracy, instigated to weaken the so-called ‘resistance axis’ against Israel (Gani, “Contentious Politics” 127-153). Putting normative debates to one side, it was, from a strategic perspective, a highly counter-productive tactic from the US and its allies. Syria’s anti-colonial narrative was deployed from a deep, long-term, ideological repertoire, accumulated over fifty years precisely to mobilise local support in the face of

⁷ See discussions of race and multiculturalism from the extreme right to western liberal elites, in Modood and Werbner 2-4.

⁸ A question successfully raised in J. M. Hobson’s excellent book *The Eurocentric conception of world politics: Western international theory, 1760-2010*; also see Jones, *Decolonizing International Relations*.

insecurity, intervention and conflict. Notwithstanding the complexity of the conflict, a greater acknowledgement and understanding of the role of ideology in Syrian politics, particularly its foreign policy, would have better enabled international actors to devise a more effective and sustainable strategy for resolving the conflict, instead of one that played directly into the regime's agenda.

Finally it is worth exploring a brief historical example to illustrate the way in which the notion of core and peripheral principles can aid a more nuanced reading of ideologies in conflict situations. During the cold war, the United States' paranoia surrounding the Soviet Union and fears of Communist inroads in South America, Europe and the Middle East, caused them to simplify and conflate leftist or neutralist ideological movements with Communism. This lack of nuance proved to be disastrous in the Middle East. In Syria, the Arab nationalist Ba'th party was founded in the 1940s on the core principles of independence and freedom from occupation; Arab solidarity was included in the Ba'thist slogan, but it was considered an important facilitator to the goals of independence, rather than perceived as an ultimate goal in itself. In those early years, the Ba'ths chief ideologues, Michel Aflaq and Salahaddin Bitar, recognised the value of entering into an ideological partnership with Akram Hawrani's revolutionary socialism. While Aflaq and Bitar accrued influence in the urban centres, Hawrani had built a substantial support base amongst the peasant classes. His socialist agenda had a localised, class focus, railing against Syrian elites (Seale 120). But since those elites had been the beneficiaries of French patrimonialism, it became possible to link colonial oppression and class-based injustices; an Arab nationalist-socialist coalition was thus both principally consistent for their respective ideologies, and a pragmatic way of expanding their popular following. Syria's grievances at this stage were directed towards the European powers, and not towards the US, who had not yet established a negative record in the Middle East. However, successive US administrations failed to recognise the historical reasons behind the Ba'th-socialist affiliation, and assumed Syria had become a Soviet satellite. This overlooked the fact that the Ba'th part and Hawrani's socialist party had deeply antagonistic relations with the Syrian communist party, precisely because it was perceived to be a trojan horse for 'Soviet imperialism' - in this case, shared peripheral principles between the Ba'th and the Syrian communist party exacerbated their rivalry, rather than bring them closer together, unlike the relationship between the Ba'th and the socialists.

US ignorance towards the complex and rich ideological tapestry in Syria in this period led them to pursue destructive interventionist policies against Soviet encroachment, the most blatant of which occurred in 1957 when the US sponsored a failed coup against the leftist Syrian government. Ironically, it was the crisis of '57 that pushed Syria closer to the Soviet Union and contributed to a long-term arms deal between the two states (Lesch). This episode marked Syria's transition away from the neutralist camp into a firm alliance with the USSR, the legacy of which can still be seen today in the Syrian conflict. The conflation between competing ideologies still occurs on a regular basis due to a neglect of the core and peripheral principles of a given ideology - a lack of historical awareness, and an assumption that power-political and material interests have universally replaced ideological motives, which has produced a flattening of differences between rival ideological movements.

Conclusion

Based on the above framework, we are able to identify what can be considered as an ideology, as opposed to a mere identity, philosophy or set of interests. It encourages a more nuanced and complex analysis via a distinction between core and peripheral principles; this in turn helps to map out competing, affiliated, and opposing ideologies which help to locate the function and relevance of an ideology in the real world. Moreover, the differences between the core and peripheral principles in an ideology can shed more light on instances when an ideological actor is likely to be intransigent or flexible in adhering to ideology: this knowledge could be a significant resource in conflict resolution and peace negotiations. It is also important to note that ideologies are implemented because of the contextual salience - without this ideologies would have little purpose and might become dormant. Given that ideologies are such powerful forces for popular mobilisation, and that they promulgate universalist, moralist, even manichean messages to their followers, it is unsurprising that they are often heavily present in conflict situations when societies will typically search for meaning, explanation and guidance to help them navigate the instability of war. Ideologies may foment and exacerbate conflict, or they can increase in salience as a defensive force. But even so, ideologies are just as likely to permeate politics and society in non-conflict settings, and have the capacity to foster alliances. What is clear is that dismissing the role of ideology in contemporary politics, society and economics detracts from the power of beliefs in human agency, and undermines a comprehensive understanding of global realities; on the other hand, inflating the role of ideology, perceiving it as necessarily a dogmatic and irrational factor, can inflame suspicion and risk abortive attempts at compromise and negotiation, which only exacerbate the potential for conflict. It is thus through efforts to identify, historicise, and complicate the composition and implementation of ideologies that the triumvirate problem of erasure, simplification and essentialism can be avoided, thereby establishing a necessary but more measured analytical approach to the study of ideologies.

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