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PERSONAL IDENTITY AS A DETERMINANT OF INTERNATIONAL ATTITUDES

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In our research at the Center for International Studies at M.I.T. we have found it useful to explain the individual's salient attitudes toward the foreigner as a manifestation of a self-defining process. To feel strongly that the foreigner is attractive or repellent, omniscient or inadequate, receptive or rejecting, is, in our view, one important outcome of the process wherein the individual attempts to create within himself a sense of sameness, a feeling of personal identity adequate to cope with the major challenges of his life.

The sense of personal identity, with its concurrent feelings of comfortable continuity, is indispensable for all individuals. For adolescents in particular--at the period that Erikson has called the crisis of identity diffusion²--this search for sameness often appears in conjunction with an increase in awareness of the foreign and the foreigner as possible models for positive and negative identification. For these, and other age groups, the individual's answer to the question: "Who am I," is closely linked to another question: "Who is the foreigner?" The verbalized attitudes toward specific foreigners and national groups, in

¹Given at the Symposium: Studies of International Attitudes: Their Determinants, Structure, and Change; American Psychological Association, August 31, 1957, New York, N.Y. This is in part a summary of findings of the manuscript by H. V. Perlmutter, "Personal Identity and the Foreigner" being prepared at the Center for International Studies' Experimental Section, International Communications Program.

²E. Erikson, Childhood and Society, New York: Norton & Co., 1950.

their direction, content, intensity, and durability, reflect the nature of the identification with the foreigner.

Broadly speaking, the individual is presumed to seek more adequate self definitions of temperament, sex, occupation, community, and country and whenever he encounters the foreigner he is disposed to test out the adequacy of his identity as he sees it related to his country and his compatriots. The exchange student who comes to a new country, for example, finds and often seeks to find that some features of his identity will acquire new and better meanings in the foreign world. His loyalties--his identifications with his own country as evidenced by his attitudes toward work, love, and play among his compatriots--he finds are being evaluated by himself as well as the foreigner. And he seeks to establish a broader identity in the foreign situation. Identity seeking, establishing and maintaining processes are found in individuals studied by Sewell and Davidson³ (Swedish), Jean Watson and Ronald Lippitt⁴ (German), John Bennett and Robert McKnight⁵ (Japanese), and at our own Center for International Studies.⁶

I would like to focus attention on our research findings with native college students in India, Germany, France, and the United States, and expatriate Americans in France and expatriate Indians in the United States, and to point up some observations and interpretations of our data that bear on the relation between attitudes toward the foreigner and the self defining process and outcome.

³W. H. Sewell and O. M. Davidson, "The Adjustment of Scandinavian Students," The Journal of Social Issues, Vol. 12, No. 1, 1956, pp. 9-19.

⁴J. Watson and R. Lippitt, Learning Across Cultures: A Study of Germans Visiting America, Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, U. of Mich., 1955.

⁵J. W. Bennett, and R. K. McKnight, "Misunderstandings in Communication between Japanese Students and Americans," Social Problems, April 1956 pp. 243-256.

⁶H. V. Perlmutter, op. cit.; D. Lerner, Modernizing the Middle East (publication forthcoming) Glencoe, Ill. Free Press, 1958.

These findings are simplified greatly; we will not do justice to the rich variation and complexity of the image of the foreigner. Instead, we consider three rather extreme types of orientation to the foreign and give a more or less depth interpretation of the sense of personal identity individuals who hold these orientations have. Unfortunately, we cannot report on the cross-cultural differences between students of these countries. From a theoretical perspective, however, this simplification may be fruitful.

We found first the classic and well-researched orientation toward the foreigner--the xenophobic, ethnocentric view. For this type the foreigner is undesirable and untrustworthy. The California study and a host of others that followed have continually connected authoritarian-ethnocentric personality traits as stereotypes of thought, conventionality, admiration for power, contempt for the minority. In our data, the California findings apply best to Americans and are least adequate for Indians (using the California-authoritarian F scale). Yet in all countries we studied there is a good case for delimiting this authoritarian type because of a commonality of identity structure that appears. From our projective tests the individual with this negative orientation toward the foreigner was seen as having at least two sub-identity systems: a good system identified with a strong, powerful father and a bad identity system identified with a weak, helpless, nasty, impulsive child or minority system. The "bad" system the authoritarian-ethnocentric does not like to feel is a part of his identity. So, as many clinicians have noted, this type projects badness on the foreigner, and hence tries to exclude from his identity an aspect he calls foreign. The dislike of foreigners and negative attitudes

toward foreigners is an effort to demarcate, to produce a sense of self identity that is good and strong, rather than bad and weak. So the authoritarian-ethnocentric type's tendency to idealize the compatriot and deprecate the foreigner.

We also examined those individuals who held positive attitudes toward the foreigner. Our previous scales of xenophilic attitudes used in the United States were adapted for India, France, and Germany along with the Authoritarian scale. The individuals who hold xenophilic attitudes (literally, those who hold attitudes favoring the foreign over the domestic) we found more complicated. They may, in fact, turn out to be what in a value-laden terminology we call internationalist and cosmopolitan. But these types in general can be distinguished from the authoritarian-ethnocentric type in their interest in and propensity to identify with the foreign. Now it is a moot point whether the strong xenophiles are becoming rarer in the United States or at least less evident than in the twenties of Ezra Pound and Van Wyck Brooks. But in the so-called underdeveloped countries, the decolonized Asian nations where the nationality status is low compared to the Great Powers, there is evidence of a conflictful propensity for the adoption of foreign institutions, ideas, and products. So it was of interest to compare and examine the structure of personal identity of students who hold positive orientations to the foreigner in such countries as variegated in history and socio-political situation as the United States, Germany, and India.

First we wished to understand a type who has attitudes indicating he is high in attraction to the foreign and low in authoritarianism (frequently he was found in expatriate groups). We came out with a portrait that is very consistent in all three of these countries. This "potential

expatriate" type is a person who reacts positively in fantasies about foreign people and foreign ideas but he finds the strange and foreign fearful at a deeper level. He has problems with authority; he is either overtly or latently anti-authoritarian, anti-coercion of any kind, and he feels a strong sympathy with most underdogs. He is concerned with emancipation from family by travel, and he interestingly describes his life process as a search for self.

This metaphor "search for self" is, in fact, a clue to his identity crisis—he does not really know who he is and does not accept consciously at least the definitions of nationality, family, and self given him. He is described as alienated from his country and himself, he feels foreign: outsider, different, strange. By some kind of magical transposition he feels more like the foreign than the compatriot even though he has little contact with the foreign. In being foreign, he says he can express his real identity. His identification with the foreign is, in one sense, narcissistic since the foreign is a reflection of his real self and is like him. I shall not attempt to burrow more deeply except to note that attitudes toward foreign nations which result from this sense of identity reflect the need to make the foreign identity attractive, and in some instance produce fantasies about the foreign that cannot be validated in experience.

A second kind of positive orientation to the foreign which is evident in all three countries is held by those who hold xenophilic attitudes and score high on authoritarianism. This group is particularly interesting since, in general, most research has concerned itself with the authoritarian-ethnocentric group. Our findings suggest that this group dislikes a weak foreigner, a foreign minority—but powerful or prestigious foreigners capture their attention. This kind of person remains tied albeit

ambivalent with domestic authority, evidences disenchantment with selected but significant features of the domestic (the domestic woman, for example), fear of rejection by peers, and of the strange. His identity structure indicates he often thinks of himself as a child, a dependent organism who seeks to find in the foreigner wisdom and guidance. The dominant figure that appears for this kind of person is that of the powerful foreigner, or the wise foreigner who nurtures and teaches and possesses the traits he would like to have. In short, the identification would be termed anaclitic, or identification with a figure, a nation that will give the person what he needs in order to complete his sense of identity. Here, unlike the previous orientation to the foreigner, he sees the foreigner as different and better than he is, and he is receptive to his foreign education.

Of course the categories necessary to describe the subsystems of personal identity are but approximations. The good and bad identity, of the ethnocentric, the estranged identity of the low authoritarian xenophile, the child identity of the high authoritarian xenophile, all are metaphors suggesting features of the inner experiences and the ^{tentative} answers to the question: "Who am I" among our American, Indian, and German subjects.

Yet in a minor study of American expatriates living in Paris who prefer to live abroad, we found that the high xenophile low authoritarian--the alienated type--tended to see the foreign experience in a particular way: they mentioned how equality is possible in France--"that one can do as one pleases"--"In France it is possible to say what one thinks and act upon it, with infinitely more freedom, in the sense that you are much less likely to be considered queer or controversial"--"I feel more like

these people—I am more like myself here." This person is strangely absent from our domestic scene now. On the other hand, among the expatriates in ^{France} the authoritarian xenophile who is an expatriate does not often mention a need for freedom. He talks of the old culture, of the tradition of the Louvre, the cathedrals, the chateaux, the theatre, and what he can learn from the experience there. While the former feels more at home, the authoritarian speaks of strangers and foreigners.

But I have not meant to dwell on these types for their intrinsic interest. Rather they should serve as examples to illustrate how an individual's efforts to define the permanent self are linked with his attitudes toward the foreign. In our view, this research strategy focussing on personal identity is more than a new way of stating old observations--it has led to new explanations and new hypotheses.

In concluding, we suggest research that focus on the experience of personal identity, particularly national identity and its expression in attitudes toward foreign nations. And we further suggest that such a focus will bring into better perspective a number of important social psychological problems that are evolving on a world scale. In our shrinking world, contracting daily with each innovation in the distribution of ideas, products and persons across national boundaries, more persons are confronted with an increasing variety of ways in which foreigners earn their bread, play and love. Each contact with the Foreign and each consequent evaluation of the foreigner's views on Human Nature, on the Beautiful, on the Useful, on the Good and True, whether he is aware or not, utilizes and tests the concept of his identity as a person and citizen of a particular nation.

For as long as some mode of living is seen as particularly conducive to survival, to self-fulfillment during his life, the individual has always to question what in his personal identity, as it relates to his domestic way of life, can be retained or adapted or altered to meet the changing requirements and opportunities of the modern world.

In this perspective, attitudes toward foreign nations come to have an adaptive feature, adaptive in the sense that the conception of the foreigner and the compatriot are at once externalizations of the process of self definition, and aspects of the effort to form and maintain a sense of inner sameness and continuity.