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National Identity in the Americas

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Table of Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Problem formulation	2
3. Analysis	2
<i>3.1 National identity in the United States of America</i>	3
<i>3.2 National identity in Canada</i>	7
<i>3.3 National identity in Cuba</i>	9
<i>3.4 National identity in Brazil</i>	11
<i>3.5 National identity in Mexico</i>	13
4. Conclusion	15
Bibliography	



1. Introduction

In recent decades the notion of national identity (that is belonging to a united and unique national identity defined by the concept of a nation-state) has gained increasing significance in global and local politics and discourse. As nation-states emerged the idea that one population “belonged” together, and to their country arose. No longer do world citizens identify “solely” with being a farmer, worker, religious person or part of small community etc. Now, being part of a national identity is increasingly defining the very person you think and believe you are. One might even claim that national identity is necessary to keep the nation-state alive, as it supposedly would fall apart with the backings of its inhabitants to maintain and preserve it. Questions of nationhood and national identity are of their nature complex, value-laden, and contested, and in recent years, concepts of national identity have been subject to criticism. Some think that applying various cultural characteristics to different nationalities and / or ethnic groups can lead to the use of stereotypes and possibly discrimination. But, being part of a shared identity can bring peace and joy to a person’s life. The fact that you have characteristics, language, culture and ideals in common with your fellow citizens can help build your own identity and bring with it a profound content and sense of belonging. As the world becomes more and more intertwined and culturally globalized, the sense of nationalism and patriotism increases. Fear of losing the uniqueness about one’s national identity, is profound and in some cases the root to civil conflicts, upheaval and in some cases, war. One needs only to look at the Balkan War to see the evidence of this. Currently, Europe is facing increasing “threats” to their nationalism, as immigration and integration changes the demography and composition of the people. Multiculturalism has become a phenomenon most Europeans know, and in some cases dread. The same fear is evident in the U.S. As the Latino population constantly increases, changes (or enhancing and enriching) the culture, some Americans become more and more fearful of losing their unique national identity.



The Americas as a region share many similarities by virtue of geography, history of colonization and cultural integration. What is interesting in this case, is how very different each country has “built” their national identity. Obviously, the physical boundaries that was establishes after their independence, created distinct and various histories, cultures and population compositions, which in turn helps build the characteristics of the nation-state and it’s identity. But, despite the obvious differences between the countries, one would suspect they have more in common as their connections are substantive. Through this paper, I will do a comparative analysis of five inter-American countries’ interaction and show the difference in how they “constructed” their national identity, and what it has become.

Notwithstanding that notions have been put forward to say that, national identities have eroded and fragmented into hybrid and diverse personal identities; “identities are fragmented and fractured, never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions”, (qdt in Ashbee, 2002) I will focus on the notion of national identity exclusively, due to the limited space available.

2. Problem formulation

Focusing on the U.S., Canada, Cuba, Brazil and Mexico, assess how each country has build and developed it’s sense of nationalism / national identity, and how each identity is distinct from the others, despite their common background, and similarities.

3. Analysis

The very notion of identity, can be seen as either a constructed one (constructivism) wherein the citizens share values and ideas of what they are, or it can be view upon as having simply to do with where you where born and thereby which values you inherit (primordialist). Most modern world citizens would probably agree that identities are something constructed and has little to do with your place of birth. Indeed, are you American, Danish or Chinese, simply because you where born there, or is