PART I

Theory with an empirical intent: theories of ideology, subjectivity and intersubjectivity

Introduction: Theory with an empirical intent

> For if much of service has been got by following Occam's law to the effect that 'entities should not be *multiplied* beyond necessity', equally much of disservice has arisen through ignoring a contrary law, which we could phrase correspondingly: 'entities should not be *reduced* beyond necessity'.
>
> (Kenneth Burke, *A Grammar of Motives*, emphasis in original)

Ideologies are complex and dynamic formations which are at once cognitive, affective and conative in character. They both construct and evaluate the political and social field and they motivate behaviour within it. That such is the case is particularly apparent at moments of stress or crisis; at least if one observes the crisis from the privileged perspective of an alien. For instance, to live in the United States during the period of the occupation of the US Embassy in Teheran was to experience, both within the public domain and broadly within the private domain, the pervasive capacity of an ideological process to structure the thoughts, feelings and behavioural orientations of a whole society (these were perhaps best expressed in the popular aphorism of the time, 'We should nuke downtown Teheran'). Similarly, to live in Britain during the Falklands/Malvinas episode was to witness the narrowing and focusing of the 'civic culture' around one sanctioned construction of reality. In both cases, at least in my own experience, the cognitive rigidity and emotional valence of these ideological forms was quite palpable. Except within narrow conclaves it was difficult to speak or indeed think in a reflective and critical manner about the complexities of such issues. The conceptual ground was so narrowed and so emotionally charged that to tug at its boundaries was to risk, at least, the occasioning of discomfort or insult to those individuals, that is to say the vast majority, who recognised these ideologies as in some sense their own.

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The above characterisations are somewhat idle reflections which are intended merely to suggest, or recall, for the reader some prominent features of ideologies. However even as such they go beyond the conventional academic notions of ideology. For they recognise that ideologies are dynamic structures which have affective as well as cognitive dimensions, and that they at once touch both individuals and whole social formations.

This study endeavours to develop a theory of ideology (and identity) which is adequate to such a complex, dynamic and potent object. Thus it eschews approaches which regard ideology as merely a derivative or reflection of economic or social processes. Similarly it regards approaches which concentrate solely on the psychological characteristics of individuals or groups as unduly limiting and restrictive. It intends to replace such partial perspectives with a more adequate theory of ideology, one which recognises the centrality of ideology to both the constitution of subjectivity and the structuration of political and social relations. The study takes as its point of departure the apparent anomaly of the persistence and regeneration of ideologies of ethnicity in the modern world. It focuses on Northern Ireland as one particularly striking example of this apparent anomaly.

Ideologies of ethnicity, whether they assume racial, regional, religious or other forms, are striking features of the contemporary world. Wherever they occur these ideologies touch intimately upon the constitution of political subjectivity; forming, at least potentially, a central aspect of individual identity. At the same time, they are also a central cultural form for the organisation of political and social life. Hence, at once, they touch both individuals and whole social formations, and they do so in palpable ways. A further feature of such ideologies, one which is characteristically discounted, is that they are marked by emotion.

Prevalent theories of ideology are unable adequately to grasp these features. Characteristically, prevalent theories privilege either the individual or the social and then derive the features of the suppressed part (the social or the individual) from the features of that part which they have privileged. In other words, they tend to fall prey to either psychological or economic or social reductionism. Whenever this reductionism occurs it obscures the complex character of ideology. This complex character of ideology lies exactly in its inclusion of the subjective and the social as thoroughly interrelated;

as two sides of the same process. Prevalent theories also tend to discount the emotional component of ideologies and they have difficulty in relating ideology to the organisation of social and political relations. The theory developed in this study attempts to overcome these various limitations.

The very persistence or regeneration of ideologies of ethnicity in the modern world is something of a mystery to our commonsense understanding. We tend to assume, particularly with regard to Western societies, that growth, progress, modernisation, industriali-sation, capitalism (or what you will), should eradicate such primor-dial identifications and sentiments. If sectarianism and other such ideologies of ethnicity are traditional, indeed irrational, then surely they must wither and die! Yet the contemporary world, East and West, North and South, First, Second and Third, provides clear evidence that ideologies of ethnicity are prevalent and persistent. Indeed they seem to be proliferating.[1] How could this be?

This 'ethnic revival' presents a profound challenge to more than our commonsense understanding of how the world should be ordered. It confounds all those theories of growth, modernisation or development which have their basis in the Enlightenment tradition and which retain their faith in the power of reason; including the case where reason has been transubstantiated into proletarian class consciousness. Consequently, the incapacity of so much contem-porary theory to adequately explain the persistence and regeneration of ideologies of ethnicity in the modern world, although substantial in itself, is best recognised as one instance of a far broader range of anomalies and lacunae within the major traditions of political and sociological theory; all having their basis in the failure of this theory adequately to grasp the centrality of ideology to the constitution of both political subjectivities and social and political relations. From this perspective it is a profound irony that the past thirty years, which were so confidently expected to exemplify a brave new world beyond ideology, should have witnessed an ideological explosion.[2] Feminism and the other liberation movements, the conservation, anti-nuclear and green movements, fundamentalist religions of various types and a host of other passionately upheld and non-negotiable single issue movements; all of these, along with ideologies of ethnicity, nation

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[1]   See A. D. Smith, *The Ethnic Revival in the Modern World* (Cambridge University Press, 1981), passim.
[2]   See D. Bell, *The End of Ideology* (New York: Free Press, 1960), passim.

and race, have become central to an ever more unmanageable
political order. The rational administration of politics within con-
vergent and consensual political cultures seems further away than
ever, as do those other certainties regarding the emergence and
consolidation of ideologies of class consciousness. All such certainties
have been confounded by the multifarious complexity of political life
and the centrality of ideology to its constitution.

As we can see, the failure of prevailing theories to comprehend the
persistence and regeneration of ideologies of ethnicity calls their
general assumptions about ideology radically into question. This
failure constitutes the opening, the persistent gap between explanans
and explanandum, from which I hope to develop a more adequate
theory of ideology. At its most general, then, this study is concerned
to develop a theory of ideology which specifies both the character of
ideology and the character of its relationship to other political and
social processes. This leads it to pose a group of questions of which
the most central are the following. How is an ideological formation
structured, and what are its rules of structuration? How is an
ideology reproduced and transformed? How does an ideology
operate to organise subjectivities and the field of intersubjective
relations? How does crisis affect an ideological formation? What are
the mechanisms of articulation between ideological and other poli-
tical processes? How do class processes enter into the determination
of an ideological formation?

The final question concerning the significance of class processes is,
of course, a perennial one within political and social theory. Usually
it is taken up in an economistic manner by both advocates and
opponents. That is to say, ideology is usually regarded as epipheno-
menal, as merely the reflection, at the level of consciousness, of
economic or class processes. Ideology is regarded as a transparent
medium or register with no structure of its own. It is merely a
derivative effect of something whose structuring principle is other
and elsewhere. As such it is denied any constitutive or determinative
role within the political process. The point of the whole group of
questions outlined above is to establish a somewhat novel proble-
matic which should allow a thorough-going break with such a
limiting and misleading approach. In responding to the group of
questions which constitute this problematic I will not be content with
programmatic statements which remain at a high level of abstraction.
Rather I take it as central to any theory and method concerned with

the analysis of ideology that it be both conceptually sophisticated and able to support a systematic and detailed examination of a particular ideology. Moreover it must be able to integrate and move between these levels of analysis in a consistent manner. Hence, one litmus test for the adequacy of any theory of ideology is its ability to be applied to the analysis of particular cases. The benefits of such a requirement are manifold. In particular the discipline which it imposes should generate both conceptual clarification (a rare commodity in this domain) and a more comprehensive understanding of ideology in its various aspects. This should facilitate the replacement of mechanistic and instrumentalist conceptions of ideology by a conception which recognises both its centrality and its contingency.

My intention in this study is to develop an approach which takes seriously the centrality of ideology and identity to the structuration of political life. I attempt to do so in two interrelated ways. First, in part 1 I attempt to develop a somewhat novel theory of ideology, one which recognises ideology as a structure of signification, communication and subjection which is central to the organisation of both subjectivity and social and political relations. This theory is developed by drawing critically upon four traditions within contemporary social theory (namely structuralism, post-structuralism, structuration theory and the theory of communicative action) and by looking closely at the ways in which each has appropriated psychological theory (in particular psychoanalysis, but also cognitive-developmental theory). These various theories are drawn upon and then selectively drawn together, and not merely reproduced, in an attempt to specify the manner in which ideological formations operate. To achieve this I opt for a revised theory of structuration, one which places the unconscious rules of structuration at the centre of its account. Second, having elaborated this somewhat novel theory of ideology, in part 2 I draw upon this theory to analyse the case of Unionist ideology in Northern Ireland. First of all, I analyse the major forms of Unionist ideology, elaborating the characteristics of each. Then, building upon this, I develop an account of some central aspects of the political process in Northern Ireland; in particular those aspects involving the conflict for hegemony between these major, and distinct, forms of Unionist ideology. When my discussion calls for it I also develop an analysis of some principal features of Nationalist and Republican ideologies. The leading empirical question which organises this study is the following:

in what manner has Unionist ideology operated in Northern Ireland
to 'reproduce' that society as a 'divided' society? My contention is
that only by taking ideology (and identity) seriously are we likely to
offer an adequate answer to this question. Along the way we will
notice that those answers to this question which, in Kenneth Burke's
phrase, have 'reduced [entities] beyond necessity' are seriously
misleading.[3]

   This study can be described as an attempt to develop social and
political theory with an empirical intent. In part 1 the discussion, first
of all, develops a novel theory of ideology and then, in chapters 4
and 5, it specifies the manner in which such a theory may be drawn
into empirical research. This latter step is the crucial dimension of
this study, as it is here that the strengths of the sophisticated theory
of ideology are extended to the analysis of empirical evidence,
hopefully in a manner which preserves these strengths. As I claim
below, it is at this point, the extension of theory to empirical analysis,
that most studies falter, often falling into the very reductionist moves
which they have castigated or overlooked in their theoretical sec-
tions. In part 2 this extension of sophisticated theory into empirical
analysis is carried a step further when I focus explicitly on the issue of
the role of Unionist ideology in Northern Ireland. The intention
here is to demonstrate the strengths of the theory and methods of
analysis established in part 1 by developing an account of the
structuration of Unionist ideology during the, by now, lengthy crisis
of the past thirty years. After establishing some preliminaries in
chapter 6, in the succeeding chapters I develop an analysis of
Unionist ideology as it has moved from a position of relative
hegemony to a position of relative crisis. The evidence used in these
chapters is drawn from the public political discourse. It includes
political statements and speeches, as recorded in the regional and
local press and as recorded in the magazine and pamphlet literature
of the various political groupings. By focusing on the unconscious
rules of structuration of Unionist ideology I attempt to offer a
detailed explanation of the splintering which has occurred within
Unionism since the 1960s and an explanation of the particular forms
which this (splintered) ideology has taken. These chapters offer a
novel approach to the processes through which non-negotiable,
uncompromising forms of political subjectivity are endemically,

[3]   K. Burke, *A Grammar of Motives* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1945).

though not automatically, reproduced within a crisis-ridden ideological formation. The period of the 1960s and early 1970s is read as an attempt by various actors and movements to institutionalise a novel set of rules. Within Unionism the failure of this enterprise led to an internal splitting of what, previously, had been a relatively united movement. Certain exclusivist, triumphalist and denigrating rules, which had always been a part of Unionism, were now drawn upon in the creation of a new set of political and paramilitary groupings which set about recolonising the ideological field so that it more fully met their own preferred notions of identity, authority and the proper pattern of social and political relations. The intention in these chapters is to analyse this dynamic political process within Unionism, so as to highlight the manner in which this process may be more adequately conceptualised as a conflict over which rules of ideology should dominate the institutional and public space. The related intention is to explore the ways in which a more adequate understanding of the character of the political subjectivities at play in Northern Ireland can offer a better understanding of the restrictions and distortions which endemically mark and limit attempts to institutionalise different, more 'liberal' identities and patterns of relationship. It is claimed that this approach offers new insights into the relationship between political subjectivities and the scope and limits of political action. Finally, in the concluding chapter I make use of the approach developed throughout this book to offer a preliminary analysis of the current situation in Northern Ireland subsequent to the cease-fire and publication of the British and Irish governments' 'Framework Document'.

TWO CONVENTIONAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF IDEOLOGY

As an initial step, two broad types of approach to the study of ideology, one sociological and the other psychological, may be distinguished. The first comprehends ideology as a more or less immediate effect of social, or economic, processes. It involves numerous variations on the one set theme: individuals as the mere bearers or carriers of ideological systems. In this approach an analysis of ideology is seen to require a consideration of class processes, or modernising processes or whatever the particular sociological theory in use specifies as the determinant social process. Such

an approach has major limitations. Principally, it is unable to enter the ideological discourse itself and to treat ideology as an autonomous or relatively autonomous structure with its own determinate rules of structuration. Rather it falls prey to what may be termed an equivalence fallacy.[4] It regards the ideological formation as a thoroughly plastic medium which operates in more or less immediate and perfect synchrony with whichever social process is understood as the determinant of its character. The rules of process characteristic of the social field are merely extended to the ideological field unquestioningly. This extension – the assumption of an equivalence between the rules of process of the social field and the rules of process of the ideological field – is seriously misleading.

Modernisation theory is one of the social theories which highlights this failing.[5] This theory sees the emergence of a modernised ideological formation as the inevitable outcome of the modernisation of social relations. Being unconcerned with the internal rules of structuration of the ideological formation itself, it must choose, or oscillate, between being reductionist and being idealist and descriptive. That is, the cultural norms of modernity are regarded either as the direct effect of social processes or as mere givens which, once implanted, continue to inhere. The case of Northern Ireland, in which the modernisation of economic and social relations coexists with, and appears to have generated, primordial identities and ideologies, confounds such a happy ignorance of the character of ideology. As, indeed, does the more general 'ethnic revival' within the modern world.

A second approach to the study of ideology operates, principally, at the psychological level and comprehends ideology as the complex construction generated by an interaction between an ideological formation, usually described as a culture, and the personality system of the individual under examination. Rather than working with abstract and schematic descriptions of this or that ideological system, such a psychological approach characteristically concerns itself, initially, with detailed and expansive accounts of the thoughts and feelings of particular individuals as elicited, usually, through a series of interviews. An immediate effect of such an approach is the substitution of extremely rich and complex evidence in place of the somewhat arid schematisations characteristic of the sociological

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[4]   See chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion of this proposed equivalence fallacy.
[5]   See chapter 1 for a more detailed discussion of modernisation theory.

approach. A first corollary of this is the necessity for the development of methods of analysis which recognise the complex integrity of such evidence. A second corollary is that ideologies themselves, and not their putative social determinants, become the primary objects of attention.

If the above may be counted as advantages of the psychological approach, in its conventional form it also has serious limitations, both inherently and in practice. By bracketing any concern with the intersubjective character of ideologies, and by focusing on the individual psychological determinants of a subject's system of values, beliefs and feelings regarding the political order, many other aspects of ideologies are excluded from systematic consideration. In particular, as Geertz pointed out some twenty-five years ago, the ideological system itself, rather than its psychological (or social) determinants, is excluded from analysis.[6]

Both the virtues and limitations of such an approach can be seen in Robert Lane's work on ideology. In *Political Ideology* , *Political Thinking and Consciousness* and *Political Man,* Lane uses (or reflects upon their use in *Political Man*) intensive interviews with a relatively small group of subjects as the source of ideological evidence.[7] He then proceeds in two directions simultaneously, attempting to establish both the 'core belief system' and the idiosyncratic transformations worked upon this by the personality system. Lane's work is exemplary in that it moves (as is too seldom the case with the political psychological approach), on the basis of a considered evaluation of evidence gathered from intensive interviewing, from the individual to the social. However even Lane's exemplary work remains caught within the limitations of its paradigmatic approach. Due to a privileging of socialisation processes above other (social) processes, ideological formations are recognised as a determinant within the political process only insofar as they are internalised. Although the social and the cultural are included within the scope of such an approach, they are only incorporated insofar as they derive from and return to the individual actor, or groupings of such actors. In particular, the effect of such an approach is to radically diminish the role of ideology as the discursive field which is recursively involved in

[6] See C. Geertz, 'Ideology as a Cultural System', reprinted in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
[7] R. E. Lane, *Political Ideology* (New York: Free Press, 1962), *Political Thinking and Consciousness* (Chicago: Markham, 1969) and *Political Man* (New York: Free Press, 1972).