

FORMS AND PLACES OF POWER

Introduction

- ▶ The organization of any society implies a particular distribution of power between its different groups on a political, social or economic level. It generally also implies a basic division between those who have and exercise power and those who have none or a little of it.
- ▶ To try to explain what this notion of **“Power”** means and what the problems with power are, I will study the case of South Africa, which is very interesting because power distribution has evolved a lot during the history of this country.

I.] Past oppression

A – Apartheid: an uncommon power distribution!

During the past century (more exactly it began in 1948 and it lasted until the 1990's), South Africa underwent an uncommon policy: Apartheid, which was an official government policy of racial segregation.

Segregation is the separation of 2 communities, or in other words a spatial and geographical form of discrimination. People, and here black and white people, didn't have the same right since apartheid was based on four unequal principles:

- The population was divided into 4 racial groups (Whites/Colored/Indians/Africans): race hierarchy.
- The whites ruled and governed the country alone (the power distribution was easy to understand but not easy to accept because it was very unfair).
- The system was based on inequality.
- The whites were considered as the dominant group (it was easier to govern...).

Naturally, these principles engendered unfair laws...

B – Unfair laws

A few examples of unfair laws, in order to show how this power distribution worked:

- White people controlled the 3 powers: legislative, executive and judiciary. It was forbidden for Black people to exercise one of them. This White people were the white colonists from Holland, France and Britain, and naturally not the native population of South Africa.
- Black people couldn't vote because they didn't have the franchise. They were second class citizens. Therefore they couldn't do anything to make their situation change legally.
- Black people had to carry a pass book (and they were arrested if they didn't have it). It was easier to control them and to know where they went.
- It was illegal for Black people to own their own business.
- Some black people were detained for a long time without being tried.

C – Fight and legal repression

Naturally, some black people wanted to fight for their rights and for equality (even if some wanted a black supremacy to reverse the situation) but it was not so easy because black people were imprisoned or forced to go underground or into exile because black organizations were outlawed.

It was also forbidden to demonstrate and the police could open fire on demonstrators.

The leader of the battle for justice for all South Africans was Nelson Mandela, elected president of the African National Congress and launcher of the sabotage campaign and the military branch. During his fight for equal rights, he was charged with treason and spent 27 years in jail (including 18 years on Robben Island, which became a historical place!).

II.] Turning point and end of Apartheid

A – Soweto uprising

Everything started with an (illegal) demonstration against Afrikaans being used as the language of instruction on June, the 16th 1976. It became the Soweto uprising because the police opened fire on the demonstrators and schoolboys were shot dead, including the 12 years old Hector Pieterse.

Today the 16th of June is a youth day in memory of the heroes who were killed because this event eventually led to the end of Apartheid because they made other countries react with sanctions against South Africa...

B – Measures taken against South Africa

A lot of sanctions were taken against South Africa and its governments to make the situation change.

First the United Nations took resolutions to denounce the event (1976).

Then, there were UN embargoes on weapons and America banned its investments in South Africa (1986).

Finally, America limited its exports of computers and oil and the European Union stopped importing coal from South Africa...The government was obliged to lose a few powers and to establish a fair and equal system.

III.] Today's situation

A – Power sharing

After the end of Apartheid, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established by Nelson Mandela and chaired by Desmond Tutu to consolidate democracy, to reduce (lessen/curb) the inequalities, to forget the division of the past and to live in peace (= to reconcile the victims and the torturers), to change the preconceived ideas and to create a Rainbow Nation (= people of different ethnic groups living in peace together).

Thanks to the commission, the situation improved.

Nowadays South Africa is no more discriminates against its black citizens.

If we take back the example of Soweto, it looks like any suburb in the world, there is a mall selling international brands and black and white people have the same rights and talk together.

Black presidents were elected (Nelson Mandela was the first / he received the Nobel Peace) and there is recognition of black people's rights and an emergence of a black middle class who has climbed the social ladder, but...there are still inequalities:

B – Today's inequalities

On the one hand, the country is healing since the political changes have been successful. But on the other hand, the country still faces economic and social inequalities:

Black South Africans still suffer from unemployment, homelessness, violence and have problems in education and health (HIV).

That's why there are a lot of shanty towns full of houses made from waste because the local authorities squandered the money instead of helping the people of the working class.

The citizens theoretically have the same rights but in fact it's not the case, not because of the policy but because of the economy...

Conclusion

- ▶ During the 20th century until now, South Africa has experienced many changes in the way power was distributed and re-distributed: from apartheid and white domination to power-sharing and recognition of black people's rights.
- ▶ To conclude about our notion of "power", I can say that the exercise of power in a community requires that its members (and EVERY member) accept a complex system of relations, rules and regulations to create a social cohesion and to live in peace and equality without conflicts.
- ▶ Thanks to our example, we have seen that the fight for equality is often long and painful and that it's not easy for the group who had the power to lose the total control and to share it with the others, who have difficulties to use this newly gained power efficiently.
- ▶ To put it in a nutshell, power distribution and use is something very complicated because of the important number of persons concerned.

MYTHS AND HEROES

Introduction

- ▶ According to the dictionary, a **myth** derives from a Greek word which means “legend”. But nowadays we use this word with several meanings, from a traditional story dealing with History to a natural or social phenomenon. That's why we can say that a myth can be defined as a story about god or heroes but can also be a popular belief, a tradition...or a false notion, an illusion.
- ▶ A **hero**, in mythology and folklore can be a person with superhuman qualities who is admired for his or her courage or outstanding achievements. It can be a superhero but also a role model or an icon...in other words a real person.
- ▶ Thanks to the example of the American dream as a myth, I will try to define, at first, a myth. Then I will give several examples of heroes to try to deduce their characteristics.

I.] How to define a Myth? The example of the American Dream

A – The Myth: facts and push/pull factors

The American dream is probably the most famous myth linked to America. According to the belief of our society, America is an amazing host country where everything is possible (also called the Promised Land). That's why there are a lot of pull and push factors which attract people to the USA.

First, the economic reasons: A lot of people have to undergo poverty and joblessness in their home country. That's why they decided to emigrate to the USA to start a brand new life with better living conditions. To reach their goal, some people, like the Mexicans, are ready to cross the Arizona desert. It's a very hard and exhausting journey because of the heat and because it's very long (36 hours). It's also hazardous because of snakes and spiders but to their mind, it's the last solution.

Then, some people decided to emigrate to the USA to have an access to good education. It was the case of Barack Obama's father, who obtained a scholarship (thanks to his hard work and perseverance) to study in America. He was convinced (and it's one of the characteristics of the American dream) America would give him opportunities because in a generous America, you don't have to be wealthy to achieve your potential and to be successful: there are no barriers to success.

There were also some people who came to America to flee wars or dictatorship (so because of political reasons), because the USA is seen as a place of freedom, and it's naturally a democracy. (Example: the Cubans)

Finally, religious persecutions are also push and pull factors because there is an important religious freedom in the USA, which attracted, for examples, the Jews in the 1930's.

To put it in a nutshell, America seems to be the perfect country, without drawbacks. It seems to be a land where everything is possible for everybody but...

B – Is it (= is a Myth...) always true?

In fact, not for everybody. There are a lot of examples which show that the American dream is not as wonderful as people may think. The Mexican immigrants are often arrested at the border and send back to their country. Consequently, their dream comes to an end because the USA faces a mass influx of illegal immigrants and tries to arrest them with a big wall separating Mexico from the USA (but it doesn't really prevent the immigrants from entering the USA illegally: as long as there are jobs in the USA, they will find a way and try again and again).

Then, in the case of Ellis Island, which was the main immigration station before 1954 (70% of emigrants to America passed through the Harbor of NYC), this place was naturally nicknamed “The Golden Door” but also “The Island of Tears” because some people were rejected because America didn't want people who would be dependent on the welfare state and they had to undergo two steps (a medical exam and 29 questions) to be accepted and a lot of things could prevent them from being accepted : the American dream could become the American nightmare.

Eventually, it's not easy to reach America and then you are not sure to be happy: there are risks to be disillusioned because America is not as you expected because of a bad welfare state, a hard life or low skilled jobs (+ homesick).

C – Is it a big lie?

Naturally, there are also people who have climbed the social ladder and who have become the heroes of the American dream because they started from scratch and became very important and influential. The best example is Barack Obama because as I said his parents believed in the American dream (and they were right!). Barack Obama, during a speech, declared that “America is great, not because of its skyscrapers or its army or its economy, but thanks to its principles” (He thinks of the Declaration of Independence which enables equality...).

But is he a real hero? I will try to sort out heroes into three categories:

NE PAS TRAITER CETTE PARTIE TELLE QUELLE MAIS REUTILISER LES IDEES DANS LA PRECEDENTE POUR TRAITER MYTHES ET HEROS EN MEME TEMPS

II.] How to define Heroes?

A – Superheroes

It's probably the first thing that comes to our mind because they are very famous. Their characteristics are easy to find: they always have something special, a strange or amazing power and their role is to save the world. It's considered to be their job to protect people and to fight against terrible wicked people. In order to fulfill their role, there are often proud, fearless, brave and...fictitious. They don't really exist and that's why I think we cannot consider them as real heroes. Who are real heroes?

B – Real heroes

They are more realistic because they exist in the real life. They have the same goal (to save the world, to fight against inequality...) but not the same abilities as superheroes. However they are ready to give all their time and energy (and sometimes their life) to be successful and to help human beings. They have the same characteristics as the superhero but they are not immortal and they write their own history. That's why they are able to change the course of the world.

Some of them became models for the populations (that's why they are so important). They are admired because they are models of what we want to be (and of what we should be) because of several reasons: they are self made men with successful careers or have dream jobs / they want to heal the world and to fight against illnesses and illiteracy. They are often famous, influential, hard workers, wealthy, ambitious, generous...

Example: Oprah Winfrey (most influential women in the USA + great journalist + help country to overcome the apartheid legacy by giving time and money to build schools) and Bill Gates (American businessman who funded Microsoft when he was 20; became the largest personal software company since 94% of computers are using Windows + Foundation of Bill and Melinda Gates foundation to develop healthcare and education around the world).

C – Daily heroes

They are the most important and the most discreet. In the literal meaning: someone like you and me who save lives and solve daily problems, without being famous, without being congratulated. There are plenty of examples from the doctor to the fireman and the man who dives into the river to save a poor cat: they are essential for our society.

Conclusion

- ▶ To conclude, I can say that Myths are often based on shared values and belief of a society. It has always been the case since the first myths explained the origins of human beings (if we consider the Bible as a book of myths).
- ▶ Nowadays a whole range of new myths (with new heroes to who can either be real or imaginary) enable to stimulate people's imagination and to show them the good way because myths and heroes represent our society and thanks to them, we can deduce what is good and what is bad.
- ▶ To put it in a nutshell, even if myths are just a belief of the society and even if there is often a big gap between what you expected and the reality, they are essential for its functioning.

SPACE AND EXCHANGES

Introduction

- ▶ According to the dictionary, **Exchanges** are a group of relations between different countries which can be people migrations, assets or ideas.
- ▶ Thanks to the example of Ireland's situation since 1845, I will try to explain why there have always been waves of migration from and to this country; I will give the push and pull factors to deduce the functioning of Ireland's population exchanges.
- ▶ We can observe a few periods in the history of this space as a country and each has different characteristics concerning the population exchanges and movement.

I.] A very hard century and a half

A – The Great Famine

In the 19th century (more exactly, this phenomenon started in 1845 and it lasted until 1852), a fungus (it's a disease named the blight) affected potato plants and destroyed most of the potato crops. (For historical accuracy, I can add that it was a natural disaster but it had also historical and economic causes). The problem was that most of the population was dependent on potatoes at that time. Even if solutions were implemented to try to solve the problem, they were inadequate considering the extent of the problem. Workhouses and Soup kitchens were opened but the most important measure linked to our subject is that the British repealed the Corn Laws to establish free trade and to make exchanges easier...but Irish people couldn't afford foreign corn. So it was not enough, that's why there were terrible consequences, like starvation and the development of a lot of contagious diseases but especially, it caused the beginning of the Irish Diaspora because 2 million people left their native country. They emigrated to English-speaking countries like Great Britain, the USA, Canada or Australia.

B – The Sorry-Period

This first big emigration wave didn't stop after 1852 because until the 1990s, Ireland underwent chronic poverty and unemployment because of Wall Street's crash in 1929 for example. In other words, during that period, the population was desperate, hopeless and in 1958, more than 60 000 people left Ireland to flee poverty, expecting to find a job. Some went to Great Britain and got only low- skilled and low- paid factory jobs. Their goal was not to earn a good living but to survive. It represented very important Exchanges of factory labor between the 2 countries. Others decided to go to the USA in order to climb the social ladder because the USA gives opportunity to rise from rags to riches (It's the American dream's magical power).

II.] From recession to Boom

The situation reversed itself in the 1990's because the Celtic tiger was beginning to wake up thanks to low corporate taxes (it means to make exchanges easier and to attract investors from the European Union) and a young educated workforce.

Ireland was getting rich, that's why the country was seen as a proper land and became attractive. immigration replaced emigration. People came from Africa, Eastern Europe and descendants of Irish people who had left their home country during the recession decided to come back during the economic boom. Ireland was a magnet for immigrants and its population increased. So much so that there was a lack of houses and facilities.

+ The Irish population, which had been almost entirely white and Catholic so far, changed.

III.] From Boom to Bust

Because of the mismanagement and huge mistakes made by the government, the money was squandered without thinking about the future. The government didn't fulfill its role and endangered the population.

That's why the dream was short lived: the 2008 economic bust came. In fact, a global crisis affected Ireland in 2008 because of the subprime crisis in the USA in 2007.

Unemployment and joblessness have increased because people can no longer reimburse the money they have borrowed.

They sell their houses and it creates ghost estates.

Because a bad news does not come alone, the value of properties has decreased. People are in negative equity when *they* sell and have difficulties with their debts.

Joblessness has created a new wave of emigration in order to find a good skilled job far from Ireland.

As an example, Jobless Paddy became well known because he created a big billboard to try to find a job because he didn't want to emigrate (the caption said "Save me from emigration!"). That's what happened because he now works in a communication enterprise...

Conclusion

- ▶ To conclude, Ireland's situation is a good mirror to understand the notion of Space and exchanges and reveals that there have always been population exchanges and migrations linked (that's very important) to the economic situation of the country.
- ▶ This phenomenon (In Ireland and generally in the whole World) will probably never end and seems to be periodic: a wave of immigration replaces a wave of emigration...and so on and so forth.
- ▶ The Irish diaspora represents about 70 million people throughout the world: a few examples: JF Kennedy, Nicole Kidman, and George Clooney...