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Identity formation
Issues, challenges and tools.

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Introduction

This chapter discusses identity formation: the ways people constitute and position themselves in the world, how they render themselves and their relations with others meaningful, how they construct their narratives of self, enact their images of self, and perform their identifications in order to get things done. Paradoxically, this complexity of phenomena solidifies into apparently simplistic labels such as Mother, Director, Secretary, Chief, Gay, Hetero, Homeless, or Refugee. That a Refugee can be Homeless, a Father, a Chief of a tribe, and Homosexual illustrates the theoretical and practical complexity of identity formation. A multitude of processes, conditions, constraining and enabling factors, and subjective experiences contribute to how individuals, groups and communities envision, label and define themselves and others in specific historical, social and economic contexts.

This text was written by a multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional group of social scientists participating in the CERES School of Research and the study of identity formation. This text is an effort to discuss different perspectives and issues involved in the study of identity formation. Rather than a review of the state of the art in the field, it is a selection of issues reflecting the authors' fields of expertise and standpoints. Nonetheless, the issues presented below are crucial for our understanding of the conceptual complexity of identity formation.

The chapter's structure reflects the three elementary layers on which the analysis of identity (formation) is built. The first section presents a contextualization of the concept of identity formation within the social sciences. It will briefly discuss the concept's prominence within the social sciences, the advantages it offers over related concepts and the critical qualifications that can be made against it. A plea will be made to position the concept of identity (forma-

tion) at a meta level and to render other concepts that depend on it operational for empirical research purposes and further theorizing.

The second section presents an inventory of the different perspectives that social-psychologists, biologists, anthropologists, sociologists and others take in the analysis of the processes that fall under the meta-concept of identity formation. We then explore the theoretical tensions that exist between and within disciplines on a key set of issues, encouraging the reader to take a balanced, eclectic approach in research practice. Our queries predominantly concern the conceptualization of identity as a relational or social concept, although some of the relevant tensions and balances we discuss, such as those between biological versus social positions, fall somewhat outside the realm of the social sciences.

The third section takes a reflexive glimpse of one of the fields of empirical studies in which processes of 'identity formation' play a crucial role: identity politics. This discussion will take up two main lines of argumentation of the first chapter: identity politics within the struggles over globalization as a neoliberal political project and identity politics as a consequence of the increasing intensity of flows of people, images, capital, goods, meanings and so on spanning the globe and challenging existing identifications embedded in local, regional and national institutions. The section will conclude with a brief discussion of relevant directions in research.

Why identity formation?

The concept of identity or identity formation has strong scientific foundations, increasingly inspiring scholars from among others social-psychology, sociology, anthropology and discourse studies. In this section the position of the concept within the conceptual or semantic field as well as its relative advantages and disadvantages vis-à-vis related concepts will be sketched.

As an alternative to class, culture and self

The current popularity of the concept of identity grew out of several theoretical debates. Whereas it started as a psychological concept, it was subsequently adopted in social science in general. To some extent, the concept gained momentum as an alternative to the concept of class (Wagner 2001) to allude to the ways people constitute and position themselves in the world. Classical class thinking, particularly structural-functionalist approaches, saw people in terms of their structural position within society, from where they satisfied society's needs for integration and cohesion. Likewise, neo-Marxist approaches saw people as grouped together according to their common relations to the means of production and their antagonism towards groups occupying oppos-

ing positions within the capitalist or feudal mode of production. The concept of class therefore often became associated with master plans of 'modernization', 'capitalist accumulation' or 'proletarianization' that teleologically determined the course of history and class formation, and therefore the course of life of each and every person as well.

The concept of identity has also been presented as an alternative to the concept of culture. For some authors (for a summary see Brightman 1995) the concept of culture lost its appeal as it became associated with homogeneity, coherence, uniformity and continuity. It led to thinking in terms of reified and static abstractions and distinct realms of ideas, and diverted attention from the dynamics of specific interactions between specific people. The description of culture as a set of phenomena was also problematic. The selection of the items that were included in the description was felt to be arbitrary. Defining culture as a system was also criticised for the false image it created of cultures as bounded entities situated next to each other. Especially in functionalist approaches, culture had gained a superorganic status, as if people did not matter or were rule-following zombies. In short, not only class, but also culture seemed to trigger essentialist thinking.

The emergence of the concept of identity (formation) also relates to the problematic use of the concept of self. An Enlightenment or Cartesian approach found in certain branches of anthropology and sociology, considered subjects to be unique and capable of organizing their lives from a dynamic centre of awareness, emotion, judgement and action. People were seen as bounded selves, relatively autonomous, independent, reflexive and able to pursue their own goals. However, this portrayal of self in the literature was often limited to the Western self in opposition to the non-Western self that supposedly possessed all the opposite traits: unbounded, dependent, non-reflexive, unable to distinguish between him- or herself and his or her societal role and status and unable to pursue own goals (see for a critical discussion Sökefeld 1999). In short, here we also found essentialism, cloaked in the opposition between Western and non-Western selves.

The deterministic and essentialist ideas that informed the interpretation of concepts of class, culture and self, find few supporters among contemporary scholars. A person's practices and meaning making are not determined solely by the structural directives and functional necessities of becoming conscious of one's class position, nor do they merely represent an all-embracing and homogeneous culture. For example, religious experiences are about much more than simply executing society's need for integration, keeping actors from adopting a clear position in class struggles or manifesting dominant cultural schemes. For the same reasons, the portrayal of non-Western selves as non-reflexive

and dependent on contextual cultural or structural factors must be discarded, together with the voluntaristic idea that Western selves supersede structural or contextual directives through rationality.

The ways people constitute and position themselves in the world are much more complicated and multifarious than the old concepts of class, culture and self suggest. They may be better captured by the concept of identity that, particularly in combination with a recognition of the fact that each individual deals with several and multiple identities, has the advantage of pointing to diversity and contradiction within the lived experiences of the individual (Ewing 1990). The actor no longer disappears behind a static view of class or culture nor is s/he exalted to illusionary voluntarist altitudes. Identity is increasingly understood in terms of dynamic and fluid processes of construction and (trans)formation, in which intention and instruction, reflexivity and domination, sense and performance, individuality and social embeddedness converge and clash. Such an approach not only escapes from deterministic and essentialistic conceptions, but also from ethnocentric oppositions of so-called Western versus non-Western selves (Cohen 1994).

A closer look

The concept of identity (formation) may have advantages over the concepts of class, culture and self, but has not replaced these concepts once and for all. Just like the concepts of class, culture and self, earlier conceptions of identity also disclosed essentialist notions, as if a person's identity was his or her portrait, similar to an identity document such as a passport. In psychology as well as in anthropology the emphasis was on sameness, i.e. identity was seen as a more or less fixed and integrated whole of personality characteristics that a person shared with other members of his/her group. The modernist view on identity was strongly connected to notions of continuity and coherence (Wagner 2001). Having multiple identities was considered pathological.

Since the 1980s, though, having multiple identities (see Otto & Driessen 2000) has become considered normal and even a sign of mental health (Lifton 1993). The idea of fluid and many-sided identities has become popular (see Gergen 1991 and 1994). Difference has replaced sameness as the key word: difference between the various personality and identity traits as well as between the person and the group (see Sökefeld 1999). If the person is made up of several identities (gender, age, sex, education, occupational, class, ethnicity etc.) s/he cannot be understood as being wholly embedded in one single group. Relations between personal identity and group or collective identity cannot be taken for granted.

However, not only the concept of identity (formation) went through a

process of redefinition to get rid of its former essentialist connotations. In specific branches of sociology and social-psychology, a similar redefinition took place regarding the concept of self, emphasizing its multiplicity, de-centredness and transcient character (Wagner 2001). Moreover, a relational and processual reworking of the class concept rid it of essentialism and determinism while highlighting the continuing importance of work and relations of production (see Kalb 1997). Such a concept of class calls attention to shifting (power) relations between people, actions and everyday life experiences, both in local and wider societal contexts. It is about the interplay between hegemonic structures and their material, social and symbolic foundations, which are sometimes contested, at other times confirmed, sometimes challenged or rebelled against, at other times evaded or obeyed. The concept of class reminds us of the deeply political nature of efforts to position and constitute oneself in the world and the interlinkages of these efforts with developments in a wider societal setting. However, other concepts such as hegemony (see Kalb 1997) may be more suitable for highlighting exactly these fluid processes of domination, differentiation, everyday politics, contestation, negotiation and identification because they better recognize the importance of other identifications besides socio-economic positioning, such as gender and ethnicity, in such processes.

In a similar vein, the concept of culture has also been reformulated and redefined. In the current definition, culture is no longer an integrated and shared whole oiling the wheels of social life, no system of cultural classification with relatively fixed markers in social life. Presently, culture appears as something discordant, non-systemic, contradictory and pluralistic, characterized by non-sharing and difference and failure to provide clear recipes for action (Featherstone 1995). In fact, the relative advantages of the concept of identity formation over the concept of culture may disappear when we recognize that both concepts used to trigger associations of reification, integratedness, wholeness, systemic and statistic nature, and essence, and that to get rid of such associations, efforts have recently been undertaken to shift the emphasis in both concepts from *internal* sameness to *internal* difference and process.

After all, borders marking off one culture from another have become questionable. The current emphasis is on scapes or flows of people, ideas, goods, images, capital, information, meanings, representations and so on, which increasingly span the globe and do not halt at any border (see Appadurai 1996 and Hannerz 1992 and 1996). As borders increasingly become permeable and porous, their capacity to provide a framework for the development of distinct cultures will be lost.

In short, the currently redefined concept of culture makes it very difficult to make *substantive* statements regarding a culture because it has virtually

become impossible to delineate one culture from another, to make explicit to whom such substantive claims refer and to whom they do not. This argument does not apply, of course, to the *formal* use of the concept of culture foregrounding the *importance* of studying processes of meaning making and practices of particular people in practical circumstances. The adequate place to position the concept of culture is at a meta level. The moment we want to say something substantive about cultural processes in operational terms, it makes more sense to use other concepts.

However, for different reasons a similar plea can be made regarding the concept of identity or identity formation. The concept also continues to raise problems and objections at an operational level. Etymologically speaking the concept is unmistakably linked to sameness, to something, which is identical. Wittgenstein already pointed to the problematic connotation of the meaning 'identical' here: '... to say of two things that they are identical is nonsense, and to say of one thing that it is identical with itself is to say nothing at all' (quoted in Wagner 2001: 62). In addition, if the connotations of 'sameness' and being 'identical' are etymologically central to the concept of identity, how can this concept subsequently be redefined to mean exactly the opposite, i.e. difference? Moreover, these connotations of 'sameness' and 'identical' contrast sharply with the fact that the processes that we are interested in, i.e. the ways people constitute and position themselves in the world and render themselves and their relations with others meaningful, are becoming particularly relevant in the context of difference, not sameness. It is exactly globalization and its consequence, i.e. multiculturalism defined as the multiplication of experienced difference (Siebers 2002), that renders the constituting and positioning of oneself a *problématique* of prime importance.

So given the confusion raised by the concept of identity we prefer to position this concept at a meta level, pointing to the need and importance of studying the problems and issues involved in constituting and positioning oneself in the world in a globalizing context. These problems and issues themselves can better be studied using other concepts that can be defined and deployed in a more operational sense.

Operational concepts

In the framework of this chapter we cannot work out all the relevant operational concepts in detail. We can only depict some of the most important ones. Whether persons are embedded in certain groups and whether collective identities emerge is an open question. Therefore, research had best focus more on persons – individually or jointly – struggling and dealing with different global flows, societal developments, discourses, orientations and (shifting) power

relations. This helps to problematize relations between individual persons and groups in the face of current developments of fragmentation, atomization and individualization.

With such a focus, psychological drives and factors but also relational aspects – identifications (with and as) and differentiations (from) – will be found. Identifications and differentiations do not only include cognitive, but also normative and expressive or emotional meanings. The advantage of talking about identifications and differentiations is that they immediately refer to specific events, settings and situations in which these identifications and differentiations are made relevant. For example, when being abroad one's nationality may be an important identification whereas the same person may emphasize his or her identification as teacher or student when at school.

Social reality however cannot be neatly cut into 'slices', one identification / differentiation being relevant in each of them. Several, sometimes contradictory identifications / differentiations may be relevant in one and the same setting. Such multiple or contradictory identifications call upon a person's capacity to manage this multiplicity based on his or her awareness and reflexive sense of distinction between him- or herself and everything else. This awareness makes interplay between identifications and differentiations possible. Such a redefined conception of self in terms of the management capacity to deal with reflexive distinctions between oneself and the world (Sökefeld 1999) may create the basis for the construction of narratives in which a person tries to make sense and interlink the various meanings and identifications / differentiations in the multiple settings of his or her life-world in a discursive way, drawing on various flows, discourses and orientations.

This narrative integration of various identifications / differentiations may take place in a coherent way, leading to unambiguous prescriptions on how to act, or in a rather loose and flexible way, little concerned with coherence. It may be expressed in a single line of unequivocal concepts, consistently structured in an orderly and sequential, teleologically organised plot with a beginning, middle and end, or in a multi-centred way with various identifications clustered around several symbols without unambiguous interrelations (Gullestad 1996: 6). Narratives of self may remain stable over time, but may also change and transform in specific circumstances and events.

By constructing narratives of self, persons deal with contexts in which institutions guide or even oblige them to act in a particular way. Of course, material circumstances and involvement in or exclusion from specific production and consumption flows and structures play an important role here, as do cultural orientations (Van Binsbergen 1999a) or discourses (Foucault 1971). The advantage of the latter concepts over that of culture is that they focus on spe-

cific issues allowing for some degree of consistency at this issue oriented level without assuming any overall or consistently integrated framework of several discourses (Van Binsbergen 1999a). They also alert to the prevalence of imposition as against the spontaneous creation associated with culture.

Moreover, even though institutionally anchored, we may assume that societal discourses or orientations are in practice plural, calling for a differentiated and fluid concept of hegemony and its articulations with the everyday politics of individual persons. The fluctuating and multifarious character of these everyday politics also has to be stressed. Sometimes social discourses are enclosed within a specific orientation, at other times they take a critical distance. Sometimes discourses and narratives of self provide people with meaningful identifications that clarify issues and get things done. At other times people will feel powerless in the face of the challenges put in front of them. Occasionally they will feel torn apart by these challenges or, conversely, be able to play with differences while maintaining a stable sense of self. Sometimes individuals group together, at other times they stress their individuality. Thus, the concepts of discourse, hegemony and everyday politics enable us to understand people's contentious positioning in the power-laden fields of practice.

Identity formation – tensions and balances

In the following text the word 'identity' or 'identity formation' should be understood as referring to the challenges, problems and issues involved in the ways in which persons constitute and position themselves in the world and try to make the best of it. An advantage of seeing identity this way is that *a priori* characterizations of what identity 'is' or 'is supposed to be' are avoided and the need to look for operational concepts to study the various processes involved in identity formation is stressed . Thus we may get rid of the either / or questions common to the debates about identity. The processes of identity formation may be about flow and closure (Meyer & Geschiere 1999), about change *and* continuity, about difference and sameness, about fluidity and solidity, about coherence and fragmentation etc. In some situations one may get the upper hand, in other circumstances the other. How identity becomes articulated in specific occasions and events cannot be determined *a priori,* it requires empirical research.

The variability in time and space and the complexity of these articulations have to be stressed. In principle there are two ways to approach the matter: either in terms of structure or process (see Maier 1999, Worldview Group 1994). The first approach tries to distinguish elementary entities and their interrelations. The characteristics that these entities and relations either share or differ on are subsequently studied to understand the nature and functioning of the

whole system. Applied to the case of 'identity formation', this approach focuses on identifications / differentiations and their meanings and on the various practices stemming from these identifications / differentiations as 'building blocks' of narratives of self. The interrelations of these identifications and meanings in narratives and the patterning of these practices into behaviour are scrutinized. Subsequently, the relations between narratives and patterns of behaviour and the conditions, rules and driving forces behind the coming into being of these relations are questioned. The structure approach thus relies on the vocabulary of systems, patterns and maps.

The second approach, the one characterised by 'process', highlights change over time, actions and events. In principle these are complex dynamics composed of a great number of interrelated and continuously changing activities. Fundamental to this approach are transformation and novelty and the passages from chaos to order and vice versa. The quality of a process will depend on its extension (the number of objects the process will involve), the degree of change it can bring about and the continuity of the process. Regarding 'identity formation' this approach does not emphasize the identifications and practices themselves, but the ways they come about and transform over time. What merits attention in this view are not the final 'products' of 'identity formation' but the processes by which identifications and narratives become constructed and related practices become enacted, and the ways in which the persons and groups involved deal with conditions and discourses and their own drives in these processes. Here the fluid vocabulary of flux, change, and dynamics is used (cf. Cohen 1985, 1994). The emphasis is on the unpredictable nature of individual meaning making and acting, which cannot be reduced to the operations of a system. Performance, celebration and expression are preferred above some coherent idea of 'self' or 'identity'.

For analytical reasons the distinction between structure and process approaches is useful. But we should be cautious not to simply adopt one approach and reject the other. In stead, we should use a combined perspective that calls attention to both relations and processes, elements and events, function and change, and allows us to study the phenomena and processes involved in both time and space. Such a method will be deployed in the following section where several important debates on the ways in which persons constitute and position themselves in the world are discussed. For each debate, we firstly distinguish the tensions between different poles in the debate and sensitize the scholar to the possible positions and options. Next, we underline the need for a balanced or eclectic approach in research practice and indicate the options for combining insights.

Driving identity formation: genes or relations?

A first debate around the development of 'identity', or 'personality development', concerns the question of what drives the processes involved in the genesis of personality development. *Grosso modo* two opposing viewpoints can be distinguished (cf. Whitehouse 2001). On the one hand there are those who point to internal – genetic or biological – forces that prescribe an individual's course through a pre-established sequence of phases, provided external conditions enable him or her to do so.

Others, on the other hand, claim that personality development is primarily relational in character (e.g. Gergen 1991), i.e. people start off as a *tabula rasa* that in the course of life becomes constituted or inscribed by social relations and interactions. The ways people constitute and position themselves in the world are the result of social relations that become inculcated in one's *habitus* (Bourdieu 1972) and are shaped through the embodiment of cultural orientations or societal discourses. Personality development does not take shape autonomously, but is indexical, i.e. defined by a person's relations with other relevant persons and processes. It is therefore contingent and can change over time, without any predetermined direction.

The internal and the external are clearly opposed in these interpretations of what drives personality development. Neither position, however, can ignore the other. Those who support the internal forces perspective cannot deny the role that social and cultural conditions play in facilitating the operationalisation of these internal forces. The genetic is undeniably real and pre-existing, but the choices it allows for are negotiable and changeable. On the other hand, those who stress relational or external forces cannot for instance deny the role of memory and mental instructions in influencing the meanings, actions and gestures of individuals in interaction with others.

Real, ideal or not possible at all?

Is identity construction a futile endeavour in today's constantly changing social and cultural settings? And how is the structuring of narratives of self intertwined with normative conceptions of what one's 'identity formation' is supposed to be like? These two questions synthesize a second set of tensions and balances around claims that 'identity formation' is feasible as a lifetime project integrating biological, mental, cultural and social aspects of life versus arguments that any such effort as a long-term life-project has become illusive.

Those who claim that the formation of a lifetime project is feasible understand it as a developing pattern of personality traits, driven by genetic impulses or by the construction of a narrative of self that meaningfully incorporates motivating metaphors about oneself. 'Identity', then, provides individuals with

a sense of direction in their life. It can also be defined as the emergence of a socially and morally responsible person or citizen who answers to the needs of family, church or society. Such a view finds supporters among specific schools of development psychologists, political scientists and sociologists. Anthony Giddens (1991) claims that contemporary conditions for such a project of 'self-identity' are favourable because individual meaning-makers can draw on almost endless reservoirs of knowledge enabling them to shape not only social conditions, but also their 'self-identity'.

The scholars who claim that 'identity formation' is an illusion, point to the pace of social change that no longer allows anyone to articulate his or her experiences meaningfully. Globalization overstretches the individual's capacity to adapt and undermines the stable conditions of community and circumscribed space that are necessary for 'identity formation' (cf. Van Binsbergen 1999b). Grand narratives, which used to provide an overall meaningful and motivational framework for individuals and groups to hold on to, are in disarray (Bauman 1993, 1995, 1996 and 1997, Lyotard 1984). Consequently, 'identity' can be about no more than a sequence of disconnected short-term experiences, sensations and kicks that fail to accumulate or provide a basis for understanding 'identity' as a project or task.

However, few would go so far as to deny the very possibility of a narrative of self. Questions such as 'who are you?' usually meet with some kind of explanation or account. The suggestion that repertoires of identifications / differentiations would necessarily be made up of disconnected single identifications / differentiations and that a person's life-story would be made up of a series of disconnected spheres of his/her life-world and stages of life-history, is hard to accept. Persons may interrelate these various identifications meaningfully, though not necessarily rationally, in overarching narratives of self (Siebers 2000).

Several contemporary approaches emphasize the potential that each meaning-maker possesses to use a repertoire of multiple identifications in different situations and circumstances. Ewing (1990: 251) argues that people in all 'cultures' project multiple, inconsistent self-representations, phrased in terms of gender, age, sex, ethnicity, descent, nationality, religious affiliation, occupation, kinship, regional background, class, lifestyle etc., that are context-dependent and may shift rapidly. The fact that persons are often unaware of these shifts and inconsistencies leads to 'the experience of wholeness' (Ewing 1990). An illustration of this is found in Notermans' research on multiple identifications of women participating in polygynous marriages in Cameroon, which pointed out that women strictly separate different stories representing different identifications (Notermans 1999). Identity stories can be so much context-bound

that the researcher has to change contexts in order to discover the multiple identifications: stories told from the perspective of a first wife in a polygynous household strongly contrast with stories the same woman can tell from the perspective of being a mistress. However, while occupying both positions, women never relate these stories to each other. By keeping only one frame of reference in mind at any particular moment, they are able to maintain an experience of wholeness in the face of radical contradictions (Ewing 1990, Notermans 1999).

An experience of wholeness can also come about through the articulation of several identifications / differentiations. A particular identification may be expressed through the articulation of another. De Theije provides an example of this with the case of Paulo, an activist in a Catholic base community in North Eastern Brazil, who explains his religious identity in terms of his gender identity (De Theije 1999, 2001). Paulo is in his 50s and lives with his wife and children in a small house in a poor neighbourhood. He and his sons can only just sustain his family by cleaning cars.

Life used to be different for Paulo. He told me [Marjo de Theije] that in the past he was not a man involved in the church, but an 'erroneous man', a *'machão'* (big macho), 'wild, and violent.' After the death of a son, some twenty years ago, Paulo turned to religion and became involved in various activities in the parish. Through this participation he gradually became another person. He is a base community leader because he believes that discussing the relevance of the teachings of God for the world today helps people to work towards a better life. Paulo is also the president of the Vicentinos, a religious association addressing the needs of poor people. He helps putting up campaigns for the needy in the neighbourhood and 'taking [the Eucharist] to all the sick people. To know how they are, have a chat, converse with them. And so there, my life bettered, developed.'

It is interesting that Paulo draws on gendered images to explain his religiousness. He uses the image of the *machão* to explain how he used to be another person. He contrasts this gendered stereotype with the implicitly less masculine person he is now without implying, however, that he is no longer a man. In Brazil, it is uncommon for a man to be so active in everyday religious affairs. In fact, this is considered 'women's business'. Generally it is only women who put religiousness into practice by performing religious duties as an extension of their caring duties in the household. Still, men like Paulo who do perform religious activities that are generally associated with female activism, are not considered deviant beings. In fact, Paulo is highly estimated in the local Catholic community.

For men like Paulo, masculinity does not depend on religiousness. Paulo

does not respond to the common image of a macho Brazilian man, but only within the vicinities of the church. Paulo recalls the satisfaction that his religious work gives him but also emphasizes that it is something you do in *(dentro)* the church, suggesting that other norms apply in other spheres of life. Indeed, in the household sphere, Paulo does not fulfil specific caring tasks. Apparently, for a male base community leader like Paulo, different gender ideals prevail in the religious realm and in the household or society in general.

Paulo shows us that radical changes in one's life do not necessarily exclude the possibility of actively (re)creating identifications / differentiations. In fact, quite the opposite is the case here. Paulo now lives with at least two different gender identifications: that of a Brazilian man, husband and father, and that of a religious man. Narrating about himself and his life he differentiates his life in at least two parts, i.e. the sphere of the church and that of outside life. He thus articulates his religious identification with a specific gender identification while reserving some space for his masculinity of the macho type in his family life. In his case this does not seem to provoke problems, although his wife complains about his Sunday morning duties. However, his turn to religion also affected his overall image about himself. To some extent, he manages to create an experience of wholeness by articulating several identifications, distinguishing several spheres of life and maintaining an image of radical overall change in his life course. He does so in a flexible way, appropriating various identifications, without being bothered with consistency too much.

Self-referential or performative?

A third set of tensions and balances concerns the difference between identification as a self-reference vis-à-vis identification as a performance based on strategic considerations (Goffman 1959 and 1963). Identifications / differentiations may be constructed by someone to make his or her person meaningful and to make others understand him or her as s/he understands him- or herself, to become recognized. However, they may also be deployed in interactions for strategic reasons, to make someone else do something. The performance of very specific identifications may even be required by institutions or organizations. This forces a person into front stage obedience, reserving self-referential identifications for backstage activities. The identification of persons as law-abiding citizens by the state is a case in point. Persons may perform prescribed identifications and use them strategically, but that does not mean that they become part of their self-image.

The basic difference here is the point of reference, i.e. whether someone creates a self-image for his/her own sense-making needs or to make someone else do something. Nevertheless, self-referential and performative aspects do

not exclude each other; they may mingle in specific identifications / differentiations in specific settings. The fact that the process of identification is often closely linked to struggles over scarce resources demonstrates that identifications / differentiations cannot always be about self-reference only. For example, asylum seekers knocking at the gates of fortress Europe may seriously harm their interest if they only disclose a self-referential image when asked to identify themselves in order to get access.

However, the desire to have some anchor points in one's self-narrative may be very important for the satisfaction of emotional needs such as the need for belonging, security, or recognition. We cannot rule out the possibility that the overstretching of the distance between required and performed identifications on the one hand and self-referential sense making on the other may result in conflict within a person's self-perception and his or her experiences and relations in daily life. Such a breach between the self-referential and the performative could be an explanation for problems such as burnout.

Individuality or ethnicization?

Individuals do not construct their ideas about themselves in social isolation; they do so within groups and other larger social units. However, the exact relationship between the individual and the group, the social or the collective, between personal and collective 'identities', provokes differing viewpoints among scholars. Some perceive of the individual as embedded in social structures and cultural environments, others highlight the unique, bounded self, foregrounding a high level of individuality. There is more to 'identity formation' than identifying with a group or being a member of one of more groups, especially where traditional communities are questioned. On the other hand, identifications in terms of group membership remain possible, both regarding primordial communities such as kinship lines or local communities and 'imagined' communities such as the ethnic group and the nation (see Anderson 1987).

Differences of interpretation abound on the analytical understanding of group membership. Some sustain that group identifications emerge from commonalities such as common history, language, and traditions. Others, instead, point to the crucial role played by the construction of boundaries – real or imagined, geographic or social – arguing that the formation of a group (identity) is based on the opposition towards those who are considered as 'outsiders' or 'others' (Barth 1969, Simmel 1955). Cultural elements serve to erect such boundaries (see Baumann 1999). However, not many cultural commonalities are required for a strong group-identification. Some scholars are sceptical of the autonomous dynamics of the social and the cultural and point to the impor-

tant role of states in deliberately fomenting nationalism to create the conditions for industrialization (Gellner 1983) or to support other political purposes (Dijkink and Knippenberg 2001). Issues of power and hegemony appear to be intimately linked to group formation and boundary construction.

Whatever the source of group identification, it has become seriously challenged by globalization and fragmentation. Any stable embeddedness within the framework of an (imagined) community with its own 'culture' and territory is radically challenged by the diversity of influences from all over the world that individuals face. Grand narratives or community structures on which people may draw in reconstructing their image of self may fragment. Group identifications may thus become challenged and anxiety and uncertainty created if no other meaningful sources present themselves as credible alternatives.

An outcome of this state of anxiety and uncertainty is the growing importance of cultural difference and multiculturalism in the global-local theatres in which current problems of social transformation and contradiction are played out (see Benhabib 2002). For some, anxiety and uncertainty have resulted in efforts to restore the classical idea of the national community, reformulated within violent and regressive particularist terms. Others feel attracted to radicalism with universalist claims such as Islamist movements. Again others seek refuge in boosting their ego and individuality by putting their trust in their own entrepreneurial talents and capacity to take care of themselves. Globalization may also create opportunities for people to select from different discourses while constructing their identities. Influences from outside are often used to strengthen already existing traditions rather than to eliminate them (cf. Piot 1999). Christian Cameroonians, for example, have not used Christianity to destroy polygyny but to breathe new life into it. Here external influences have resulted in the proliferation of the traditional in a totally new understanding of polygyny, i.e. Christian polygyny (Notermans 2002: 352).

Imposition or self-formation?

The example of Christian polygyny, suggests another, final tension: are identifications conditioned by circumstances and imposed on individuals by discourses or are individuals 'free' to identify and 'form their identities' as they please? There is a constant tension between being the object of subjection and the subject of self-determination. Here the classical dilemma of structure and agency (see Giddens 1984) reappears. For specific kinds of identifications to emerge, specific conditions have to be met. For example, Habermas' rational 'identity' is only possible within a modern society with modern institutions. On the other hand, society and institutions cannot operate or exist without the structuring influence of societal discourses on individual meaning making.

Each societal discourse contains normative images and expectations of 'good identity' (see Foucault 1991).

Social discourses can become institutionalised by being framed in objectified or rationalized language that constructs and recognizes very specific categories of individuals or groups. In the case of churches, the clergy may want its laity or converts to adopt its officialized religious discourses and comply with the rules and demands inscribed in these discourses. Government policies prescribe specific requirements individuals have to comply with in order to become entitled to social benefits. Managers define profiles individual applicants must meet to be hired. Thus, categorization and labelling are part of social discourses institutionalized into policies.

The objectified language of policies often tries to hide their unmistakably political character (see Shore and Wright 1997). Institutionalized discourses represent and reflect the interests of hegemonic groups and struggles over identification are often intertwined with questions regarding access to resources and power. The impact of hegemony, discourses and techniques of power such as confessions, intakes or application interviews, is however hardly ever total. The individuals concerned are not just obedient receivers of identity instructions. They always have some space, however limited, for manoeuvre and everyday politics.

This space is opened up by various factors. First, discourses cannot describe in every detail exactly what to think and do, leaving some space for differences in interpretation and practice. Second, there is always some relatively autonomous space between what is demanded from someone and subsequently performed by this person on the one hand (front stage) and what s/he actually thinks in self-referential terms on the other hand (back stage), as we have outlined above. Third, as a result of globalization, individuals and groups increasingly have access to different discourses on the same subject whereas the demise of grand narratives entails the loss of inter-discursive dependencies (see Foucault 1991).

In her ethnographic study, Nencel (2001) illustrates the dynamics between structure and agency in the 'identity construction' of Peruvian prostitutes. Official regulation of prostitution in Peru constructed two types of prostitutes: the registered women who were considered 'healthier' and 'controllable' due to the fact that they received regular testing for STD's and who worked in licensed *locales;* and the clandestine women who worked in the street and were considered a danger to society as they were 'uncontrollable' and assumed to be the vectors of illnesses such as HIV/AIDS. Due to the regulation, clandestine prostitutes are stigmatized and marginalized even more than registered prostitutes. They face police violence and corruption on a daily basis.

Señora Pilar belongs to a group of clandestine prostitutes. She is a mother of two, of whom one is recently married, as she proves by proudly showing the pictures of her daughter in bridal gown. Her son of eight lives with her and goes to school in their neighbourhood. Señora Pilar comes to work after she has finished her household chores and has left her son at school. Although she does not work daily, she is a regular. Her presence depends on how much money she receives from her daughter. The area of street prostitution in the inner-city slums in Lima where she works is considered the lowest in work-place hierarchy. It pays poorly: $2.50 a client. But even that is more than most of these women would earn on the formal labour market. Some women, like Señora Pilar, supplement their earnings by pick pocketing their clients.

On one visit to the street, the scholar [Lorraine Nencel] ran into Pilar and intended to have a short conversation with her when they were suddenly disturbed by a group of schoolboys passing by. When one of the oldest boys murmured a sly remark to Pilar, she smacked him in the face with her pocket-book. She immediately justified her reaction: 'He is just a schoolboy, he could be my son, not only that, he should show some respect while we are talking. We normally hide inside when school children come by'.

Pilar's reaction gives insight into the interrelatedness of structure and agency. Structural constraints of poverty and lack of education limit the possibility for women like Pilar to choose and create options in their lives. Prostitution becomes one of the few viable opportunities for women from certain socio-economic strata. Moreover, the shame that is felt by many of the women working as clandestine prostitutes is partly the result of the institutionalization of prostitution through its regulation. This shame is also inscribed by hegemonic meanings of gender that exclude the possibility for women to be sexually assertive and do not condone transgressions of these norms.

Pilar's reaction is however also an expression of her agency. She acts to resolve an unpleasant situation to the best of her ability. Seen from the actor's perspective, she is managing and balancing multipositional gender identifications as a poor woman, mother and prostitute. Her reaction was not only provoked by the shame she felt for being a prostitute, but also by the pride she feels at being a mother and the respect she feels she deserves as an adult. The slap in the boy's face represents her attempt to manage these various perceptions in her own sense of identity. For the majority of the mothers who prostitute, their motherhood is a significant part of their sense of identity and one of the few things that makes their work gratifying. The one simple action of slapping the young boy is an expression of how different dynamics of 'identity formation' conflate in daily lived experiences.

The structuring impact of discourses on identification / differentiation

must not necessarily be understood in contradictory terms. After all, they allow individual 'identity' constructors to appropriate meanings and identifications offered by these discourses. Moreover, for discourses to become dominant some autonomous space for deviation in acting and identification is required.

The politics of identity

So far we have worked out some proposals for understanding the relationship between the meta-concept of 'identity formation' and related concepts such as class, culture, self, hegemony, discourse, identification / differentiation, narrative and cultural orientation. Next, we have elaborated several tensions and balances that can be used to problematize crucial dimensions of the study of identity formation. Of course, these elaborations are far from complete. They deserve to be worked out in further detail.

One of the fields that merits special attention in this respect is the field of identity politics. We already stressed that the constitution and positioning of oneself in the world is profoundly political in nature. It takes place in the interactions between hegemonic processes and structures and the everyday politics of groups and individuals with diverging and conflictive interests. Identity formation is intertwined with the struggle for scarce resources, is embedded in asymmetrical power relations and is articulated with the contestation and imposition of dominant discourses as well as the recovery of space of manoeuvre by individuals and groups. In this political game, identification and differentiation are not just self-referential processes; they entail a high degree of performativity and strategic calculation.

The politics of identity encompasses a wide field of study and we cannot possibly pay tribute to all its aspects. In the final section of this paper we will start by taking up two lines of the first chapter of this book, on globalization. First we discuss some aspects of the political movements triggered as a reaction to globalization as a (neo-) liberal project, framed around the Washington consensus in the 1990s. A multifarious and dispersed panorama of resistance has mobilized against this project and symbolic struggles over identifications and differentiations have taken centre stage. There is much more behind and besides the visible events in Seattle and Genoa, as we show in the discussion of some of the relevant aspects of so-called anti-globalism in a recent case of protest in the streets of La Paz, Bolivia. Secondly, we discuss globalization not so much as a political project, but in terms of the global flows of people, goods, capital and images that are changing the global condition (see Robertson 1992). These flows increasingly challenge existing identifications and their ensuing institutions. They incite the struggle over new definitions of individuals and groups as people instrumentalise identifications for their own political

purposes. We will bring these debates home to academia by raising some questions about the ways scholars deal with these issues and by proposing some other issues to be studied and scrutinized.

Anti-globalism and identification struggles

On Wednesday the 12th of February 2003, Bolivia lived through one of its most dramatic days in a long series of protests and public manifestations against government policies. Over 20 deaths, hundreds of hospitalized people, attacks on several political party headquarters and large scale looting were reported, primarily in the city of La Paz.

Sustained protest evolved in Bolivia during the preceding administration headed by former dictator Hugo Banzer, and continued during the administration of president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. In broad strokes, the protests might be called anti-neo-liberal resistance – neo-liberal convictions and policies being the common denominator of both aforementioned governments. The protests in Bolivia could be seen as manifestations of diverse popular sectors' rejection of neo-liberal adjustments or the lack of compensation for their impact. Identifications / differentiations of the protesters could be acknowledged as disperse and multiple, but united in their rejection of government policies.

However, the logics of protests are often more anarchic. The occurrences of the 12th of February detonated when military 'protecting' the presidential palace fired at demonstrating policemen demanding higher wages and the withdrawal of a tax bill. The military reaction was however in the first place directed against the rock throwing youth, present in the same central square in La Paz, who demanded the dismissal of their school principal and also went on to air their rejection of government policy in general and the tax bill in particular. This tax bill would affect the police and all other 'formally' employed people in Bolivia, but would only indirectly affect the many millions working in Bolivia's informal economy, and would affect the pupils even less. Yet, the tax bill ignited broad protest because it was interpreted as yet another measure to make ordinary Bolivians pay the bill for the country's troubled economic situation and the neo-liberal and IMF inspired remedies.

Nevertheless, in the events of the 12th of February, the two most powerful protest groups against neo-liberalism were not part of the initial protest. One of them is the Movimiento al Socialismo, a party headed by Evo Morales, the coca-farmers' leader. He directed many protest initiatives during the Banzer administration and was rewarded for it by obtaining the second place during the 2002 elections. He is an Aymara as are many of his followers, but ambivalently plays with this identification of belonging to a historically repressed

ethnic minority. His main demands express resistance against the government (and USA-promoted) policy to eradicate 'excessive' (suspected cocaine-related) coca cultivation. In his discourse, he combines different identity frames by referring to 'the sacred leave' in indigenous traditions, to the rescue of national sovereignty and to the rejection of the neo-liberal philosophy because it hurts 'ordinary Bolivians'. He vowed to oppose the present government, but yet neither he nor his party/movement were directly involved in the protests on February 12th. He did not hesitate, however, to demand the presidents' resignation immediately after the events on the 12th and to threaten with new protests.

Felipe Quispe is the other central figure in Bolivia's ongoing protest cycle, but his undisputed mobilizing capacity played no role in the ignition of the protests of the 12th of February either. Adorned with the Andean honorific title of *mallku*, he is more unequivocally playing the ethnic card, combining harsh words against *blanco/mestizos* with fierce attacks on neo-liberal politics. His party *(Movimiento Indígena Pachakutic)* did surprisingly well in the 2002 elections. His main topic is the impoverishment of highland peasants, but he easily connects this issue with the overall illegitimacy of governments headed by the 'historical oppressors', the *blanco/mestizos*. His relation with Morales is tense.

There are many other groups in Bolivia rallying against political measures: pensioners against the low level of their payments, consumers against price increases and privatizations, schoolteachers against the level of their wages, entrepreneurs against the failing reactivation of the economy. Within all these groups and among them, affinities are not always strong, co-operation is weak or absent, and identifications are shifting from ethnic through socio-economic to regional and national parameters, in shifting configurations and relative primacies – including the ones relatively inconsequential for collective political action.

There is thus a (co)incidental conflation of interests and fragments of 'identity', along with more persistent animosities and dissimilarity. Feelings of 'nearness' and shared interests coexist with feelings of competition and jealousy. There is no stable, 'logical' correlation between the identifications deployed and the specific roles and positions taken in the protesters' camp. As they shift between and mingle performative and self-referential dimensions of identification, they reveal affinities and convergence, and on this basis they underscore their diversity.

In short, the contestation over globalization, epitomized by anti-globalism and resistance against neo-liberalism, cannot be understood just in culturalist terms, as this Bolivian example demonstrates. However, we also cannot deny the strong mobilizing potential of identification struggles within the present global condition. Morales' identification with 'ordinary Bolivians' as opposed to

neo-liberal policies and Quispe's call for resistance against 'historical oppressors', the *blanco/mestizos,* highlight this potential. The struggle over loyalties, identifications and differentiations cannot be relegated to a mere superstructure borrowing its dynamics from an economic or political infrastructure. Politics, identifications and economic interests have their own dynamics, but at certain moments and in certain events they become inextricably intertwined leaving no room for causal explanations.

The Bolivian example also shows that the struggle over globalization as a political project is far from homogeneous. There is no unified camp opposing neo-liberalism and globalism on a world scale, not even at the national level. Different and sometimes conflicting interests between various movements and parties lurk behind a common rejection of neo-liberalism and globalism. Conflicting interests mingle with identifications driving the parties and movements apart and resulting e.g. in the fragmented picture of protest in Bolivia as painted above. The struggle over identifications has both a mobilizing and a divisive potential.

The project the protest is rallying against is also far from unitary. It would certainly be an overestimation of its capabilities to understand globalization as a masterplan effectively manipulating interests, identifications and politics all over the world. Even more, the amalgam of practices and intentions attributed to the project by its opponents, varying from IMF-instructed budget cuts to programmes to eradicate 'excessive' coca production, suggest more coherence in the minds of these opponents than in the think tanks supporting the globalization project. To some extent, globalism and neo-liberalism have become reified symbols for the sake of mobilizing resistance and covering up internal differences.

Nevertheless, all these qualifications are not meant to deny the existence of globalization as a hegemonic project. The concept of hegemony allows us to acknowledge the non-essentialist play of diversity, complexity and partial contingency of the processes and movements involved as well as the intricate intersections between identifications and interests, between differentiations and politics, while taking into account that this play is partially structured and driven by (f)actors with specific interests and definitions, and interrelated with asymmetrical power relations.

Global flows and identity politics

Currently, affirming 'one's own (collective) identity' is often seen as a defence mechanism or reaction against globalization's tendency to homogenize, wipe out cultural particularities, and neglect traditions and local knowledge. Moreover, an 'identity of one's own' is advocated as a minority right in the context

of dominant societies. Both in debates on and struggles about multiculturalism, 'identity' plays a major role. Here we are dealing with the consequences of globalization, not so much as a political project, but as a significant increase in the intensity of global flows of people, goods, capital, images etc.

It has almost become trivial to state that globalization produces 'a sense of loss' and anxiety about the identity and place of individuals, groups and nations. This anxiety is held responsible for the current rise in revitalizations of traditions, inherited cultural codes, rituals and cultural legacies. In turn, such revitalizations may come about with very specific political or strategic interests in mind. 'Groups 'discover' their cultural uniqueness and exploit it for political purposes' (Eriksen 2001: 309). The claim that globalization produces current identity projects is however hard to asses with concrete analyses of stimuli and responses. In any case, there are numerous examples of efforts to produce a distinguished 'cultural identity' in national and local realms prior to or with only secondary links to global influences (i.e. Basques, North-American Indigenous Peoples, Zulus). Both segregational strives and negotiations on group and territorial autonomy have existed before globalization obtained central stage. The consequences of global flows are not as clear-cut as they appear at first sight. Nonetheless, it seems plausible that in many cases, the strengthening of group demarcation draws upon the threat of global influences for inherited identifications. Globalization may have enhanced or amplified the urgency of revitalization, ethnic or nationalist movements.

However, such processes are also enabled by global discourses that support the right and legitimacy of difference and self-protection and by global technologies. For example, the Amazonian indigenous peoples tap into the internationally widely supported discursive frame on 'biodiversity protection' to underscore the legitimacy of their demands for territorial autonomy. Another example: the dissemination of new communication technologies is both a symbol for the economic integration and free market agreements that the Zapatistas in Chiapas (Mexico) resist, and an opportunity they use to ask for solidarity and support. Thus, it seems as if globalization contributed to both the motive and the means for identity politics. Moreover, the distinction between internal and external resources for cultural self-identification and identity politics has blurred. Cross-overs between alleged authentic sources and exogenous influences are often very paradoxical.

Such cross-overs also point to the changing significance of state territoriality, of the state's capacity to control territory and society in the wake of globalization. Challenging the idea of a 'national identity' and thus the legitimacy of the foundation of state authority, globalization undermines the effectiveness of the state's agency in obtaining economic, social, and physical security for its

inhabitants, giving rise to sub-state or global identifications. A growing tension can be discerned between identifications as embedded in traditional territorial and political structures and those emerging from the rise of network society (Castells 1997 and 2000). This does not necessarily negate the legitimacy of territoriality but does diminish the role of territory as a framework for generating trust, reliable institutions and resulting identifications. The world is waiting for new institutional answers that resonate with these changes (see Dijkink & Knippenberg 2001: 19).

Globalization and its challenge to institutions and identifications and ensuing identity politics not only bring up opportunities, but also risks. First, assertions of one's 'identity' often come with a refusal to (self-) criticise this 'identity'. Reluctance to include 'care for the other' in one's identity-delimitation can lead to group egoism, confrontational logics and intolerance of group members who do not behave according to group standards or refuse to limit their loyalty exclusively to the group. The reification of one's 'collective identity' can lead to a denial of choice for group members. We also need to ask 'how [we] should take note of the relations between different people across borders whose identifications include, inter alia, solidarities based on classifications other than partitioning according to nations and political units, such as class, gender, or political and social beliefs' (Sen 1998: 28).

Second, self-enclosure in asserted collective identifications will block the possibility of learning from persons outside the collectivity. In such cases, identity politics end up in self-righteousness and in the denial to take other viewpoints into consideration. This would mean subjective solidification instead of openness, and turns identity politics into an obstacle to multicultural society. Self-enclosure is easily produced when 'identity' is understood not as a meta-concept but as something real, to be located at the operational level as if it were tangible. Seeing identity as a 'meta' rather than an operational concept can take us from a self-enclosed and reified to a flexible and delicate understanding of the processes involved.

A-synchronies and research priorities

Using 'identity' (formation) as a meta-concept points to a crucial shift in our conceptualization. As explained above, as researchers we have left behind the essentialist idea of a primordial, heritage-like or kernel-like image of 'identity'. Instead, it has become popular to stress the dynamic, hybrid, fluid or indeterminate nature of the phenomena and processes inferred by the meta-concept of 'identity formation'.

However, one can hear anthropologists and cultural studies scholars complain that just when they had painstakingly adopted these and a range of

other de-essentializing characteristics of 'culture' and 'identity', they see themselves confronted with voices in society that claim, cherish and defend their 'culture', 'cultural identity', and traditions, departing from a notion of 'culture' that evokes just that: essence, self-enclosure and authenticity. This suggests that developments in academia and developments in the realm of identity politics in the globalizing world are out of sync.

This situation can partly be explained by differences in goals and settings. Identity politics framed in essentialist terms can be an asset or strategic necessity for subordinated and deprived people to construct distinctive or defiant identifications for themselves to defend their interests. Essentialist and self-enclosed identity politics are of course also used by dominant political actors, as recent developments since September 11th, 2001, have shown. George W. Bush constantly confronts the world with the simple option of 'either you are with us, or with the terrorists'. In short, identifications may be experienced and used in very absolute and totalizing ways, especially by those involved in struggle and conflict.

By contrast, in academia such strategic considerations are less salient, opening up the possibility to highlight the very delicate, subtle and pluriform processes that may be involved in identity formation. An academic perspective can and should account for the relative, variable and changing aspects involved. However, it would be wrong to suggest that a clear-cut breach between academic and political 'uses' of identity politics exists. The academic interest, to begin with, has definitely contributed to the current preoccupation about the effect of globalization on 'identity', and has partially delivered the vocabulary for both the struggles for the recognition of difference and diversity themselves and for the dominant political discourses on these struggles. In this sense, much identity politics echoes academic research. The research and its dissemination feeds into societal tensions and problems, and the epistemological logics behind it leave an imprint on how actors perceive themselves in their relational constellations. The question must for example be raised whether our image of identity as flexible, fluid, and non-essentialistic has served current capitalist interests, i.e. its need for the flexibilization of labour relations and the recurrent downsizing and restructuring of companies. Are we guilty of contributing to the 'corrosion of character' of those involved in these processes (Sennett 1998)?

Research priorities inevitably involve political choices. We want to close this chapter indicating lines of research that may be of particular interest. First, identity politics and the contested nature of identity formation present an array of examples and cases that call for much more attention. Identity politics seems to have risen to a level of prime importance in the struggles over access to resources and over who decides on inclusion and exclusion processes. We

may for example refer to the debates about the multicultural society in which the acceptance and access to resources of specific people defined in terms of specific identifications are at stake. We may also point to the fact that access to jobs and contracts is often decided using criteria that are framed in terms of 'identity'.

Moreover, once identity politics becomes an object of or a key player within political strife and competition for resources, the danger of ethnicization of identifications into fundamentalist movements lies ahead. In the wake of such movements, identity positions may increasingly be framed in essentialist terms and give impetus to polarization, oppression and violence. An issue of particular importance here is the way in which institutional or governance arrangements are (un)able to deal with such problems or have become part of the problem instigating fundamentalist or nationalist polarization. These problems are surely not easy to tackle, but pose important challenges for further study.

Second, our fascination with the often colourful and multifarious expressions of the persons we study, must not blind us to problematic aspects of these manifestations. Despite post-modern celebrations of people's colourful expressions, it remains important to pose questions such as to what extent an individual needs an experience of wholeness, based on an awareness of self, in the face of a multiplicity of identifications. Are there limits to his or her capacity to manage this multiplicity and what are his or her experiences when this capacity becomes exhausted? Will the imposition of particular identities by powerful actors on people not lead to alienation and disaffection? Is there a danger of dissolving all definitions of the self-referential in these processes by overstretching the relations between the performative and self-referential and how do the persons concerned experience such cases? In addition, where does an affirmative self-referential construction of one's image or narrative of self end and derail into self-enclosed solidification? The capacity of individuals to manage the relational aspects of 'identity formation' may not be endless. If this is the case, its problematic dimensions deserve theoretical attention and empirical evidence.

The challenge is to link power, inclusion and exclusion in relation to resources on the one hand and the struggle over identifications on the other, to the ways in which people manage to accommodate their experiences with these identifications. Studying these experiences may offer a good ground for combining sociology and anthropology with approaches from psychology. Identity formation derives its dynamics from the dialectic between the capacity of people to create a sense of themselves and their power and space of manoeuvre within asymmetrical power relations.

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