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Editor's Note

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EDITOR'S NOTE

I. Kaleidoscopic Identities

Identity continues to be a profoundly intriguing as well as complex phenomenon.¹ How to signify it, delineate its various components and explain their relationships, and keep an open and observant mind for shifting combinations has never been an easy task. Despite the difficulty of the project, however, concern with identity is unabated. As Jan Scholte writes,

Preoccupation with identity, in its interrelated personal and collective senses, have figured pervasively and crucially in modern social life. Issues of self/group identification have had significant bearing on a full spectrum of human interests, activities, norms and social structures. Past centuries are replete with instances where people have killed and been killed in the assertion of their senses of being and belonging. A need for recognition—to define oneself . . . and to have that identity acknowledged by others—persists as a first-order concern in contemporary social relations. Certainly under conditions of modernity . . . the pursuit of identity has ranked alongside, and has been deeply interconnected with, core and social issues of subsistence, power, communion and knowledge.²

If identity is so crucial to what is human about us, the more reason for us to interrogate it closely. Let us begin by offering a working definition: identity is the sum of a variety of ways that (a) knowledge about "I" is constructed and (b) others extend recognition.³ For the purpose of our remarks, we postulate three main nodal points in the making of identity: the self, the national, and the transnational.

The construction of the self is a most intimate activity.⁴ In its initial and physical moment, the proto-self is, literally, the outcome of a copulation of two other humans (even if at some remove from each other in these days of high science). Carrying genetic traits of the line of progenitors, the processes of rearing and socialization commence as the infant slowly enters three coexisting worlds: the natural, or the world of non-human life and of objects; the "grid of inheritance," or history; and contingency, or the realm of individuation.⁵ The first, *prima facie*, sets

the material parameters of life. The second is the bequeathal of tradition, exemplified and delivered by the guardians, immediate others, and institutions. Here, in a most concrete sense, the principal norms, or “operative public values,” of a community are introduced, which, in turn, demarcate what is acceptable behavior and what is a transgression. The third underscores the adventure of living in the present and in the face of the future, where some degree of maneuver, choice, or will, may appear. Historically, however, there has always been tension between the relatively fixed and the more permeable — a source of numerous and often colliding claims. Consequently, the challenge has been and continues to be how to create a delicate balance between continuity and, in the words of the African painter and writer Breyten Breytenbach, “a temporary awareness meeting and mating moment to moment.”⁶ Such an understanding of the rudimentary basis of the working of the self is different from deconstructionist and other perspectives that submit that the self is tantamount to a perpetual changefulness without origins or purpose.⁷

But the social circle of intimate consciousness extends further. Other spheres of self include gender, class, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, ethnicity, and race. It is difficult, if not impossible, to discern *a priori* the exact nature of and specific relationships between these factors. However, we may safely state that some form of interdigitation usually exists that complicates (or enriches) belonging and intersubjectivity.⁸ In addition, these categories constitute some of the basic elements of the thick undergrowth as well as the tall branches of modern identity. In both cases, an atmosphere of contestation prevails. But in our own hypertime of late modernity, a thrusting forth of adoration of one category or another has become familiar. For some, this situation is testimony to a long overdue erosion of an archaic and repressive ordering of self and, consequently, a breaking out into new opportunities for redefinition. For others, such a condition is more worrisome—it highlights a deepening doubt about, if not loss of, the community in the self. “Unlike other past epochs,” writes Andre Gorz, “individual being and social being no longer coincide and can no longer coincide so that the individual will belong to community in work, lifestyle, ethics, and position within the social totality.”⁹ Gorz concludes

his observation by asserting that the proliferation of roles and expectations triggers fissures that, ironically, alienate one component of the self from the others.

If the self is increasingly overstrained, identity through nationalism seems equally under stress. The appearance of nationalism as a collective ideology and movement is correctly associated with the birth and rise of the nation-state. While societies bring different resources and orientations to the project, in its elementary form, nationalism grew out of a marriage between two contradictory processes: a consolidation of pre-existing kin groups and a newly conceived, more inclusive ideology.¹⁰ In this respect, the nation or, more precisely, the loose conglomeration of cultural and ethnic groups—that is, the *Volk*—is fundamentally an invention. To keep the pieces from flying apart, then, requires another innovation—a reorganization of the structures and reach of authority. Here, one might suggest, lies an element in the origins of public power. Be that as it may, the formation of the nation is also a response to the Other—a world increasingly characterized by aggregation of power and fierce competition for resources and glory. Whether to capitalize on available opportunities—as was the case with the pioneers—or to effectively respond to the humiliation of defeat, domination, and marginalization—in the case of many others—a strengthening of the existing state apparatuses or the creation of new ones became the signature tune of the modern era. As a result, loyalty and allegiance along a wider arc would now count as important prerequisites for belonging.¹¹ In short, the cobbling of nation and state has been a simultaneous reaction to internal dynamics and external exigencies. But such is a potentially precarious condition. In one sense, national identity can easily become entangled in a latent, but often fissiparous, domestic particularism¹²—bruising it, sapping it of vitality, or, in extreme circumstances, destroying it altogether. The spectrum ranges from Canada, Britain, Spain, and Turkey to the former Yugoslavia and Somalia. In another sense, national identity can be buffeted by intrusive exogenous forces, always angling for advantage and influence. Such a situation often results in destabilization, dislocation, and xenophobic animus toward those deemed as outsiders.

Transnationalism and supraterritoriality are shaking the very foundations of identity. However, this, too, is not a one-dimensional process; transnationalism comes from different sources and takes many forms. For instance, it could be set off by economic, intellectual, religious, ecological, gender, or racial concerns that could usher in a stretching, if not a novel conception, of the constitution of identity. Such are possible bases for the birth of new global affinities. But transnationalism could also be the vector of homogenization, collective debasement, and, consequently, mutual antagonism. Convinced that the liabilities were about to eclipse the benefits, Paul Ricoeur asserted,

The phenomenon of universalization, while being an advancement of mankind, at the same time constitutes a sort of subtle destruction, not only of traditional cultures, which might not be an irreparable wrong, but also of what I shall call for the time being the creative nucleus of great civilizations and great cultures, that nucleus on the basis of which we interpret life. . . . We have the feeling that this [advancing] single world civilization. . . exerts a sort of attrition or wearing away at the expense of the cultural resources which have made the great civilizations of the past. This threat is expressed, among other disturbing effects, by the spreading before our eyes of a mediocre civilization which is the absurd counterpart of what I [call] elementary culture. Everywhere throughout the world, one finds the same bad movie, the same slot machines, the same plastic or aluminum atrocities, the same twisting of language by propaganda, etc. It seems as if mankind, by approaching *en masse* a basic consumer culture, were also stopped *en masse* at a subcultural level. Thus we come to the crucial problem confronting nations just rising from underdevelopment. In order to get onto the road toward modernization, is it necessary to jettison the old cultural past which has been the *raison d'être* of a nation?¹³

More than thirty years after this prescient warning, globalization, or what Anthony Giddens calls "action at distance," is creating more bewildering vicissitudes of unprecedented scale and speed.¹⁴ In reaction, all sorts of tactics and strategies are being put forward. For instance, some suggest running for cover by resuscitating nationalism and refortifying the national state; others respond by declaring new and more local configurations of

identity through the appropriation of the principles of self-determination. Still others see great advantage in accepting the world as one unit and, therefore, working out effective ways to successfully ride the great waves of globalization. Whatever the possibilities and choices, then, there is little disagreement that this is an age of the fragmented identity. To forestall the onset of schizophrenic disconnect will require, as in the past, positive engagement with one's multiple identities, which always include parts of the other.¹⁵

II. The Roundtable

Interpreting the ancient dictum of liberal learning "Know Thyself" as an invitation to the formation of identity, the 1996 Macalester International Roundtable was designed to continue this perennial discussion. Of course, self-sculpting is not just a solitary affair; it is also a collective project embedded in some "stream of life." Now that the familiar cusp between the local and national is further complicated by unpredictable and continuous changes in these and other spheres of existence, new and difficult challenges are added to the old. With these concerns in mind, the Roundtable was framed by the following broad questions.

- What is the self?
- What is identity?
- What is to become of national belonging and nationalism in a time of ascending claims of identity and mounting transnationalization?
- Can an overstrained self engage the making of a "horizon of meaning" fitting to moral communities for a future that could work?

In this volume, we have two keynote essays. **Benedict Anderson** attempts to discern global categories through the "modern grammars of seriality." Pointing toward the role of languages—bent to the logic of the new forces shaping the modern world—as critical transmission belts in the encounter between mentalities, he stresses the coming of a standardization of images and a flattening of time. Anderson focuses on two types of serialities: "unbounded" and "bounded." The first is more open and con-

tingent upon “acting” it out; the latter, a consequence of state actions such as census, is tightly circumscribed. He concludes by outlining some implications, including a possible descent into even more exclusive claims of identity.

The other opening and companion piece is by **Seyla Benhabib**. She begins with the firm assertion that we are in a time of desperation: the givens of political and cultural life are dehydrating fast and there is an almost forlorn effort to resuscitate them. With continental Europe as a primary space of reference, she concentrates on the various forms of identity and mobilization of difference in an age of greater and contradictory intimacies. Benhabib argues that identity, while an “elusive philosophical concept” is, nonetheless, crucial in the making of a political community. The essay brings out such key factors as gender and nationalism, and concludes with an offer of a “narrative model” to aid us in negotiating ubiquitous polarizations.

We begin the rest of the Roundtable with a spirited discussion on the Middle East, particularly the Arab world. **Emmanuel Sivan’s** essay focuses on the fate of pan-Arab nationalism in a time, he thinks, of profound disillusionment. Sivan argues that the myths that energized such broad identity are fading. In their place, he suggests, are three competing imaginaries: a recentering of the nation-state, Radical Islam, and Middle Easternism. **Alberto Moya Monge** registers Sivan’s concentration on the predominant category in the region — Arab identity. However, his major concerns include the very definition of the Middle East and, like other discussants, the total absence of the otherwise very relevant Israeli nationalism from the essay. **Eileen Whelan’s** response brings the “Irish Question” into the discussion by reminding us how the mixture of nationalism and religious affiliation have created bloody and continuing contentions over identity. **Michael Shapiro** mounts a learned and deftly deconstructive intervention. In his estimation, Sivan’s essay, at first blush, seems to offer a discussion on “contending Arab visions.” However, on a second and closer look, one discovers that the real dialogue is between Sivan’s own “geo-strategic” vision and one attributed to the “Other.” For Shapiro, the identities of Arab and Jew have historically shared such a closeness that possibilities exist for inclusive multiculturalist reformulations.

The next section revolves around **Jean Comaroff's** wide-ranging contribution. Her essay brings forth a series of questions that crystalize the peculiarities of our epoch, including an over-heating of the dialectic of citizenship and frequent assertions of ethnicity. Comaroff instructs us that an understanding of the historical structures in transformation is key to the continuous making, if not reorientation, of identities. It is in this context, then, that such a paradox as "ethnic sovereignty" and national belonging, especially in fragile post-apartheid South Africa, is broached. **Minh Ta** confirms the critical consequences of late multinational capital, the transnationalizing effects of communications networks, and the ascent of new forms of nationalism. His main reservations are two: first, Comaroff, as well as the Roundtable's concept of the self, seems to him to intimate a "singular self" rather than "multiple selves," and, second, the essay relies heavily on materialist analysis. He ends by inserting into the conversation the concepts of *intersectionality* and *performativity*. **Mulugeta Aregawi** agrees with points made by Comaroff, but he has two main criticisms: that the essay underplays the force of class in the constitution of identity, and that it assumes that globalization is pervasive everywhere. To contradict the latter, Aregawi gives a synoptic profile of Ethiopia. If Ta concluded that the essay leans on Marx's method, Aregawi thinks the other way. **Ola Rotimi** opens with a fierce contention of what globalization means. From his perspective, it is essentially a deleterious phenomenon, driven by economic exploitation. Further, while he sees ordinary ethnic affinity in a positive light, he nonetheless suggests that it turns into poison when one group or another uses that affiliation to commandeer institutions like the state to foist an exclusive utility upon the rest. In such situations, he concludes, ethnic identity eats away at the legitimacy of a polity.

The third panel is assembled around **Samira Kawash's** meditations. Fixing her attention on ethnic identity and the globalizing media, she emphasizes both the plasticity of ethnicity and the accelerative dynamics of "commodity capitalism." Kawash exposes how the prevalent and dominant discourse, particularly in the United States, sets up a typology of acceptable and repulsive representations of ethnicity. The first contains comfortable diversity that is tolerable; the latter captures all that is strange

and dangerous. It is Kawash's counterpoint that such a binary arrangement avoids, among other things, differences within. **Thea Gelbspan** appreciates how the essay links ethnicity to globalization and the adept use of evidence from the media. Nonetheless, she finds a rather disappointing disjunction between what, in her opinion, is a forceful analysis and the tentative conclusions of the essay. Gelbspan ends with an autobiographical note that expresses her stance on the world-system. **Vlad Georgescu** validates the arguments to the effect that a powerful alliance of U.S. media and their sponsoring transnational corporations appropriated the spirit of the 1996 Summer Olympics. Further, he points to how "deranged ethnicity" has affected the Balkans and has presented his own country, Romania, with plenty to worry about. But Georgescu also sees positive value in ethnic identity and globalization if everyone refuses to give in to the chauvinism in all of us and, instead, works on extending sympathy and recognition to the other. **Ellis Dye** challenges Kawash for, in his opinion, first side-stepping so quickly a much-needed definition or conceptualization of ethnicity—the main term of the essay—and, second, reiterating the familiar. In Dye's thinking, if concepts such as ethnicity are to help us master the difficulties that confront us, scholars of Kawash's high intelligence must undertake a deeper fathoming of our condition.

The last of our discussions is led by **Ashis Nandy**. Taking India as his primary spatial and cultural milieu, he argues that the modern self in the region is simultaneously a conduit for the ways of the outside world and a conveyor of Indian experiences. These dual functions create a complex dialogue within the self. With this assertion as a backdrop, Nandy enters into an elaborate reflection on the nature and evolution of the state, nationalism, and politics in India. For him, history and memory are battlegrounds where the "modernized Indian" meets the continuity of deep, "ahistorical" tradition. Because the encounter is poorly negotiated, a form of neocolonial *mentalité* reigns—a source of the troubled identities in the sub-continent. **Jeya Paul** is sympathetic to Nandy's biting criticism of modernity's continuing impact on the self but is unsure about the alternative he seems to intimate. She cautions us about the danger inherent in total rejection of the legacies of the Enlightenment or the oppor-

tunities presented by contemporary globalization. Both, Paul writes, offer possibilities to rework and enrich identity. **Rubén Guillemí** is so appreciative of the psychic and cultural uprooting that Nandy identifies with the creation of the modern Indian self that he relates it, and changes in world order, to his part of the world — Argentina and Brazil. **Arjun Guneratne** contests Nandy's central proposition that Indian identity produced by modernity is unlike the one shaped in the context of indigenous culture. Guneratne's vigorous response revolves around three subjects: culture, memory, and the state.

The contributions to this volume deal with an important aspect of human life in the closing years of the century. We continue this spirit in 1997 when the theme of the International Roundtable will be "Nature, People, and Globalization."

Notes

1. Henry Harris, ed., *Identity*, essays based on Herbert Spencer lectures given at the University of Oxford (Oxford: Clarendon Press and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); and Axel Honneth, *The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1995).
2. Jan Aart Scholte, "The Geography of Collective Identities in a Globalizing World" in *Review of International Political Economy* 3, no. 4 (1996): 567.
3. Charles Taylor suggests that "identity . . . designates something like a person's understanding of who they are, of their fundamental defining characteristics as a human being." Charles Taylor, with commentary by Amy Gutmann, ed., et al., *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition"* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 25.
4. Galen Strawson writes,
Our natural, unreflective conception of the self seems to have six main elements. First, the self is thought of as a thing, in some sense. Second, it is thought of as specifically mental, in some sense. Third, it is thought of as single. Fourth, it is thought of as something that has a certain character or personality. Fifth, it is thought of as something that is ontologically distinct from all other things. Sixth, it is thought of as something that is a subject of experience, a conscious feeler, thinker, chooser.
"The Sense of Self" in *London Review of Books*, 18 April 1996, 21.
5. Quassim Cassam, *Self and World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
6. Breyten Breytenbach, *The Memory of Birds in Times of Revolution* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 159.
7. For more exploration of this point, see Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989); and Calvin O. Schrag, *The Self after Postmodernity* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1997).

8. Immanuel Wallerstein and Etienne Balibar, *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, trans. Chris Turner (London and New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 1991).

9. Andre Gorz, *Capitalism, Socialism, Ecology*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1994), 24.

10. The literature on the formation of nationalism is vast. For various perspectives, see the structural-functionalism of Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983); the Marxism of Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and the language and state of mind orientation of Liah Greenfield, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992). See also, Periwal Sukumar, ed., *Notions of Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); David Miller, *On Nationality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986); and Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, eds., *Becoming National: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

11. Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

12. Gidon Gottlieb, *Nation Against State: A New Approach to Ethnic Conflicts and the Decline of Sovereignty* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1993); and Richard Caplan and John Feffer, eds., *Europe's New Nationalism: States and Minorities in Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

13. Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth*, translated and with an introduction by Charles A. Kelbley (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University, 1965), 276-77.

14. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1990); Immanuel Wallerstein, *After Liberalism* (New York: The New Press, 1995); Martin Albrow, *The Global Age: State and Society Beyond Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); David Jacobson, *Rights across Borders: Immigration and the Decline of Citizenship* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Saskia Sassen, *Losing Control? Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Zdravko Milnar, *Globalization and Territorial Identities* (Aldershot, England: Avebury, 1992); Leo Panitch, "Globalization and the State" in *Socialist Register* (1994); Akhil Gupta, "The Song of the Nonaligned World: Transnational Identities and the Reinscription of Space in Late Capitalism" in *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1992); and Richard Maxwell, "Ethics and Identity in Global Market Research" in *Cultural Studies* 10, no. 2 (1996).

15. "The making and sustaining of our identity in the absence of a heroic effort to break out of ordinary existence," Charles Taylor instructs us, "remains dialogical throughout our lives." Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition,"* 34.