Civil Society and the Limits of Identity Politics

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L'auteur défend l'idée que la politique de l'identité, telle que menée par les groupes et mouvements de la société civile, n'a plus de pouvoir d'émancipation. Elle tend à être exclusive et destructrice. L'auteur invite à repenser la politique de l'identité de manière à la rendre créative et fondée sur le dialogue. Pour que cela soit possible, il faut que la politique de l'identité tienne compte du contexte social et des souffrances de l'autre. Une telle approche, selon l'auteur, créerait dans la société civile l'espace nécessaire au dialogue, à la tolérance et à l'ouverture et permettrait de surmonter les limites actuelles de la politique d'identité.

The Problem

Voluntary associations, social movements and struggles for recognition constitute a significant domain of civil society and the contemporary revival of the idea of civil society owes much to these movements and struggles. In the last four decades, social movements have fought for the recognition of suppressed groups-race, caste, ethnicity, and gender--and this struggle has a historical as well as continued contemporary significance. As Francis Fox Piven who is otherwise critical of some of the dangerous implications of identity politics tells us: "..identity politics is especially necessary to lower status peoples, to those who are more insecure, and who are more likely to be deprived of recognition and respect by wider currents of culture and social interaction. Subordinate groups try to construct distinctive and sometimes defiant group identities, perhaps to defend themselves against dominant definitions… Moreover, the construction of distinctive identities may be a necessary prelude to self-organisation and political assertion...Indeed, in the cauldron of an American politics based on

difference, immigrants who had previously recognised only a village or a locale as their homeland invented new national identities… For them, the construction of new identities was a vehicle of at least psychic emancipation, and sometimes political empowerment as well" (Piven, 1995: 106).

Identity politics as an aspect of movements and struggles for recognition is an important part of our contemporary world. As Kevin Hetherington argues: "Identity politics is now celebrated as the arena of cultural and political resistance within society and is often viewed as indicative of a move to a new type of postmodern or late-modern society" (Hetherington, 1998: 22). But now there is a need to rethink identity, identity politics as part of a struggle to reconstruct civil society as a space of non-identitarian politics and ethics. The need for such a rethinking has been occasioned by a displacement in the emancipatory promise of identity politics. Earlier identitarian movements were fighting for the emancipation of groups concerned but now they are more preoccupied with the annihilation of the other than with self-emancipation. As Nancy Fraser tells us: "In the Seventies and Eighties, struggles for the 'recognition of difference' seemed charged with emancipatory promise. Many who rallied to the banners of sexuality, gender, ethnicity and 'race' aspired not only to assert hitherto denied identities but to bring a richer, lateral dimension to battles over the redistribution of wealth and power as well. With the turn of the century, issues of recognition and identity have become even more central, yet many now bear a different charge: from Rwanda to Balkans, questions of 'identity' have fuelled campaigns for ethnic cleansing and even genocide.." (Fraser, 2000: 1007). Such a displacement of the emancipatory promise of identity politics is also discernible closer at home. As H. Srikanth tells us about contemporary identity politics in Assam: "For creating and consolidating its respective identities, every group makes efforts to construct the 'other.' Initially, the 'other' was the Bengalis, later the Bangladeshi immigrant and now it could be anyone, an Assamese, a non-tribal, a Muslim, an officer from Guwahati on a trip to Barak valley or even a resident of Lakhsmipur trying for a job in Sivasagar. As the number of identities increases, the lot of 'others' also

multiply. The logic of the 'other' never looks at a person as an individual. He is always seen in relation to the community to which he belongs. The 'other' should always be submissive to the 'natives.' If at any time the other persists and refuses to submit, he needs to be killed or at least deported to his original homeland" (Srikanth, 2000: 4124). Movements of identity politics now promote "repressive forms of communitarianism" and in their preoccupation with "authentic collective identities" "serve less to foster interaction across differences than to enforce separatism, conformism and intolerance" (Fraser, 2000: 119).

In this context, there is a need to look into the limits of identity politics as a part of rethinking identity, difference, community, culture and multiculturalism. The present paper undertakes such an exploration in order to contribute to a reconstruction of civil society as a space of non-identitarian ethics and politics and dialogical care between the self and other. It submits that identity politics, many a time, has taken an involutionary turn in which there has been an assertion of one's identity but such an assertion has not been accompanied by a self-critical move to be reflective about one's own asserted identity and be dialogical to many others in the creation and living of one's identity. This uncritical assertive move within identity politics constitutes a danger to self and cultural creativity. In this context, the key question is how do we live by the dignity of our identity without being involutionary and self-enclosed, closing off our doors and windows? How do we create and recreate our identities but in the process do not become hostile to many others who live in the ecology of such identities? In this context, the paper argues that we need an ethics and politics of identity formation which is not exclusionary but dialogical--identity here is integrally linked to the calling of a dialogical praxis in which the self and the other are in dialogue rather than at each other's throats with sharpened knives. But this dialogical praxis requires self-development and self-transformation on the part of mobilizers of identities--issues which are conspicuous by their absence in the predominantly political connotation and mobilization of civil society at present (Giri, 2000a).

Identity Politics and New Social Movements: The Dialectic of Resource Mobilization and Identity Formation and Beyond

In last three decades new social movements of various kinds - ecology movements, women's movements and student movements - have been important agents of self-development and social change. But these new social movements have changed the logic of collective action as concerned with capture of power and through their vision and experiments have striven for a new identity formation at the heart of which lies a new grammar of life. The new social movements have striven for a new identity formation on the part of the participants and this aspect of their work is contrasted with the work of resource mobilization on the part of old social movements - party-based and class-based. But when we look at contemporary social movements, even of the new social movement variety, we find that there is an intertwining between identity formation and resource mobilization in their work. Thus understanding the work of social movements in terms of the exclusionary or either or logic of identity and resource is not helpful and there is a need now to look at contemporary movements as embodying a dialectic of identity formation and resource mobilization (Giri, 1992; Rochon, 1988). This becomes clear when we look at the vision and dynamics of new social movements of our times such as the U.S. based Christian socio-religious movement of Habitat for Humanity on which I have had the pleasure of carrying out fieldwork (Giri, forthcoming). Habitat for Humanity builds houses for low-income families in around 1500 communities in the U.S. and across sixty countries around the world. Through its activity of service Habitat provides a new identity to its participants--the identity of belonging to a Christian evangelical movement which believes in doing rather than just preaching, and one which is different from numerous charity organizations where people are not given anything for free. For example, the recipients of Habitat contribute to the services they receive--from contributing sweat equity to the building of the house to making regular mortgage payment to the local Habitat project which has sold the house to him / her at no interest and no profit. But when we talk to the volunteers of

Habitat it becomes quite clear that they are interested not only in "identity formation" but also in "resource mobilization." They are able to mobilize resource based on their differential identity, i.e., they are able to generate more resource because they are not like any other charity organization and their mobilized resource helps them not to compromise their identity of belonging to a movement with a difference. With the donation they receive which is partly due to their organization being not any other charity organization, the leaders and volunteers of Habitat are able to maintain their distinctive identity and not knock at the doors of the Government for grant.

At the same time, there is a complexity to the process of identity formation in Habitat which calls for another deeper dialectic, the dialectic of self-reflection and self-transformation. The identity of Habitat volunteers is crucially dependent upon the performance of the homeowners. Homeowners must repay regularly which helps Habitat volunteers to feel secured in their identity of belonging to a movement where their money and labor is not given either as a dole or a charity but becomes a link in an ever-widening circle of "Revolving Fund for Humanity" - a fund with which new houses are built for the needy. The leaders and volunteers of Habitat feel threatened when the homeowners default. In order to secure this identity from all probable threats the actors of Habitat would not hesitate to impose their own middle-class identity upon the homeowners by insisting on the destruction of the dilapidated trailer of a selected homeowner. Some of them also would not feel the prick of conscience in throwing out a defaulting homeowner to the streets of Chicago in a cold winter night (that this actually happened in the Chicago Habitat affiliate was once reported widely in the newspapers in the United States) or suggesting to take out the roof of a poor farmer's Habitat house (this happened in a village in Andhra Pradesh where Habitat had built), thus blurring the thin separating line between vicarious and creative identity formation. This blurring has to do with the sometimes exclusive preoccupation on the part of the Habitat actors with their own spiritual self-development and not relating this to their responsibility to the other and the need to transform

society which structures such an unequal relationship between self and other. Creative identity formation calls for a creative reconciliation between care of self and responsibility to the other, between aesthetics and ethics which in turn is based on a creative relationship between self and other.

In the work of Habitat there is a dialectic between identity formation and resource mobilization but in the process of identity formation there is insufficient attention to the dialectic of critical self-reflection. Thus in understanding movements for alternative identity formation we need to move beyond the sociological dialectic between identity formation and resource mobilization and bring the dialectic of self-transformation and self-reflection to the very heart of identity formation itself. This however calls for understanding dialectics itself in a new way, not concerned with thesis and anti-thesis alone. For Roy Bhaskar, dialectics now needs to be rethought as quest for "open totalities" accompanied by the dialectics of self-transformation (Bhaskar, 1993, 2000). As Roop Rekha Verma argues: "The dialectic by itself does not explain the possibility of cultural change or a critique of culture...What is important to add in this dialectic is that internalization can be reflective or unreflective" (Verma, 1991: 533). It is the lack of a dialectic of self-reflection and self-transformation which make Habitat volunteers blind to the predicament of the homeowners.

It is the work of self-reflection which also relativizes preoccupation with either invariant or absolutist collective identities. In fact, in understanding the work of new social movements we need to be aware of the problem of invariant collective identity. As Sheldon Stryker tells us: "[In new social movements] movement collective identities become bases for members' definition of self" and there is a "blurring here of individual and collective identity" (Stryker, 2000: 24).

Dialectic as critical self-reflection helps us relativize our absolutist self-assertions. It seems that in contemporary women's movement there is a slow recognition of this relativization. Proponents of women's movements now

realize the limits of speaking of women's identity in singular as they become attentive to the differences of class, race / caste, and power within the so-called unified category of gender. In feminist studies and women's movements there is also a recognition of the dangers of essentializing woman as an identity group. As Iris M Young writes: "The identification of 'woman' with a self-conscious political movement seems to designate arbitrarily what, from the vantage point of common sense, seems merely a specific group of women. Moreover, it also appears to restrict in a disciplinary way who gets to be counted as a 'woman.' (Young quoted in Nicholson & Steidman, 1995: 24). Gayatri C. Spivak also offers a similar critique: "I think the hardest lesson for me to learn.. and I have not learnt it, one attempts to learn it everyday - is that the word 'woman' is not after all something for which one can find a literal referent without looking into the looking glass… What I see in the looking glass is not particularly the constituency of feminism" (Spivak, 1990: 70).[1] The dilemma that we face here is: "How can we use group labels without attributing to them any essential characteristics?" (Nicholson & Steidman, 1995: 24).

But coming to terms with such challenges calls for a new mode of participation in the vision and experiments of social movements where struggle for recognition and realization of identity is not tied only to a confrontational logic and vilification of the other. This in turn calls for, as Kevin Hetherington argues, going beyond the "Euclidean geometry of master and slave" (Hetherington, 1995) and recognising each other as friends. In the words of Hetherington: "Social movements..have been associated with a political identity defined by a Euclidean geometry of master and slave - a geometry of opposite sides, opposing classes, opposing genders, opposing skin hues, opposing sexualities and so on. The marginalised have often adopted this geometry as well...To adopt a connotative approach means not only challenging the simplicities of denoting but also the simplicities of Euclidean thought… In many respects, the shift in attention that began in the 1960s and 1970s away from the Euclideanism of capital and labour on to other forms of politics - feminism, civil rights, environmentalism, peace campaigning - might have

challenged this way of thinking about politics. Rather, however, a new Euclideanism has set in and it began with the earliest studies of new social movement theorists looking for a new historical agent (Touraine), a new source of rationality (Habermas), or a new form of identity politics and collective action" (Hetherington, 1995: 29; also see Laclau 1996).

The Limits of Identity Politics

In dealing with identitarian movements then the key question is: "how do we generate ways of understanding identity as central to personal and group formation while avoiding essentialism? And how do we articulate identity so that it can be understood in relation to sociohistorical dynamics?" (Nicholson & Steidman, 1995: 21). This calls for exploring the limits of identity politics as we appreciate its significance in democratizing and pluralizing an earlier centrist, unitarian, authoritarian and monological world.[2] However, it must be made clear at the outset that the exploration of this limit is not from the transcendent and purist standpoint of an external observer but from the vantage point of genuine struggles of identitarian movements themselves as well as from critical participation in and reflection on these.

The first limit of identity politics is that it reifies identities and this reification and substantialization is not only dangerous for the other, it is dangerous for the self as well. Identity politics many a time leads to denial of choice on the part of the individuals whose identities are valorized and fought for. In their different but related ways, both Andre Beteille and Amartya Sen draw our attention to this aspect of limits of identity politics. For Beteille, "the greatest threat to civil society in India comes from the intrusion of collective identities into domains that ought to be governed by rights and obligations of individuals" (Beteille, 1999: 2589). But while Beteille draws our attention to the dangers to individual freedom emanating from collectivist identity politics, he is silent about the need for supplementing individual freedom with attentiveness to the well-being of others (see Beteille, 1991; Giri, 1998). In

exploring limits of identity politics we must avoid the danger of falling into the trap of either collectivist erasure of individual freedom or individualist self-closure which does not realize and actualize one's responsibility to the other. Amartya Sen's critique of identity politics also draws our attention to denial of choice at work in such politics but here individual freedom is, at least rhetorically, linked to social commitment (Sen, 1991; 1999). Sen draws our attention to the new tyrannies that are emerging in the "unreasoned identity shifts" that are taking place in different parts of the world - "in the former Yugoslavia, in Rwanda, in Congo, in Indonesia" (Sen, 1998: 21). For Sen, "There is something deeply debilitating about denying choice when choice exists, for it is an abdication of responsibility to consider and assess how one should think and what one should identify with. It is a way of falling prey to unreasoned shifts in alleged self-knowledge based on a false belief that one's identity is to discovered and accepted rather than examined and scrutinized" (ibid).

But one difficulty with Sen's critique of identity politics is that he gives reason an unconditional primacy and does not realize the need for it to be supplemented by self-critical awareness of the limits of reason itself and the need for a hermeneutic spiritual supplement (Giri, 2000b). At the same time, Sen quite admiringly draws our attention to the issue of what Habermas would call post-national identity formation (Habermas, 1998). Limits of identity politics urges us to realize not only the limits of assertive identitarian groups within the nation-state but also understand the limits of nation-state as a taken-for-granted ultimate frame of our identity. As anthropologist Gerd Baumann challenge us in his provocative *The Multicultrual Riddle: Rethinking National, Ethnic and Religious Identities*: "The nation-state .. is not simply the neutral arena within which the multicultural dream can be realized; rather, it is itself one of the problems" (Baumann, 1999). In a similar spirit of critical dialogue, Amartya Sen writes: "The importance of nationality and citizenship cannot be denied in the contemporary world. But we also have to ask: how should we take note of the relations between different people across borders whose identities 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). In this context, Sen presents a transnational and planetary challenge of identity formation before us: "Even the identity of being a 'human being' - perhaps our most basic identity - may have the effect, when properly seized, of broadening our viewpoint; and the imperatives that we may associate with our shared humanity may not be mediated by our membership of collective identities such as 'nations' or 'peoples'" (ibid).

The reign of collectivist identities unless put in place and perspective can create impediments to our realization of ourselves as subjects. The limits of identity politics lies in obstructing the unfoldment of an appropriate ethics and politics of the subject and in recent social theory, Alain Touraine has been foremost in drawing our attention to this (Touraine, 2000). For Touraine, "The Subject is an individual quest for the conditions that will allow him to become the actor of his own history. And that quest is motivated by the pain of being torn apart, and by the loss of identity and individuation" (Touraine, 2000: 56). For Touraine identity politics must be understood in relation to a thrust towards a global marketization and both the processes threaten the unfoldment of an appropriate ethics and politics of the subject. In his words: "As it becomes more difficult in this globalized society to define oneself as a citizen or a worker, it becomes more tempting to define oneself in terms of cultural community such as an ethnic group, a religion or belief, a gender or a mode of behaviour" (ibid: 31). Touraine movingly presents the predicament in which we are at present, pushed and pulled as we are between global marketization and communitarian identity mobilization: "Our real point of reference is not hope, but the pain of being torn apart. Because the world of objectification and its technologies has been so debased as to be no more than a market, while the world of cultural identity is locked into communitarian obsession, the individual who exists inside us all is suffering the agony of being turn apart, of feeling that his or her lifeworld is decayed as the institutional realm or even the representation of the world itself" (ibid: 55).

From the displacement of the subject that takes place in identity politics let us now come back to the issue of displacement of material interest and redistribution that accompanies many a movement of identity politics in the contemporary world. We have already had a brief encounter with Nancy Fraser's formulation of the shift from redistribution to recognition in identity politics in the introductory section. We get additional intimations of such in the writings of H. Srikanth and Sarah Joseph. Srikanth writes about the contemporary identity politics in Assam: "..the politics of identity in Assam is basically the politics of Philistines, trapped in the world of appearances, fighting imaginary crimes. It draws its strength from prejudices and misconceptions of groups about themselves and others. Its ideology masquerades class exploitation and ignores the material structures and forces responsible for their problem" (Srikanth, 2000: 4124). Similar is also the critique of Sarah Joseph who laments that class as an analytical category has been totally excluded from contemporary discussions of culture and ethnicity (Joseph 1998). For Joseph, "The view that identity claims should be viewed as rights in particular needs to be critically interrogated. And any attempt to critically examine identity claims would necessarily involve going beyond the self-perception of individuals and groups to understand such claims in relation to wider social processes" (Joseph, 1998: 130).

But the greatest danger of identity politics lies in the fact that it debilitates our capacity to learn. This is easily discernible in the case of identity politics that is taking place in India in the field of caste and religion. The Dalit movements today continue to be bound to an anti-Brahminical logic and do not explore the task of reconstruction and self-criticism outside of the villainous construction of the Brahminical other (Iliah, 1995). It is now universally recognised that education is crucial for human development and Ambekar himself had placed a key emphasis on education for the emancipation of Dalits. But in inculcating the habits of education, Dalits who are almost always first generation learners, can learn from the life-practices of Brahmins. Dalits can learn the habitus of education from Brahmins as Brahminical castes can learn

the art of labour from the Dalits. Such a mutual learning can facilitate the intertwining of mental learning and manual labour in both Brahmins and Dalits and this can also facilitate the transcendence of their categorical identities. But this is not possible as long as protagonists of Dalit politics stick to Dalitization as the sole route to emancipation and Brahminical sociologists look at any effort at human improvement as an instance of Sanskritization and offer it as the sole model of social and cultural development. Civil society as a project of learning in the lives of individuals and communities privileges neither Dalitization nor Sanskritization but is animated by a dialectic of self-realization.

The same problem of refusal to learn and an arrogance to kill the other which poses a challenge to our self-secured identity is witnessed in the contemporary identity politics of religion. Attack on Christian missionaries and Christian communities has been a barbaric and tragic part of the religion-based identity politics in our country. But such attacks reflect, at a deeper level, the envy and jealousy that some belligerent Hindu organizations have towards the services rendered by some Christian organizations and their unwillingness to learn from such ethical engagement and to make Hinduism and several of its institutions undertake more service activities. This challenge of learning and self-criticism becomes clear in what a senior citizen of Baripada, Orissa who is himself a Hindu, told me during my recent fieldwork: "We Hindus spend all our energies in observing so many festivals and now collecting donation for these have become a thriving industry. The wealthy Hindus of the town put their money in building temples but they would not spend a rupee in undertaking service activities in the city what to speak of going out to the remote tribal areas as Christian missionaries do." Similar is the approach of the self-study movement of Swadhyaya, a movement of practical spirituality from within contemporary Hinduism. For Swadhyaya, Hindus must learn from Christian missionaries to work among the unreached and downtrodden. And as Hindus learn from Christians, Christians and Christian missionaries also can learn from the Hindus that there are many ways to God and not one and also understand the difficulties and anxieties that many Hindus, not just Hindutva

fundamentalist forces, have about conversion. As Felix Wilfred, himself a passionate Christian writes in his recent *Asian Dreams and Christian Hopes*: "Many Christians may dispute how founded are the fears of our neighbors regarding conversion and how much it may be substantiated by hard facts. But the fact is that there is such a wide-spread impression that Christians are concerned about increasing their numerical strength in addition to the power and influence they already wield in terms of their institutions and foreign flow of funds. Such impressions create a lot of difficulties in our mutual relationship" (Wilfred, 2000: 236). In this context, Wilfred urges our Christian brothers and sisters to develop a "relational language" "ending the epoch of the language of isolation," participate in civil society, and make their service organizations accessible to the public and open to democratic community control. For Wilfred, "Christian services today exhibit a certain parallel to what is being done either by the State or other voluntary agencies. Though in principle co-operation with the larger society is recognised, in practice, however, there is the attitude of self-isolation and segregation. This is fostered at various levels by confidence in money, institutional power and servile and uncritical dependence on elsewhere. There is greater need to practice greater collaboration with the larger civil society" (Wilfred, 2000: 194).

Thus there is a challenge for transformation for both the Hindus and Christians as Hindus can learn to make their religious activities focus more on concrete service programmes from the Christians and Christian leaders and organizations strive to make their institutions more accessible to people at large, facilitate more public control of these institutions, participate in the civil society and public sphere as partners of dialogue and embody the practice of what in Christian theology is called *kenosis* or self-emptying vis-a-vis the use of power. In this work on self-emptying, Christians can learn from the Hindus and Buddhists, especially from their traditions of self-transcendence and self-abnegation.

But in the field of identity politics of our country, we are faced with the fact of a persistent refusal to learn and this is antithetical to the spirit of a multicultural society. A multicultural society has to be a learning society where different cultures and individuals are open to learning from each other. But this requires, as Satya Mohanty tells us, "an adequate appreciation of the epistemic role of 'culture'" which provides us "deep bodies of knowledge of human kind and of human flourishing" (Mohanty, 1998: 240). Each culture is an epistemic community and provides us a unique mode of knowing the world but this knowledge is not destined to be particular rather it finds its fulfillment in a creative universalization (Sunder Rajan, 1998). Genuine multiculturalism facilitates a creative universalization of particular knowledges of the world and requires the flourishing and practice of "epistemic co-operation" (Mohanty 1998: 240). This in turn requires opening and learning from the members which assertive identity politics makes it difficult to happen. But this epistemic learning is not simply a question of epistemology as it seems to be the case with Satya Mohanty but involves ontological preparation and work on self-development on the part of self, culture and society. An ontological opening for epistemic co-operation can facilitate the realization of "cultural communication" and "cultural liberation" and contributes to the much needed "recomposition of the world" in these days of fragmentation and deconstruction (Touraine, 2000).

It hardly needs to be stressed that such a vision and practice of multiculturalism calls for a reformulation in our conceptions of culture and communities. As Baumann reminds us: "Multiculturalism is not the old concept of culture multiplied by the number of groups that exist, but a new, and internally plural praxis of culture applied to oneself and to other" (Baumann, 1999: vii). Each culture has a dimension of beyond which resists its total subsumption under custom, convention and power (Pande, 1989). As Veena Das tells us: "There are constantly moving, dynamic, challenging, encompassing relations between culture as a societally agreed set of values which structure voice--and voice as appearing in transgression, proclaiming the truth of culture and relationship--yet allowing culture to be born not only as

external facade but as endowed with soul" (Das, 1995: 160). But identity politics has its limits in realizing such a vision and practice of culture, especially recognizing human voice. It also has a naturalized view of community. But community is not only the storehouse of a naturalized identity, it also has a moral dimension which calls for what Habermas calls a "post-conventional" identity formation on the part of the participants (Habermas, 1990). In such an identity formation, identity needs cannot be easily satisfied by appeals to communitarian frameworks; rather it requires a morally just identity formation on the part of the actors and proceeds with a frame of "qualitative distinctions" (Joas, 2000; also Matustik, 1997). Such a process of identity formation calls for rethinking community as not merely a space of conformity but as a space of responsibility. In fact, in thinking about community there is a need now to make a move from community as a space of "descriptive responsivity" to it as a space of "normative responsibility" where as Calvin O. Schrag passionately tells us: "Responsibility, nurtured by the call of conscience, supplies the moral dimension in the narrative of the self in community" (Schrag, 1993: 100).

Rethinking and Reconstructing Identity and Difference

Such a view of culture and community calls for a different conception and realization of self-identity. Identity is not only a matter of apriori formulation and categorical determination; it is also an aspect of an unfolding narrative. To talk of identity then is to talk of narrative identity as Paul Ricouer would teach us and this is crucial to our idea of a capable subject. In Ricouer, "the identity of the narrating self finds its proper analogue not in an objectivating numerical identity but rather than in the self-identity achieved through the development of characters within the plot of a story" (Schrag, 1997: 39). For Ricouer, "[We must distinguish] between the identity of the self from that of things. This latter kind of identity comes down in the final analysis to the stability, even the immutability of a structure...Narrative identity, in contrast, admits change. The mutability is that of the characters in stories we tell, who are emplotted along with the story itself" (Ricouer, 2000: 3). Self-

esteem and self-respect are crucial to this narrative identity. These are also concerns with identity politics but unlike identity politics in the pursuit and work of narrative identity, the concerns with self-esteem and self-respect are not bound to the self--individual or group, rather it overflows to the fields of the other. As Ricouer tells us in his inimitable words: "Life stories are so intertwined with one another that the narrative anyone tells or hears of his own life becomes a segment of those other stories that are the narratives of others' lives. We may thus consider nations, peoples, classes, communities of every sort as institutions that recognize themselves as well as others through narrative identity" (ibid: 7).

Narrative identity helps us overcome the limits of reification of identity in identity politics and this task of overcoming is further facilitated by realizing the distinction between identity and identification. While preoccupation with identity has the implication of absolutization, determination and fixation, an engagement with processes of identification makes us sensitive to the process of identity formation which is a constant negotiation between the desire to reify and the desire to fly the chains of essential fixation. Baumann urges us to realize this distinction between identity and identification. As he writes: "We will not know what an identity *is* unless we have tried to dissolve it into situational identifications; we will never learn what culture is until we understand it as a dialectic, double discursive, process: People reify it and at the same time undo their reifications.." (Baumann, 1999: 140). Baumann urges us to "unreify all accepted reification by finding cross-cutting cleavages (among identities)" (ibid).

The distinction between identity and identification that Baumann makes gets an enriching dialogical shift in Kevin Hetherington where "identity is performed through bricolage" rather than through the annihilation of the other. Hetherington urges us to understand the specific topology of identity and identification in the contemporary world where there are multiple locations and lateral and "transversal" (cf. Schrag, 1997) pathways of connections and

72

conversations among them. In the words of Hetherington: "In a world where identities cannot be attributed to singular uncomplicated subject positions (authors or narrators outside the story), identity becomes all about multiple location and performativity within that location. Under such conditions the main issue associated with such spatial uncertainty is identification. It is through identifications with others, identifications that can be multiple, overlapping or fractured, that identity--that sense of self-recognition and belonging with others--is achieved" (Hetherington, 1998: 24).

A concern with identification as different from identity tells us that there is no essential confrontation between identity and difference and differences have not only a creative and productive role to play in unsettling identity but also helping us to realize the other within and in its manifold creative unfoldment (Connolly, 1991). But this calls for rethinking identity and the relationship between identity and difference. So far this relationship has been thought about in the language of universality and this has led to the subsumption of one under the other. But now this relationship needs to be thought about dialectically and transversally. Universality stresses unification but transversality proceeds in "an open-textured gathering of expanding possibilities" (Schrag, 1997: 133) in establishing connection between identity and difference. In transversality the process of establishing connection is always an "ing," process of unifying, rather than an "ed," a finalized result (ibid). In reconstituting relationship between identity and difference we need to make a move from universalist unification to transversal connectivity, an art of connectedness which acknowledges the lack of total fit between identity and difference but nonetheless continually tries to establish relationship "moving beyond the constraints of the metaphysical oppositions of universality and particularity and identity and difference" (ibid).

An engagement with identification urges us to understand negotiation between identity and difference. But what is to be noted that this negotiation is not only external but also internal. There is a need to take note of the

experiential dimension of identity formation and experiencing identity as a process involves constant negotiation not only with those who are around us but also "internal negotiation" (Craib, 1998). Identity has both the dimension of self and social and rethinking identity now calls for a realization that our identities are not exhaustively social (Cohen, 1994; Rapport, 1999). As Ian Craib argues:

> We certainly have social identities: I am a university teacher, a father, a husband, a psychotherapist, a supporter of the English cricket team and so on. Some of these (especially the last one) could disappear without experiencing any great loss. I would have lost *an* identity, not *my* identity. If I suffer a major tragedy in my family life, ceasing to be a husband and becoming a divorced man or widower, my identity would have changed in an excruciatingly painful way but I would still have an identity. Social identities can come and go but my identity goes on as something which unites all the social identities I ever had, have or will have. My identity always overflows, adds to, transforms the social identities that are attached to me (Craib, 1998).

For Craib, identity politics does not understand the limits of the social in talking about identity and is linked to projective identification: "Projection is a psychological operation by which I fail to see something threatening or unpleasant part of my own make-up but recognize it readily in other people. Such a mechanism can be seen as the basis of homophobia. If I am anxious and threatened by my own homosexual desires, then I can deal with them by projecting them into other people and dealing with them thereby prosecuting and attempting to suppress them" (ibid: 172). Projective identification is a vicarious substitute to our essential and unavoidable need for emotional communication and in the practice of identity formation, this needs to be transformed by discovering and nurturing our dependence on others. Contra-Habermas, for Craib, it is emotional intersubjectivity, not linguistic intersubjectivity, which is at the heart of our identity formation, and emotional intersubjectivity requires the lubricant of love and a capacity to identity with

the suffering of others. As Craib tells us: "The discovery of freedom is the discovery of multiple forms of suffering and perhaps the most meaningful personal sense in which we can talk about having an identity is that our identity is the result of the quality of our suffering" (Craib, 1998: 177).

Thus in rethinking identity as well as the relationship between identity and difference there is a need to bring suffering to the core of our vision and practice. Bringing suffering to the heart of identity formation has the potential to transform the annihilatory logic of contemporary identity politics and such an invocation is enriched by a dialogue with Gandhi and Levinas (see Barnes, 2000). Gandhi tells us of the need to prepare ourselves to undertake suffering, when the need arises and the call comes, in order to establish creative and transformational relationship with others (Giri, 1998; Giri, 2001). Levinas also brings suffering to the heart of our webs of relationships. For Levinas, the ego must be prepared to "undergo the suffering that would come to it from non-ego" (Levinas, 1991: 123). As Levinas reminds us: "it is no longer a question of the ego, but of me. The subject which is not an ego, but which I am, can not be generalized..Here the identity of the subject comes from the impossibility of escaping responsibility.." (ibid: 13 / 14).

And this responsibility is the responsibility of identifying with the suffering of others, and not to inflict suffering on others as is the case with most instances of identity politics in the contemporary world. Such an identification with suffering requires much more than the valorization of identity politics and the production of triumphant memory and history which does not seek to forgive, reconcile and participate in overcoming the logic of contemporary bindings. Edward Said articulates such a challenge of rethinking and reconstructing identity before us taking the predicament of Jews and Palestinians as the case in point (Said, 2000). For Said, "Israelis and Palestinians are now so intertwined through history, geography and political activity that it seems to be absolutely folly to try and plan the *future* of one without that of the other." But the creation of this common future depends on identifying with the

suffering of each other. But for Said, "Most Palestinians are indifferent to and often angered by stories of Jewish suffering…. Conversely most Israelis refuse to concede that Israel is built on the ruins of Palestinian society… Yet there can be no possible reconciliation, no possible solution unless these two communities confront each other's experience in the light of the other... there can be no hope of peace unless the stronger community, the Israeli Jews, acknowledge the most powerful memory for Palestinians, namely the dispossession of an entire people. As the weaker party Palestinians must also face the fact that Israeli Jews see themselves as survivors of the Holocaust, even though that tragedy cannot be allowed to justify Palestinian dispossession" (ibid).

By the Way of Conclusion

In his *Power of Identity*, Manuel Castells tells us that at the contemporary juncture of globalization creative identity formation or what he calls "reflexive life planning" (Castells, 1997: 11) is impossible except for the elites of society and the only way identity formation now can take place is through "reconstruction of defensive identities around communal principles" (ibid). But Castells bases himself only on a limited set of particular kinds of defensive identity mobilization but we need to have detailed studies of varieties of identity formation at work in the contemporary order. In this paper I have not provided ethnographic instances of creative identity formation in great details though I have made brief references to movements such as Habitat for Humanity and Swadhyaya which do not fall under the type of defensive and fundamentalist identity mobilization that Castells talks about.

In this paper we have explored the limits of identity politics and political and spiritual preparation for a non-identitarian civil society. A key argument of this paper has been that identity-based movements have been important agents of change and political contestation in the contemporary world but their mobilization now needs a hermeneutic and spiritual

supplement of recognizing and identifying with the suffering of others. Identity politics now needs to be transformed by an openness to the other and through such a dialogical opening we can recreate civil society as a space of ethico-political mobilization of the subject. In such rethinking and reconstruction, the following lines of Sri Aurobindo can provide us additional encouragement:

> A lonley freedom cannot satisfy
> A heart that has grown one with every heart
> I am a deputy of the aspiring world
> My spirit's liberty I ask for all

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Endnotes:

1. Another feminist scholar Irene Gedalof also makes a similar point: "..there is no pure site of identity organized around a single axis of gender or sexual difference" (Gedalof, 1999: 2).

2. In his recent work, social theorist Jan N. Pieterse (2001) also draws our attention to both the emancipatory as well as repressive dimensions of contemporary identity mobilizations.

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