Identity:
Beyond Tradition and McWorld Neoliberalism

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Edited by

Brian Michael Goss and Christopher Chávez

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P U B L I S H I N G

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INTRODUCTION

BRIAN MICHAEL GOSS
AND CHRISTOPHER CHÁVEZ

Whether one asks for one or not, and regardless of how it may be locally construed and experienced, identity gravitates to the subject. In turn, an identity may be mistaken or reified (for example, a longtime resident of a tourist-laden country being misapprehended as a tourist) or invested with unwanted and even specious preconceptions (that need not be pejorative to be aggravating). While identity is also a regularly invoked rallying call for celebration, it is currently an unhappy concept. Identity may be construed as caught between the conflicting logics of unyielding right-wing, essentialist atavism, on one side; and, on the other, identity is assumed to melt into neoliberal globalization as an ostensible universal solvent of identities. The thesis is not new, as Benjamin Barber reduced it to the "Jihad vs. McWorld" aphorism in a 1996 book of that title. The gloss presented by Barber's dichotomy, nevertheless, maintains a hold on imagining identity.

As subjects and as academics, we also seek exits from the *cul-de-sacs* of assuming either static identity atavism or identity as governed by the common currency of manic commodification. Instead, we assume that out of the cultural materials at hand – necessarily not of our own making, and in many cases with distinct constraints in how they may be taken up – subjects arrange and re-arrange these materials to fashion finely calibrated identities. The question thusly begged is: How does one mend the many tears in the theoretical fabric to advance empowering concepts of identity that account for its (often un-empowering!) real world exigencies?

Two vignettes

Moving away from airy abstractions, what is at stake in pinning down what identity is – and what it is not? Consider two vignettes.

The first vignette revolves around a 55 second audiovisual sequence that is now available on YouTube long after its original movement into

circulation ("I Spy TV Opening Theme Version 1" 2010). While the term "revolutionary" is widely over-used, this audiovisual material can make a claim for such. Specifically, the sequence is the opening credits of the US prime time television action-adventure series *I Spy* (originally broadcast from 1965 to 1968). The credits open with a stylized sequence of an animated figure playing tennis in silhouette as the names of a series of high profile cities (*e.g.*, Berlin, Madrid, Tokyo) roll horizontally around him. The silhouetted figure pivots, kinetic codes shift from exhibitionist tennis player to that of covert agent, and the racket morphs into a gun. After the animated part of the sequence ends, actor Robert Culp lights and lobs a bomb toward the camera/spectator – explosive! – that inaugurates a montage of shots from the upcoming episode of *I Spy*. During the credit sequence, a title card transmits the name of Culp's co-star, Bill Cosby, who is prominent in the montage.

While the credits convey some of the 1960s sensibility of visual cool, where are the hints of the revolutionary in this? *I Spy* made its debut in the US' national televisual schoolroom in 1965, during the second decade of the medium's ubiquity in the North American home – and it represented the first time that an African-American (Cosby) was featured in a lead role, with all of the anxieties that this prompted for Euro-American producers and the majority audience (Kackman 2005: pp. 113-143). In the same decade, a few short years before *I Spy*'s debut, a child born in Honolulu, Hawaii was destined to become the US' first African-American president. Connecting these two roughly contemporaneous events in a straight line simplifies an ineffably complicated (and ongoing) narrative. One can nonetheless speculate: In the cultural "war of maneuver" (Jones 2006) that eschews the direct frontal assault on the seat of prevailing authority, President Barack Obama traversed the cultural platforms forged in materially resonant moments such as, *e.g*., Jackie Robinson's arrival in major league baseball in 1947 and Cosby's in *I Spy*. Politics followed on the platforms established in popular culture, in other words! Nevertheless, Cosby (and others who followed in short order, such as *Mission: Impossible* regular Greg Morris) were harassed by traditionalist chauvinists through abusive letters to the television networks. Echoes of these rear-guard actions continue in pathetic, rag-tag campaigns in late 2012 to secede from the US following Obama's successful 2012 re-election campaign. One may conclude that, while revanchist chauvinists continue to inflict damage, their crusade is an elegiac one, animated by the raging "romanticism" of the dead end and the lost cause that few others lament.

Discussion of the first vignette may seem optimistic, and teleologically so, as utopian ideals of equality push relentlessly against harsh realities. The “dark side” that arises around the issue of identity may, nevertheless, be illustrated through some snapshots of atavistic dystopia. On 22 July 2011, in the heart of one of the world’s most prosperous and egalitarian societies, Anders Behring Breivik embarked on a terrorist rampage. It began in Oslo, with bombings of government buildings that murdered eight people. The massacre then continued on the nearby island of Utøya where, using firearms, Breivik murdered 69 more people. Most of Breivik’s victims on the island were teenagers attending the summer camp of Norway’s ruling Labor Party. Concurrent with the paroxysms of mass violence, Breivik released a “manifesto”. His rationalizations for mass murder present a roll call of right-wing obsessions as they intersect with identity. These obsessions include ultra-nationalism and racial supremacy, while the manifesto pitches against feminism, Islam, multiculturalism and “cultural Marxism” (Tietze 2012, 24 August). While Breivik conducted his terrorist campaign alone, his stated ideology contained germs of right-inflected but “mainstream” discourse.

As with other chauvinists, Breivik’s take on identity may be called fundamentalist, white-knuckle literal, as serious as a heart attack. In this view, bodily-marked ascriptive identity *is* essence and it *is* unswervingly indexical.[1] While the violent essentialism that Breivik apotheosizes is increasingly marginal, it is consequential in literal life and death terms when it erupts. Moreover, as Corey Robin argues (2012), a chronic state of brooding grievance and loss is part and parcel to the political right’s self-definition – and assures that pushes for revanchist reaction will never be exhausted of fuel. Robin theorizes that, for the right, every moment is the adrenaline surge of “high noon” and a cultural Battle of the Alamo is convened on every corner in perpetuity.

The moment of commodification and the market

The contrasting vignettes of revolutionary implications embedded within the everyday (such as TV) and right wing atavistic reaction are but two (dramatic and contrasting) moments that illuminate the play of identity. Let us now step further back and consider another paradigm by which identity may be organized and understood; one that may be called classically liberal or neoliberal in its emphasis on capitalist market relations and economic reductionism. In this view, collective identity has been reconfigured from its traditional specifications according to marketplace logic. Raymond Williams (1980) argues that the conversion of persons into consumers is a fundamental

characteristic of modern society and that our inclination to describe members of capitalist society in terms of their economic capacity reflects the marketization of everyday life. Susan Strasser (2003) captures the deeply grounded, materially resonant economic logic behind this shift in subjectivity when she marks the conversion in the economic base from artisanal production to conglomeration. The milieu of craftspeople and family-grounded entrepreneurialism in villages and urban neighborhoods, selling necessities to people they knew, was supplanted. In its place, transient and alienated exchanges between an employee working for someone else and the consumer became the norm. Mass production and the rise of retail chains, in this view, generate a form of a mass subject, among its many other product lines.

As market logic has gained expression, identity has had less to do with ascriptive identities that have traditionally been associated with spatial concepts and more to do with patterns of consumption. While a long way from traditional essentialism, class and economic status regiment identity by the rules of its own regime. Moreover, a paradox arises. Right wing atavism essentializes – exaggerates and reifies group differences – so that We are irreducibly distinct from all of Them. At the same time, the classically liberal paradigm reduces identity to (literally) a matter of common currency that is concerned with "diversity" principally for the instrumental purpose of isolating the market niche for a commercial appeal.

While the market may be relatively liberalized within the register of ascriptive identity – the color that matters is that of the money, and not of the skin – it is a bare-knuckled taskmaster, particularly in its relatively unbridled neoliberal form (Harvey 2005; Duménil & Levy 2011; Klein 2007). The deep class striation associated with neoliberalism's form of authoritarianism is no less neo-feudal in its ferocity for a partial detachment from ascriptive identities.

The moment of the nation

One potentially enabling paradigm places little emphasis on ascriptive aspects of identity. In this view, identity is a construction, an achievement, a pastiche, a series of performances even; one may strategically enact, disavow, or re-articulate an identity on these logics.[2] For the theorist of this persuasion, the mass media in which contemporary societies are saturated present a key site in collating identities. Dick Hebdige (1991)'s seminal research on musical sub-cultures in mid-twentieth century Britain

furnishes an exemplar of identities cobbled together from the *bricolage* of culture and its everyday objects (combs, gel, safety pins).

In a similarly media-driven vein, consider identity as implicated in the construction of the nation. In an often quoted passage, Benedict Anderson conjures the newspaper reader: “the ceremony he [or she] performs” with a copy of the daily tribune “is being replicated by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he [or she] is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notions” (1983: p. 46). The mass mediated imagined community, in Anderson’s phrase, can be convened *as if* it is the traditionally “real” community of the village, via mass ritual enacted in parallel – and to powerful effect when very loose ties are multiplied by multitudes. The tendency to construct imagined communities are likely heightened with the rise (and intensification) of polyglot nations that demand the production and maintenance of common points of reference out of which an identity may be cobbled together.

So, it is settled: nations, one contemporary fundamental of an identity are mere bureaucratic constructions that inadvertently throw off an efflux of plastic and malleable identities. In this view, national identities summon an orderly narrative where there is none – and also gloss over the raft of aberrant subjectivities and subalterns, while generating possibilities for identity by *bricolage* within the nation’s seams. At the same time, positing the nation as a form of contrivance is too pat and does not account for the lived experience of identity within it. National identity is regularly experienced as ripe, rich, super-organic, palpably real in ways that resist dismissal as “false consciousness”. In other words, even if the nation is a contrivance, it has largely succeeded in generating the self-fulfilling aura of transhistoric truth around it. Profound ambivalences are, nevertheless, regularly insinuated into the subject who may exalt the abstracted ideal of the nation – while (paradoxically) despising most of his or her neighbors (see: the case of Breivik). And, in parallel, even a nation’s discontents may employ its symbols and tropes to register that discontent, to even exhort that *“¡Spain is not truly Spanish enough!”* (or, insert name of any other nation).

Leftists in the Gramscian tradition are particularly alert to the paradox of the artificiality of the nation, alongside its palpably experienced texture that is felt in living through the “national popular” (Hall 1988; Jones 2006). Here, one is beckoned to participate and embody the national identity in a hands-on manner. Far from repressing expression or imposing onerous demands, nationalism seduces subjects’ participation and animates them to say and do more for the collective. Notice that the potentially progressive impulses that drive identity construction can be – indeed, often

are – hijacked by a re-inscription of atavism when inserted into national identity. Mobilizations through appeals to a monolithic version of “Us” against “Them” in preface to wars of aggression are an obvious instance (Goss 2013). In these moments, rather than being a creative achievement, identity is proximal to chauvinism against designated Others, a matter of prejudice and not pride.

The moment of transnational identity

While Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* was published merely 30 years ago, its influential conceptualizations have already been partly undercut by galloping globalization. Since 1983, the roster of alphabet soup organizations has proliferated (EU, WTO … and also MTV, FIFA, D&G), the reach of global events has spiked (from the World Cup to deadly terrorist “propaganda of the deed”), and the flows of diasporic populations has intensified. Globalization implicates distinct but articulated domains of activity: finance, mobility, communication and media. In the light of these globalizing forces, scholars are reconsidering the persistence of national identity. In this vein, Manuel Castells (1994) suggests that major European cities have become nodal centers of the new global economy. These metropoles are the locus of a “European dream” of peace, prosperity and political recognition that immigrants have risked death in hazardous transit to reach, as Jeremy Harding (2012) documents in harrowing, indignantly marshaled detail. These circumstances are profoundly impacting the nature of collective identity and the nation in Europe, with their attendant re-constitutions of what it is taken to be European – and also with (as noted) attendant episodes of backlash of varying degrees of ferocity.

The impact of media and communication further illustrate the new transnational terrain as concerns the contours of the nation. By the turn of the millennium, Mike Davis (2000) theorized the rise of “transnational suburbs” between the US and Latin America. These have been enabled by the “communications revolution” and its concomitants (*e.g.*, low cost airlines, video telephony) that have re-fashioned space as de-literalized and de-territorialized. Slices of the US harbor umbilical connections with Mexico or El Salvador while, simultaneously, the US’ domestic spaces are re-visioned and re-shaped. These connections are arguably more vigorous than a century ago when immigrants left a homeland on a boat and never looked back (except, perhaps, through the lens of distanced nostalgia). Since Davis first minted the concept, countless other transnational suburbs have come into view, for example, between Spain and Romania.

Despite the pressures exerted through globalization, the nation and its imagined community are not set to be retired to the museum as relics of the past. As Armand Mattelart (2000) observes, strong national states are not an inhibitor *but a necessary pre-condition* for the advent of globalization. In this view, nations are the links that, when articulated, constitute the chain, or the nodes that compose the world-encompassing network. At the same time, recent claims that globalization has withered away as a casualty of ongoing economic disturbances (Stewart 2013, 18 January) are palatable to observers who hold that it is mainly a vehicle of exploitation – as well as pleasing the identity essentialists who resent global integration's impact on their idealized and hermetically sealed community. For good and/or ill, globalization is a cake that cannot be readily unbaked and parsed into its constituent ingredients, even if there are oscillations in how "oven baked" solid it is. In the light of the ongoing dialectic between nation and trans-nation, this volume will engage with teasing out tensions between the national and transnational.

The moment of subjectivity

Theorizing identity in some of the terms discussed above, one can construe it as a collage of materials from the cultural agora (or, if one prefers, the cultural garage sale). Prominent components of the collage include the "usual suspects" of gender, race, confessional status, class, and ethnicity. In this view, sub-cultural capital is also assumed to be an important constituent part of identity (*e.g.*, punker, vegan, Red Sox fan). The resultant conceptualization of identity emphasizes that it is in flux, a creative work that is never quite finished. This theorization spins away from the accent on ascriptive identities and is hostile toward essentialism, while it champions the contingencies of cultural constructionism. As such, it is a long way from Breivik and other right wing obsessives fixated with *you* – and the problem of how "'to perfect *you* personally, to perfect *you* politically, to perfect *you* religiously, or racially, or geographically'" (emphasis added; Amos Oz, quoted in Trimble 1998) in line with their rigid, bullying demands about what part you must unswervingly play.

Once again, is the matter settled by finally reducing identity to an individual, monadic subject absorbed in exercising classically liberal identity "choices"? Not really. Even in convening the "Identity, Culture, and Communication" conference in spring 2012 in which this volume is anchored, constructions of identity came into play for even relatively privileged people in unexpected ways – and hurtled us back to negotiating the more fixed categories that the conference's Organizing Committee

generally eschews. For instance, depending on a conference presenter's nationality, he or she experienced an easier or more difficult time gaining entry into Spain and the European Union. And this was not merely a question of geographical distance. European Union citizens who participated in the conference were, of course, able to glide through member states' borders largely without friction. By law, transit was also facilitated (no need for visas for visits of up to several months) for citizens of some of Britain's former colonies; to wit, the nations of USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, that were all represented at the conference, despite their spatial remove from Madrid. These societies, where "excess" European population settled centuries ago, have been long dominated by European descendents and are today among the wealthiest nations on the globe. By contrast, citizens of Britain's biggest and most important former colony, India, do not enjoy the same privilege of entering the European Union without a visa. Other potential participants who had been admitted to the conference had their aspirations to participate thwarted not by the absence of a stamped piece of paper, but by the lack of a state-backed document of another kind. In other words, a lack of money or subsidy effectively kept these scholars segregated from colleagues and peers with abiding academic interest in identity.

Even considered in terms of organizing the conference on which this volume is based, identity may also have more subtle calibrations. In its deliberations, the conference's Organizing Committee admitted a minority of the applicants (38 percent) from a pool of almost 200. While we do not harbor neurosis about our decision-making calculus, there is no doubt that our "gate keeping" judgments were at least partly driven by seeking applicants who satisfied the template of academia that we internalized from graduate training in North American "Research I" universities. Applicants who were able to fit this template, who were fluent in the academic idiom that we transact, were advantaged. The resultant conference roster was impressive in terms of original topics and the far-flung nations in which participants work. The hoped-for diversity was achieved! Nevertheless, shot through each of our invited participants was a form of academic training as a constituent part of identity, one as internationalized in its own way as the styles (tattoos, piercings) of the rising MTV generation that populates our courses at the highly international Saint Louis University-Madrid Campus that hosted the conference. In this view, we at once presided over diversity – *and* sought out "people (somewhat, more-or-less) like us" in non-ascriptive terms. While our deliberations were by no means a species of chauvinism, they were surely and subtly shaded gate-keeping behaviors that reaffirmed what

we as subjects understand to be "legitimate" approximations of academic discourse.

Despite emerging acceptance of identity as a collage, ascriptive identities still retain compelling force, even if violent fanaticism, such as that of Breivik, presents a sickening symptom of backlash against a more deeply integrating world. Nevertheless, this volume will place a relatively strong accent on nonascriptive identities in a departure from 1990s-style theorization of identity that wagered heavily on gender and race. Chauvinism that surrounds ascriptive identities is by no means set to be retired, despite the courageous and partly successful efforts of feminists and anti-racists to alter the prevailing climate. This volume assays, however, to explore territory that may generally be less familiar (even if it is by no means without its precedents). While cognizant of the qualifications on conceptualizing identity that have been rehearsed here, the volume's *portmanteau* provides eclectic snapshots of a variegated global milieu. The advantage of this approach is that the studies presented in each chapter drill down into particular sites to illuminate case studies. Moreover, the volume's center of gravity is not North American-centric and its discourse makes distinctive contributions to knowledge for scholars in Europe, Asia, and Latin America.

Each chapter is permeated with an emphasis on identity and culture as part of the quotidian with its practical concomitants. It is here in the crevices of everyday practice that ideology arises, subjectivities coalesce, and disparate and even contradictory materials of identities consolidate, fused together in the white heat of practice (Althusser 1994; Eagleton 1991, 1994).

Overview of the volume

In the light of the vertiginous complexity of the topic, this volume is parsed into three sections in order to organize the reader's experience and group chapters to the extent possible within a recognizable scheme. These sections are, in order, "Mass-Mediated Identity", "Identity Refracted Through Nations and Trans-Nations", and "Social Aspects of Identity".

Alongside the convulsions of new media, the "old" ("heritage" or "incumbent") mass media continue to reach audiences of millions – and to colonize large swaths of the ostensibly new media territory (Curran 2012). Brian Michael Goss' "Yob Rule" leads the volume off and also opens the discussion of mass media as it intersects with identity. Goss confronts a journalistic discourse on identity that defies the empowering conceptualizations that this introduction assays to map. In particular, Goss

analyzes the discourse in the United Kingdom's *The Daily Telegraph* with respect to riots that convulsed England, 6-10 August 2011, at a cost of five lives and an estimated £500 million. The *Telegraph* – colloquially referred to as the "*Tory*-graph" for its rightward lean to the UK's Conservative party – was selected for study as it is recognized as "quality press" within the ensemble of British daily papers. A corpus of 147 articles (news reports, editorials, letters to the editor) published between 10 August and 31 December 2011 informs the analysis. After introducing theories pertinent to the discursive construction of "Us" and "Them", Goss characterizes the *Telegraph's* right-leaning politics as gaining expression through otherizing discourse – albeit in largely non-ascriptive ideological and class terms. By contrast, the newspaper was relatively muted on matters of bodily marked (ascriptive) identity such as race. Immigrant behavior is, moreover, praised by the *Telegraph* during the riots, albeit in patronizing terms that sentimentalize immigrants as what the right wants them to be (static and monolithically wedded to tradition). In the *Telegraph*'s discourse on the riots, the left is a monolithic and made-to-order "Them" while police are constructed as unambiguous avatars of "Us" in uniform. Nonetheless, the ostentatiously pro-police *Telegraph* editorially hurtled far beyond what at least some police figures considered proportionate for public order (for example, with respect to use of rubber bullets). Moreover, the *Telegraph*'s unequivocal if idealized support for the police trashes its ostensibly conservative distrust of the State.

In Chapter 2, entitled "Imag(in)ed Diversity", Arne Saeys orients to the big screen in Europe; in particular, filmmakers from extra-European backgrounds who are infusing the continent's industries with new impetuses. Saeys prefaces his discussion with a detailed rebuttal to Hamid Naficy's "accented cinema" thesis (2001) on the grounds that it is reductionist and over-simplifying as it effaces the national contexts in which multiculturalism is becoming more deeply inscribed. However well-meaning a concept such as accented cinema may be, it depends upon *a priori* categories that necessarily put familiar othering tropes into motion. In completing the conceptual pivot away from "accented cinema", Saeys surveys European film production that transcends the Maghrebi and Turkish roots of its makers and traces its trajectory from the margins to a place within the mainstream. In crafting this argument, Saeys develops case studies of two signature national film industries on the European continent. Specifically, Saeys argues that Maghrebi influences on French cinema or Turkish ones in Germany are not a question of "accent" – but of actual embedding of the newer arrivals into the representation of the continent to itself on screen. The chapter conveys the aspiration that what

Naficy calls "accented cinema" should, alternatively, be regarded as just another aspect of the quotidian in shepherding work-a-day European realities of diverse lives to the screen.

In completing the volume's first section, Sompatu Vungthong's "Total Aliens or Humans Just Like Us?" gazes on a Guttenbergian mass medium that is often overlooked. She plays on the observation that when we think of images of foreign visitors in the media, we usually think of the discourses of news, advertisements, or the screen industries of film and television. However, she argues, literary work can be seen as a medium for transmitting ideology. Her chapter pulls on this thread by examining the discourse around foreigners in Rattawut Lapcharoensap's *Sightseeing*. The book is a well-received collection of short stories originally written in English by a young Thai writer and channels current attitudes of Thais towards foreigners. More specifically, Vungthong asks how western tourists, expatriates, Filipino and Cambodian immigrants are portrayed alongside Thais on their home turf. In doing so, Vungthong works through the tradition of linguistic analysis (*e.g.*, Reisigl and Wodak 2001) that employs referential and predicational strategies. She also critiques some of the implicit assumptions of discourse analysis. In parsing how foreigners are linguistically constructed through the qualities attributed to them, Vungthong develops a concept of identity that assumes no inner core or essence to dictate its contours. Consistent with this view, she finds that fixed or stable images of foreigners in *Sightseeing* are finally elusive. To be sure, foreigners are represented according to Thais' stereotypes with their attendant simplistic and negative notions. On the other hand, significant slippages are evident and foreigners are also and finally "people like us", regardless of their initially exotic or alien qualities.

The second section of the volume is concerned with tensions that surround the nation and identity in an era of intensifying transnationalism; a topic that has been rehearsed earlier in this introduction. The era of globalization has in important ways reconfigured, but not effaced, identities nested in the national and demands careful analysis. Christopher Chávez begins this section with a focus on the global advertising industry and the practice of market segmentation. In "Global Latino", Chávez argues that as transnational corporations have become increasingly important conduits for global flows, there is a need to rethink the relationship between physical space, collective identity and the profit motive. The global expansion of the advertising industry necessarily requires discursive tools that enable these institutions to imagine their dominion, but as Anderson (1983) and Mignolo (2005) point out, such devices are ideologically driven. With a specific focus on the discursive (re)construction

of Latin America, Chávez provides an ideological critique of institutional discourses exchanged between the global advertising industry and an audience of financial stakeholders. In his analysis, Chávez demonstrates how internal advertising discourses have inherited colonial discourses by positioning Latin America as a resource to be exploited by more powerful, globalizing bodies. In doing so, physical space has been abstracted and reconstituted for strategic purposes. Chávez also argues that political, ethnic and class divisions that exist between nation-states are suppressed in an effort to achieve the economic goals of the advertising firms' networks.

The chapter that follows executes a pivot from the keyboards of political dissidents to politics on the grassy fields of sport. In "*¿Visca España*?", Mateo Szlapek-Sewillo probes Spain's triumph in the 2010 Féderation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup as concerns its implications for a re-crafting the long-problematic issue of national identity in Spain. Szlapek-Sewillo takes theoretical loans from Anderson (the "imagined community", 1983), Billig ("banal nationalism", 1995) and Hobsbawm ("the invention of tradition", 1983). The chapter analyzes the Spanish national team *vis-à-vis* its construction as a national metaphor that still carries the cultural baggage of the Franco regime (1936-1975) that continues to burden "national" Spanish symbols long after Spain's successful re-invention during its Transition. Szlapek-Sewillo also fleshes out a process of cultural reclamation and applies it to the Catalan and Basque regional movements that have partly gained expression on the football pitch. At the same time, reinforcement of regional identity through football has become complicated by the heavy Catalan representation on Spain's World Cup-winning national team. Szlapek-Sewillo's timely analysis draws on an array of materials and suggests contemporary Spaniards' willingness to simultaneously hold and negotiate regional and national alliances (thereby frustrating demands from right wing Spaniards for the monolith of the nation to efface the regional). Szlapek-Sewillo concludes on the cautionary note that, almost three years after Spain's victory in South Africa, economic crisis and the resumption of old sporting and regional tensions may well have complicated a chance for further national reconciliation.

While a number of chapters address representation in media, in "*Kratos* without *Demos*?", Francisco Seoane Pérez orients to formal representation as it plays out in the political arena. In particular, Seoane observes that debates over the "democratization" of the European Union (EU) have run mostly along procedural lines (such as increasing the power of the European Parliament). However, these discourses have been largely and

conspicuously silent on the intimate linkage between nationalism and democracy. Moreover, debate about Europe has been largely indifferent to the need for a palpable and real European *demos* in order to sustain a democratic Europe. The reasons for this anemic version of democracy are, first, the absence of a common language of public communication. Second, Seoane posits, the structural features of the political "monster" that is the European Union are structurally at odds with democratic engagement. In particular, the EU is constructed on neo-functionalist principles (through the integration of inter-related policy areas) with an admixture of technocracy and diplomacy that pivots away from dialogue with the public. One of the governing principles of the European Union is "subsidiarity", hailed by some scholars as "federalist" for largely fencing off national affairs from supranational intervention; yet, at the same time, it renders the supranational authorities invisible to the average European citizen. The subsidiarity principle thereby entrenches the disconnection between EU institutions and the European people(s). All of these considerations generate barriers to closer European integration that could be cultivated through a widely-held feeling of being European in more than vague and nominal terms.

Recent waves of media are also implicated in the tensions between nation and trans-nation. In a case study of Iranian dissidence and diaspora, Pardis Shafafi's "Politics in the Age of Blogging" stresses new media, its intersection with the nation and with anti-government activism. Her contribution is timely since Iranian bloggers are some of the world's most prolific and scathing critics of the regime that they seek to oust. Shafafi argues that new media discourse, such as blogging, has transformed notions of risk and efficacy that are associated with political activism. Moreover, under the surveillance state that has come to characterize modern day Iran, internet activism is an indispensible beachhead against the right wing regime – and it is at least as risk-laden as more traditional forms of activism. Re-working Anderson (1983), Shafafi observes that the oppositional front that the internet has facilitated enables activists of the political diaspora to communicate with, relate to, and understand the country that they left behind in the aftermath of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Shafafi's research is informed by a community of political immigrants from Iran who had been politically marginalized for years in exile and have located a new media arena for participation that appears to yield results in real time – and that has partly collapsed generations and geographies of difference. The chapter explores the dissidents' dialogue, with consideration for the consequences of what it may portend for political movements in Iran and elsewhere. While Shafafi is cognizant of

the limitations of cyber-activism, as elaborated in sophisticated critiques (*e.g.*, Morozov 2011), she also points to its alignment with "real life" action such as a recently convened Truth Commission and Tribunal on Iran.

From a perspective of deeply inscribed hybridity, Paul Venzo's chapter, "*La Dolce Vita*", observes that Italy's current economic crisis is interconnected with the politics of the Berlusconi era and the cultural implosion of the myth referenced in the chapter's title. At the same time, Venzo cross-examines the prevailing notion of Italian-ness that is grounded in a cartoonish vision of a country addicted to an indulgent "good life" – further characterized by corruption and obsessive individual self-interest – although these over-the-top constructions have been consistently affirmed in global media. Venzo examines the continued media interest in the antics of ex-Prime Minister Berlusconi and Francesco Schettino (captain of the ill-fated cruise ship Costa Concordia) as they function as synecdoches of narrow versions of Italian identity and simultaneously talk over other ways of interrogating national identities. With the perspective of a first-generation migrant who writes into Italianicity through creative poetic practice, Venzo explores the imminent collapse of outdated modes of understanding what it means to be Italian. Influenced by the work of Braidotti (1993, 2000), Deleuze & Guattari (1987), and Trinh (1992), Venzo argues that crabbed and cramped identity categories (such as ethnicity or nationality) must make room for a new "poetics of the self" characterized by flexibility, multiplicity, nomadism and hybridity. In Venzo's account, poetry and poetics offer a way into the labyrinth of existential material from which the subject is fashioned – and may counter dominant imaginings of Italian identity still prevalent in global media.

The third and final section of the volume addresses the social aspects of identity and the ways in which interpersonal relationships may be highly mediated projects. Each author approaches the topic from two very different contexts. Ya'arit Bokek-Cohen begins this discussion by examining the use of matchmakers in Jewish culture, a practice that dates back centuries. Bokek-Cohen focuses specifically on matchmaking within the National Religious (NR) sector of Jewish society whose members are attempting to balance fidelity to traditional and religious values with allegiance to Zionist secular culture. This negotiation between tradition and modernity presents a unique challenge in finding a mate, leading to an increase in demand for matchmakers. Drawing on marriage market theory (Grossbard-Shechtman 1984, 1985; Grossbard-Shechtman and Clague 2002), Bokek-Cohen examines how matchmakers "package" and "sell" their clients within the marriage

marketplace. Based on interviews with 25 volunteer matchmakers, Bokek-Cohen argues that her participants operate with a deep concern for the collective good. In an effort to solve the "problem" of protracted singleness, however, Bokek-Cohen found that matchmakers often re-constitute the identities with risks of objectification in order to make singles more marketable. The new identity focuses on physical appearance, improved inter-personal relations skills and personal assets.

While Bokek-Cohen sheds new light on the traditional practice of matchmaking, Antonio García-Gómez examines how interpersonal dynamics are shaped by more recent developments in communications technologies. García-Gómez specifically illuminates how some long-prevalent problems of gender roles are given renewed impetus on the internet, while other new problems for identity formation have also arisen. In "Rethinking Agency", García-Gómez examines how British teen girls perform gender through social media sites. García-Gómez situates his study in two social phenomena. The first involves girls' appropriation of "laddish" behavior via codes of communication and socialization that maintain social hierarchies (Jackson 2006; Ringrose 2006). The second phenomenon involves the increased use of pornography in non-pornographic contexts (Evans *et al.* 2010). Drawing on discourse analysis and discursive psychology, García-Gómez examines how young women draw on pornified discourses to shape their sexual identities in episodes of online relational aggression. Based on a quantitative and qualitative analyses of British female teenagers' wall posts on Facebook, García-Gómez argues that the young women employed sexualized images in their discursive strategies for negotiating conflict. García-Gómez also claims that these strategies pose the risk of legitimizing and exacerbating bullying among young women. He builds on current research that demonstrates the frequency in which teenagers engage in over-zealous and potentially detrimental practices in social media (*e.g.*, "sexting" or rumor spreading, *cf.* Ringrose *et al.* 2012; Williams 2012).

"The choice is ours"

It is our desire to employ this "Introduction" to usher in a volume that presents the rigors that arise from academic discipline and its attendant critical distance; even as, paradoxically, the volume examines the "stuff" of the quotidian, drawn from all over the globe. Moreover, in considering identity, it is finally apparent that we are *not* all alike. Genuine and material conflicts are implicated in this irreducible condition of being different from each other. This circumstance is, nevertheless, something in

which to glory since, whoever we may be, we are distinctive in important respects.

In the concluding passage of a carefully measured and insightful analysis of the infamous "Danish Muhammad cartoons" debacle in 2005-2006, British academic Tariq Ramadan threads the needle between distinct identities and the need for common interests in the following terms:

> We are in dire need of mutual trust. The crises provoked by these cartoons shows us how, out of "seemingly nothing", two universes of reference can become deaf to each other and be seduced by defining themselves against each other – with the worst possible consequences. Disasters threaten that extremists on both sides would not fail to use for their own agendas. If people who cherish freedom, who know the importance of mutual respect and are aware of the imperative necessity to establish a constructive and critical debate, if these people are not ready to speak out, to be more committed and visible, then we can expect sad, painful tomorrows. The choice is ours (Ramadan 2006, 6 February).

Following Ramadan's wisdom, a final word on identity may be that it bests serves us a matter of prideful celebration, tempered by critical reflection and resolute cancellation of prejudice.

Notes

[1] As Belden Fields (2003: pp. 91-92) defines the terms, ascriptive identity is grounded in bodily-marked identity that is defined biologically or with reference to whom one is biologically related. This implicates elemental characteristics such as gender, race and ethnicity. Nonascriptive identity is, by contrast, defined by roles and actions that are in some degree within the locus of a subject's control. This far broader sphere of identity includes educational status as well as religious, political or ideological positions that constitute identities. Prejudice and persecution can, of course, be directed at either ascriptive or nonascriptive identities.

[2] Notice that the project of theorizing identity as, at once, a reification and a construction – sometimes called "postmodern" or "post-structuralist" – has been disastrous as a formal political project in its quixotic efforts to mobilize the citizenry behind baffling slogans that, for example, valorize "empty signifiers" and "silences" that "speak" (see Jacoby 2006). Despite the overwrought theoretical arm-waving that it often triggers, "PoMo" has nevertheless proven enabling when it shepherds a flexible and tolerant informal cultural politics into being.

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PART I:

MASS MEDIATED IDENTITY