

Identity in the globalising world*

'There has been a veritable discursive explosion in recent years around the concept of "identity"' – observed Stuart Hall in the introduction to a volume of studies published in 1996.¹ A few years have passed since that observation was made, during which the explosion triggered an avalanche. No other aspect of contemporary life, it seems, attracts these days the similar attention of philosophers, social scientists and psychologists. Not just the 'identity studies' are fast becoming a thriving industry in their own right; more than that is happening. One may say that 'identity' has become by now a prism through which other topical aspects of contemporary life are spotted, grasped and examined. Established issues of social analysis are being rehashed and refurbished to fit the discourse now rotating around the 'identity' axis. For instance, the discussion of justice and equality tends to be conducted in terms of 'recognition'; culture is debated in terms of individual, group or categorical difference, creolisation and hybridity; and the political process is ever more often theorised around the issues of human rights (that is, the right to a separate identity) and of 'life politics' (that is, identity construction, negotiation and assertion).

I suggest that the spectacular rise of the 'identity discourse' can tell us more about the present-day state of human society than its conceptual and analytical results have told us thus far. And so, rather than composing another 'career report' of contentions and controversies which combine into that discourse, I intend to focus on the tracing of experiential grounds, and through them the structural roots of that remarkable shift in intellectual concerns of which the new centrality of the 'identity discourse' is a most salient symptom.

We know from Hegel that the owl of Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, spreads its wings, prudently, at dusk: knowledge, or whatever passes under that name, arrives by the end of the day when the Sun has set and things are no more brightly lit and easily found and handled (long before Hegel coined the tarrying-owl metaphor, Sophocles made the clarity of sight into the monopoly of blind Tiresias). Martin Heidegger gave a new twist to Hegel's aphorism in his discussion of the priority of *Zuhandenheit* to *Vorhandenheit* and of the 'catastrophic' origin of the second. Good lighting is the true blindness: one does not see what is all-too-visible; one does not note what is 'always there'. Things are noticed when they disappear or go bust: they must fall first out from the routinely 'given' for the search after their essences to start and the questions about

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1 Stuart Hall, 'Who needs "identity"?', in Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds.), *Questions of cultural identity*, London: Sage, 1996, p. 1.

their origin, whereabouts, use or value to be asked. In Arland Ussher's succinct summary, 'The world as world is only revealed to me when things go wrong'.² Or, in Vincent Vycinas' rendition,³ whatever my world consists of is brought to my attention only when it goes missing, or when it suddenly stops behaving as, monotonously, it did before, loses its usefulness or shows itself to be 'unready' for my attempts to use it. It is the awkward and unwieldy, unreliable, resistant and otherwise *frustrating* things that force themselves into our vision, attention and thought.

Let us note that the discovery that things do not keep their shape once for all and may be different from what they are is an ambiguous experience. Unpredictability breeds anxiety and fear, the world is full of accidents and surprises; one must never let vigilance to lapse and should never lay down the arms. But the unsteadiness, softness and pliability of things may also trigger ambition and resolve: one can make things better than they are, and need not settle for what there is since no verdict of nature is final, no resistance of reality unbreakable. One can now dream of a different life – more decent, bearable or enjoyable. And if in addition one has confidence in one's power of thought and in the strength of one's muscles, one can also act on those dreams and perhaps even force them to become true. Alain Peyrefitte⁴ has suggested that the remarkable, unprecedented and unique dynamism of our modern capitalist society, all the spectacular advances made by 'western civilization' over the last two or three centuries would be unthinkable without such confidence: the triple trust – in oneself, in others and in jointly built, durable institutions – in which one can confidently inscribe one's long-term plans and actions.

Anxiety and audacity, fear and courage, despair and hope are born together. But the proportion in which they are mixed depends on the resources in one's possession. Owners of foolproof vessels and skilled navigators view the sea as the site of exciting adventure; those condemned to unsound and hazardous dinghies would rather hide behind wave-breakers and think of sailing with trepidation. Fears and joys that emanate from instability of things are distributed highly unequally.

Modernity, we may say, specialised in making *zuhanden* things into *vorhanden*. By 'setting the world in motion', it exposed the fragility and unsteadiness of things and threw open the possibility of (and the need for) reshaping them. Marx and Engels praised the capitalists, the bourgeois revolutionaries, for 'melting the solids and profaning the sacreds' which for long centuries cramped human creative powers. Alexis de Tocqueville thought rather that the solids picked for melting in the heat of modernisation had been already in the state of advanced decomposition and so beyond salvation well before the modern overhaul of nature and society has started. Whatever was the case, human nature, once seen as a lasting and non-negriable legacy of one-off divine creation, has been thrown, together with the rest of divine creation, into the melting pot. No more was it seen – no more could it be seen – as 'given'. Instead, it has turned into a *task*, and a task which every man and woman had no choice but to face up to and perform to the best of their ability. 'Predestination' was replaced with 'life project', fate with vocation – and a 'human nature' into which one was born with 'identity' which one needs to saw up and make fit.

2 Arland Ussher, *Journey through dread*, New York: Devin-Adair, 1955, p. 80.

3 Vincent Vycinas, *Earth and gods*, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969, pp. 36–7.

4 Alain Peyrefitte, *La société de confiance. Essai sur les origines du développement*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 1998, pp. 514–16.

Renaissance philosophers celebrated the breathtaking new vistas that the ‘unfinishness’ of human nature opened before the resourceful and the bold. ‘Men can do all things if they will’, proudly declared Leon Battista Alberti. ‘We can become what we will’, announced Pico della Mirandola with joy and relish. Ovid’s Proteus, who could turn at will from a young man into a lion, a wild boar or a snake, a stone or a tree, and the chameleon, that grandmaster of instant reincarnation, became the paragons of the newly discovered human virtue of self-constitution and self-assertion.⁵ A few decades later Jean-Jacques Rousseau would name *perfectibility* as the sole no-choice attribute with which nature endowed the human race; he would insist that the capacity of self-transformation is the only ‘human essence’, the only trait common to us all.⁶ Humans are free to self-create. What they are is not a no-appeal-allowed verdict of providence, not the matter of predestination.

Which did not mean necessarily that humans are doomed to float and drift: Proteus may be a symbol of the potency of self-creation, but protean existence is not necessarily the first choice of free human beings. Solids may be melted, but they are melted in order to mould new solids better shaped and better fit for human happiness than the old ones – but also more solid and so more ‘certain’ than the old solids managed to be. Melting the solids was to be but the preliminary, site-clearing stage of the modern undertaking to make the world more suitable for human habitation. Designing a new – tough, durable, reliable and trustworthy – setting for human life was to be the second stage, a stage that truly counted since it was to give meaning to the whole enterprise. One order needed to be dismantled so that it could be replaced with another, purpose-built and up to the standards of reason and logic.

As Immanuel Kant insisted, we all – each one of us – are endowed with the faculty of reason, that powerful tool that allows us to compare the options on offer and make our individual choices; but if we use that tool properly, we will all arrive at similar conclusions and will all accept one code of cohabitation which reason tells us is the best. Not all thinkers would be as sanguine as Kant was: not all were sure that each one of us would follow the guidance of reason on one’s own accord. Perhaps people need to be forced to be free, as Rousseau suspected? Perhaps the newly acquired freedom needs to be used *for* the people rather than *by* people? Perhaps we still need the despots, though ‘enlightened’ ones and so less erratic, more resolute and effective than the despots of yore, to design and fix reason-dictated patterns which would guarantee that people make right and proper uses of their freedom? Both suppositions sounded plausible and both had their enthusiasts, prophets and preachers. As it were, the idea of human self-construction and self-assertion carried the seeds of democracy mixed with the spores of totalitarianism. The new era of flexible realities and freedom of choice was to be pregnant with unlikely twins: with human rights, but also with what Hannah Arendt called ‘totalitarian temptation’.

These comments are on the face of it unrelated to our theme; if I made them here, I did it with the intention of showing that ostensible unrelatedness is but an illusion, if not a grave mistake. ‘Incompleteness’ of identity, and particularly individual responsibility for its completion, are in fact intimately related to all other aspects of

5 Stevie Davies, *The Renaissance view of man*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978, pp. 62ff.

6 Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The first and second discourses* (first published in 1749 and 1754), here quoted in the Victor Gourevitch translation, New York: Harper and Row, 1986, pp. 148ff.

modern condition. However it has been posited in our times and however it presents itself in our reflections, 'identity' is not a 'private matter' and a 'private worry'. That our individuality is socially produced is by now a trivial truth, but the obverse of that truth needs to be repeated more often: the shape of our sociality, and so of the society we share, depends in its turn on the way in which the task of 'individualisation' is framed up and responded to.

What the idea of 'individualisation' informs of, is the emancipation of the individual from his or her ascribed, inherited and inborn determination of social character: a departure rightly seen as a most conspicuous and seminal feature of modern condition. To put it in a nutshell, 'individualisation' consists in transforming human 'identity' from a 'given' into a 'task', and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (and also the side effects) of their performance; in other words, it consists in establishing a *de jure* autonomy (though not necessarily the *de facto* one). One's place in society, one's 'social definition', has ceased to be *zuhanden* and become *vorhanden* instead. No more does one's place in society come as a, wanted or unwanted, gift. (As Jean-Paul Sartre famously put it: it is not enough to be born a bourgeois; one must live one's life as a bourgeois. The same did not need, or could not be said, about princes, knights, serfs or townsmen of the pre-modern era.) Needing to *become* what one is is the feature of modern living. (Not of 'modern individualization', that expression being evidently pleonastic; to speak of individualisation and of modernity is to speak of the same social condition.) Modernity replaces the *determination* of social standing with a compulsive and obligatory *self-determination*.

This, let me repeat, holds for the whole of the modern era: for all periods and for all sectors of society. If so, then why has 'the veritable explosion' of concerns with identity occurred in recent years only? What, if anything, new happened to the problem as old as modernity itself?

Yes, there is something new in the old problem – and this explains the current alarm about the tasks which past generations seemed to handle routinely in a matter-of-fact way. Within the shared predicament of identity-builders there are significant variations which set apart successive periods of modern history. The 'self-identification' task put before men and women once the stiff frames of estates had been broken in the early modern era boiled down to the challenge of living 'true to kind' (as the Americans say, 'up to the Joneses'): of actively conforming to the established social types and models of conduct, of imitating, following the pattern, 'acculturating', not falling out of step, not deviating from the norm. The falling apart of 'estates' did not set individuals drifting. 'Estates' came to be replaced by 'classes'.

While the estates were the matter of ascription, class membership entailed a large measure of achievement; classes, unlike the estates, had to be 'joined', and the membership had to be continuously renewed, reconfirmed and documented in day-by-day conduct. In other words, the 'disembedded' individuals were prompted and prodded to deploy their new powers and new right to self-determination in the frantic search of 're-embeddment'. And there was no shortage of 'beds' ready and waiting to accommodate them. Class allocation, though formed and negotiable rather than inherited or simply 'born into', as the *estates*, *Stände* or *états* used to be, tended to become as solid, unalterable and resistant to individual manipulation as the pre-modern assignment to the estate. Class and gender hung heavily over the individual range of choices; to escape their constraint was not much easier than to challenge one's place in the 'Divine

chain of beings'. If not in theory, then at least for *practical* intents and purposes, class and gender looked uncannily like 'facts of nature' and the task left to most self-assertive individuals was to 'fit in' into the allocated niche through behaving as its established residents did.

This is, precisely, what distinguished the 'individualisation' of yore from the form it has taken now, in our own times of 'liquid' modernity, when not just the individual *placements* in society, but the *places* to which the individuals may gain access and in which they may wish to settle are melting fast and can hardly serve as targets for 'life projects'. This new restlessness and fragility of goals affects us all, unskilled and skilled, uneducated and educated, work-shy and hardworking alike. There is little or nothing we can do to 'bind the future' through following diligently the current standards.

As Daniel Cohen pointed out, 'Qui débute sa carrière chez Microsoft n'a aucune idée de là où il la terminera. La commencer chez Ford ou Renault s'était au contraire la quasi-certitude de la finir au même endroit'.⁷ Not just the individuals are on the move but also the finishing lines of the tracks they run on and the running tracks themselves. 'Disembedding' is now an experience which is likely to be repeated an unknown number of times in the course of individual life, since few if any 'beds' for 're-embedding' look solid enough to sustain the stability of long occupation. The 'beds' in view look rather like 'musical chairs', of various sizes and styles as well as of changing numbers and mobile positions, forcing men and women to be constantly on the run and promising no rest and no satisfaction of 'arriving', no comfort of reaching the destination where one can disarm, relax and stop worrying. There is no prospect of 'final re-embedding' at the end road; being on the road has become the permanent way of life disembedded (now chronically disembedded) individuals.

Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, Max Weber suggested that 'instrumental rationality' is the main factor regulating human behaviour in the era of modernity – perhaps the only one likely to emerge unscathed from the battle of motivational forces. The matter of ends seemed then to have been settled; the remaining task of modern men and women was to select the best means to those ends. One could say that uncertainty as to the relative efficiency of means and their availability would be, as long as Weber's proposition held true, the main source of insecurity and anxiety characteristic of modern life. I suggest, though, that whether or not Weber's view was correct at the start of the twentieth century, its truth had gradually and relentlessly evaporated by the time the century drew to its close. Life today not the *means* are nowadays the prime source of insecurity and anxiety.

The twentieth century excelled in the over-production of means; means have been produced on a constantly accelerating speed and in excess of known, let alone acutely felt, needs. Abundant means came to seek the ends which they could serve; it was the turn of solutions to search desperately for not-yet-articulated problems which they could resolve. On the other hand, ends have become ever more diffuse, scattered and uncertain: the most profuse source of anxiety, the great unknown of men's and women's life. If you look for a short, sharp, yet apt and poignant expression of that new predicament in which people find themselves these days, you could do worse than remember a small ad published recently under the 'Jobs sought' heading of an English newspaper: 'Have car, can travel; awaiting propositions'.

7 Daniel Cohen, *Richesse du monde, pauvretés des nations*, Paris: Flammarion, 1997, p. 84.

The 'problem of identity', which has haunted men and women since the advent of modern times, has thus changed its shape and content. It used to be the kind of problem that pilgrims confront and struggle to resolve: a problem of 'how to get there'. It is now more like a problem with which the vagabonds, people without fixed addresses and *sans papiers*, struggle daily: 'Where could I, or should I, go? And where will this road I've taken bring me?' The task is no more to muster enough strength and determination to proceed, through trials and errors, triumphs and defeats, along the beaten track stretching ahead. The task is to pick the least risky turn at the nearest crossroads, to change direction before the road ahead gets impassable, before the road-scheme has been redesigned, or before the coveted destination has been moved elsewhere or lost its glitter. In other words, the quandry tormenting men and women at the turn of the century is not so much how to obtain the identities of their choice and how to have them recognised by others, but *which* identity to choose, and how best to keep alert and vigilant so that *another* choice can be made in case the previously chosen identity is withdrawn from the market or stripped of its seductive powers. The main, the most nerve-breaking, worry is not how to find a place inside a solid frame of social class or category and, having found it, how best to guard it and avoid eviction. What makes one worry is the suspicion that the hard-won framework will be soon torn apart or melted.

In a by now classic, almost forty-year-old statement, Erik H. Erikson diagnosed the confusion suffered by the adolescents of his time as an 'identity crisis' (a term first coined during the last war to describe the condition of some mental patients who 'lost a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity'). 'Identity crisis' in adults, as Erikson put it, is a pathological condition which requires medical intervention; it is also a common, yet passing, stage in 'normal' personal development, which in all probability will come to its natural end as the adolescents mature. Asked what the healthy state of a person should be, 'what identity feels like when you become aware of the fact that you do undoubtedly *have* one', Erikson answered: it feels 'as a *subjective sense of an invigorating sameness and continuity*'.⁸

Either Erikson's opinion has aged, as opinions usually do, or the 'identity crisis' has become today more than a rare condition of mental patients or a passing condition of adolescence: the 'sameness' and 'continuity' are feelings seldom experienced nowadays by the young and the adults alike. Furthermore, they are no more coveted; if desired, the dream is as a rule contaminated with sinister premonitions and fear. As two prominent cultural analysts, Zbyszko Melosik and Tomasz Szkudlarek, have pointed out,⁹ it is a curse of all identity construction that 'I lose my freedom, when I reach the goal; I am not myself, when I become somebody'. And in a kaleidoscopic world of reshuffled values, of mobile tracks and melting frames, freedom of manoeuvre rises to the rank of the topmost value – indeed, the *meta*-value, the condition of access to all other values: past, present and, above all, future. Rational conduct in such a world demands that the options, as many as possible, are kept open and gain an identity that fits too tightly, an identity that once and for all offers 'sameness' and 'continuity' results in the closing of options or the forfeiting of them in advance. As Christopher Lasch famously observed, the 'identities' sought these days are such as

8 Erik H. Erikson, *Identity. Youth and crisis*, London: Faber, 1974, pp. 17–19.

9 Zbyszko Melosik and Tomasz Szkudlarek, *Kultura, tożsamość i edukacja*, Kraków: Impuls, 1998, p. 89.

'can be adopted and discarded like a change of costume'; if they are 'freely chosen', the choice 'no longer implies commitments and consequences' and so 'the freedom to choose amounts in practice to an abstention from choice',¹⁰ at least, let me add, from a *binding* choice.

In Grenoble in December 1997, Pierre Bourdieu spoke of *précarité*, which 'est aujourd'hui partout' and 'hante les consciences and les inconscients'. The fragility of all conceivable points of reference and endemic uncertainty about the future profoundly affect those who have been hit already and all the rest of us who cannot be certain that future blows will pass us by. 'En rendant tout l'avenir incertain', says Bourdieu,

la précarité interdit toute anticipation rationnelle et, en particulier, ce minimum de croyance et d'es-pérance en l'avenir qu'il faut avoir pour se révolter, surtout collectivement, contre le présent, même le plus intolérable ... 'Pour concevoir un projet révolutionnaire, c'est-à-dire une ambition raisonnée de transformer le présent par référence à un avenir projeté, il faut avoir un minimum de prise sur le présent'¹¹

That grip on the present, the confidence of being in control of one's destiny, is what men and women in our type of society most conspicuously lack. Less and less we hope that by joining forces and standing arm to arm we may force a change in the rules of the game; perhaps the risks which make us afraid and the catastrophes which make us suffer have collective social origins, but they seem to fall upon each one of us at random, as individual problems of the kind that could be confronted only individually and repaired, if at all, by individual efforts.

There seems to be little point in designing alternative modes of togetherness, in stretching the imagination to visualise a society better serving the cause of freedom and security, in drawing blueprints of socially administered justice, if a collective agency capable of making the words flesh is nowhere in sight. Our dependencies are now truly global; our actions, however are still local. The powers that shape the condition under which we confront our problems are beyond the reach of all the agencies that modern democracy has invented in the two centuries of its history. As Manuel Castells put it, real power, the exterritorial global power, flows, but politics, confined now as in the past to the framework of nationstates, stays as before tied to the ground.

A vicious circle, indeed. The rapid globalisation of the power network seems to conspire and collaborate with privatised life politics; they stimulate, sustain and reinforce each other. If globalisation saps the established political institutions' capacity to act effectively, the massive retreat from 'body politic' to the narrow concerns of life-politics prevents the crystallisation of alternative modes of collective action on a par with the globality of the network of dependencies. Everything seems to be in place to make both the globalisation of life conditions and the *morcellement*, the atomisation and privatisation of life-struggles, selfpropelling and self-perpetuating. It is against this background that the logic and the endemic illogicality of contemporary 'identity concerns' and the actions they trigger needs to be scrutinised and understood.

As Ulrich Beck pointed out, there are no biographical solutions to systemic contradiction, though it is such solutions which we are pressed or cajoled to discover or

10 Christopher Lasch, *The minimal self: psychic survival in troubled times*, London: Pan Books, 1984, p. 38.

11 Pierre Bourdieu, 'La précarité est aujourd'hui partout', in *Contre-feux*, Paris: Liber Raisons d'agir, 1998, pp. 96-7.

invent. There can be no rational response to the rising *précarité* of human conditions as long as such response is to be confined to the individual's action; the irrationality of possible responses is inescapable given that the scope of life-politics and of the network of forces that determine its conditions are purely and simply incomparable, and widely disproportionate.

If you cannot – or don't believe you can – do what truly matters, you turn to things which matter less or perhaps not at all, but which you can do or believe you can; and by turning your attention and energy to such things, you may even make them matter, for a time at least. 'Having no hope', says Christopher Lasch, of improving their lives in any of the ways that matter, people have convinced themselves that what matters is psychic self-improvement: getting in touch with their feelings, eating health food, taking lessons in ballet or belly-dancing, immersing themselves in the wisdom of the East, jogging, learning how to 'relate', overcoming the 'fear of pleasure'. Harmless in themselves, these pursuits, elevated to a programme and wrapped in the rhetoric of authenticity and awareness, signify a retreat from politics.¹²

There is a wide and widening, spectrum of 'substitute pastimes' symptomatic of the shift from things that matter but about which nothing can be done to things that matter less, or do not matter at all, but can be dealt with and handled. Compulsive shopping figures prominently among them. Mikhail Bakhtin's 'carnivals' used to be celebrated inside the home territory where 'routine life' was at other times conducted, and so allowed to lay bare the normally hidden alternatives which daily life contained. Unlike those carnivals, trips to shopping malls are expeditions to another world starkly different from the rest of daily life, to that 'elsewhere' where one can experience briefly the self-confidence and 'authenticity' for which one is seeking in vain in routine daily pursuits. Shopping expeditions fill the void left by the imagination's no-more-undertaken travels to an alternative, more secure, humane and just society.

The time-and-effort-consuming activity of putting together, dismantling and rearranging self-identity is another of these 'substitute pastimes'. That activity is, as we have already seen, conducted under conditions of acute insecurity: the targets of action are as precarious as its effects are uncertain. Efforts lead to frustration often enough for the fear of ultimate failure to poison the joy of temporary triumphs. No wonder that dissolving personal fears in the 'might of numbers', trying to make them inaudible in the hubbub of a boisterous crowd, is a constant temptation that many a lonely 'identity builder' finds difficult to resist. Even stronger is the temptation to pretend that it is the similarity of individual fears that 'makes a community' so one can make a company out of solitude.

As Eric Hobsbawm recently observed, 'never was the word "community" used more indiscriminately and emptily than in the decades when communities in the sociological sense became hard to find in real life'¹³. 'Men and women look for groups to which they can belong, certainly and forever, in a world in which all else is moving and shifting, in which nothing else is certain'.¹⁴ Jock Young supplies a succinct and poignant gloss: 'Just as community collapses, identity is invented'¹⁵. 'Identity' owes the attention it attracts and the passions it begets to being a surrogate of community:

12 Christopher Lasch, *The culture of narcissism*, New York: Warner, 1979, pp. 29–30.

13 Eric Hobsbawm, *The age of extremes*, London: Michael Joseph, 1994, p. 428.

14 Eric Hobsbawm, 'The cult of identity politics', in *New Left Review* 217 (1996), p. 40.

15 Jock Young, *The exclusive society*, London: Sage, 1999, p. 164.

of that allegedly 'natural home' which is no longer available in a privatised and individualised, fast globalising world, and for that reason can be safely imagined as a cosy shelter of security and confidence hotly to be desired. The paradox is that in order to offer even a modicum of security and thus perform its healing role, identity must belie its origin, must deny being just a surrogate. It needs to conjure up a phantom of the self-same community which it has come to replace. Identity sprouts on the graveyard of communities, but flourishes thanks to its promise to resurrect the dead.

The 'era of identity' is full of sound and fury. The search for identity divides and separates; yet the precariousness of solitary identity-building prompts identity-builders to seek pegs on to hang communally their individually experienced fears and anxieties and to perform exorcism rites in the company of others who are similarly afraid and anxious. Whether such 'peg communities' provide what is hoped – collective insurance against individually confronted risks – is a moot question, but mounting a barricade in the company of others does supply a momentary respite from loneliness. Effective or not, something has been done, and one can at least console oneself that the blows are not being taken hands-down. As Jonathan Friedman puts it, in our globalising world 'one thing that is not happening is that boundaries are disappearing. Rather, they seem to be erected on every new street corner of every declining neighbourhood of our world'.¹⁶

Boundaries are not drawn to fence off and protect already existing identities. As the great Norwegian anthropologist Frederik Barth explained, it is exactly the other way round: ostensibly shared, 'communal' identities are by-products of feverish boundary-drawing. It is only after the border-posts have been dug in that the myths of their antiquity are spun and the fresh, cultural/political origins of identity are carefully covered up by genesis stories. This stratagem attempts to belie the fact that (to quote Stuart Hall again¹⁷) what the idea of identity does *not* signal is a 'stable core of the self, unfolding from the beginning to end through all the vicissitudes of history without change'.

Perhaps instead of talking about identities, inherited or acquired, it would be more in keeping with the realities of the globalising world to speak of *identification*, a never-ending, always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended activity in which we all, by necessity or by choice, are engaged. There is little chance that the tensions, confrontations and conflicts that activity generates would subside. The frantic search of identity is not a residue of pre-globalisation times not yet fully extirpated but bound to become extinct as the globalisation progresses; it is, on the contrary, the side-effect and by-product of the combination of globalising and individualising pressures and the tensions they spawn. The identification wars are neither contrary nor stand in the way of the globalising tendency: they are a legitimate offspring and natural companion of globalisation and, far from arresting it, they lubricate its wheels.

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16 Jonathan Friedman, 'The hybridization of roots and the abhorrence of the bush', in Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash (eds.), *Spaces of culture*, London: Sage, 1999, p. 241.

17 Stuart Hall, 'Who needs identity?', p. 3.