

3. HOW INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE IDENTITIES ARE CONSTRUCTED

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Identity involves the *permanence* and *continuity* of *being*.

Although this concept represents an essential part of the daily lives of individuals and nations, it is interpreted in diverse ways and remains difficult to understand.

In logical terms, identity is equivalent to the tautology that A is A (« I am I... »). Saying that a person has an identity gives him/her permanence - continuity across time. Identity is an absolute, an invariant, and an intangible that defines persons (or nations) in their historical continuity and in their substantial permanence.

In the following discussion, we plan to illustrate that unity and cohesiveness, and continuity and permanence alike, are never «given», but that they are solely *ideals*, or *functional values* towards which individuals, groups, and nations strive. These aspirations are pursued, unceasingly relaunched, put in question, lost, and revisited. They are not attainments, but «targets» that constantly retreat as we advance towards them.

Dual Identity : the Self and the Other

Durkheim suggested that two beings coexist in ourselves: the first one, the *individual being*, represents our private universe, our personality features, our heredity, our experiences and memories, and our personal history; the second one, the *social being*, corresponds to the internalized ideas, feelings, habits, values, and norms that originated in our social group (Durkheim 1977-1922, 1963 -1925). Society is perpetuated through its members' socialization and psychic integration of social injunctions. Durkheim also compares *individual consciousness*, a psychic reality, to *collective consciousness*, a social reality. Additionally, an internal dualism is created by the juxtaposition of the *conscious* mind and the *unconscious* mind. A part of the unconscious is comprised of social injunctions, prohibitions, and

other normative references. The unconscious appears to be the most « private » trace of an alternate reality within ourselves.

However, another dualism exists in the construction of personal identity: the comparison of the Self to the Other, including both friends and enemies. De Singly (1996, 21 : 21) offers a good example of this: « The contemporary individual... needs a special mirror, the gaze of somebody else. He wishes to have near him a Pygmalion, a close individual who does not create him but helps him discover his own identity ». This *alter ego* can be perceived within a *homomorphic relationship* (relationship between peers) or *heteromorphic relationship* (relationship between two different or unequal beings, adult-child for example)¹. The mirroring process can confuse identities². In other cases, identity emerges through comparison with another. Let us take the example of the French-German relationship: « Identity is not constructed solely in a relation to oneself. It is constructed also in a confrontation with the Other. And, for the last century, France's preferred Other has been Germany. Our country has an impassioned relationship with its German neighbor, always ready to reappear » (Lipiansky 1991). Confrontation facilitates the development both of one's own identity and of the Other's identity.

What will happen when the Other-adversary becomes the Other-immigrant who bursts into my (our) territory ? The Other cannot provoke anxiety, contempt, resentment or hate unless he raises an ambiguous feeling of strangeness (*xenos*, from which *xenophobia* stems, means *strange* as well as *stranger*). This feeling implies that the Other is both different of oneself and similar to oneself. He is a « fellow creature slightly different » to use Martens's expression (1981). « Racism » and « xenophobia » do not suggest a radical refusal of the Other. Then, the Other would

¹ For example, the mother can have the function of a mirror. Nancy Friday dedicated to her mother her book entitled *My mother, my love*: « When I ceased to see my mother with my child eyes, I discovered the woman who helped me give birth to myself. I dedicate this book to Jane Colbert Friday - Scott ».

² In his novel *Son*, Serge Doubrovsky writes, points out his links and similarities to his mother: « We will be one-in-two. Two bodies, one heart. The same being. A sole destiny in two examples. ». To be two in one ? But in which one ? » - which proves that even in the fused couple, personal identity works for its own differentiation: « She is my reversed image. My pact: to be like Mom. My oath: to never be like her. Between the two, I vascillate... image hunter. In the mirror.(...). Lost my place... Decisive. I am resolved. To get one ».

just be « different ». If the presence of the Other is disquieting, it is because he plagues me like a dangerous *alter ego*: the internal *alter* I have to eradicate, otherwise I cannot be « myself ». For this reason, the rejection of the other will be even stronger when one's personal identity is fragile.

In addition to this process of differentiation, the origin of identity (*to be the same* and *to be oneself*) also is associated with *multiple identifications* (to be a man or a woman, French or German, bearded or clean-shaven, etc.).

Identification is a means for a person to adopt the characteristics of someone else. This does not in any way imply that the person loses his/her identity. On the contrary, any identification functions to reinforce the identity.

Identifications can be *real* or *imaginary*, *cognitive* (capacity to differentiate, to recognize) or *affective* (identifying to someone else), *individual* or *collective*.

Identifications fulfill three essential functions: *constructive*, *defensive* and *adaptive*.

In their *constructive* function, they favor the emergence of a valued self-representation and orient the individual toward positive actions. In their *defensive* function, they allow, at least temporarily, an escape from anxiety, feelings of impotence, and devaluing. In their *adaptive* function, they allow the individual to face external pressures, to remind him/her of identity, to anticipate and to think ahead.

One can distinguish six forms of identification:

- *Dependence* identification, through which the individual tends to lose oneself in the affective omnipotence of the Other, and can only live in complete dependence on this Other who satisfies his needs and brings him security (with or without tenderness).
- *Identification with the aggressor*, through which the individual tends to adopt the violent behavior or the power of the Other to refuse and to forbid, so as to protect (or assert) his/her physical or psychic integrity and avoid being torn apart or annihilated by the Other that he/she fears.

- *Mastery and accomplishment Identification*, through which the individual perceives that the Other is successful and therefore tries to replicate the active and creative power of the Other. It allows the individual to allay feelings of impotence and failure, in order to master the environment and interpersonal relationships.
- *Mirror identification or twin identification (twin Other)* allows the individual to assimilate the similar-Other; in basic terms, it is identification with the identity that the individual has projected on another.
- *Categorical Identification* allows the person to construct a number of partial identities, through a cognitive and affective acceptance of social roles and statuses. It allows a person to recognize oneself as a member of categories and groups, by taking advantage of intragroupal similarities and emphasizing the differences of « Other » groups.
- Finally, *project identification* orients the subject to the future, leading him/her to generate conflicts by operating projections and by building programs of action.

The three first identifications (*dependence - aggressor - mastery*) concern heteromorphic relationships with other persons, real or imaginary, having certain powers and skills. The fourth one (*mirror-twin*) refers to homomorphic relationships. The fifth (*categorical*) implies identification to groups and categories. The final one (*project*) entails identification with an ego ideal, corresponding to a nonexistent model.

Even if it is possible to observe the progressive appearance of these forms of identification during childhood and adolescence, they also develop in the adult, who may activate one or another, depending on the circumstances. One also finds them in the collective behaviors.

The social participant (individual or collective) is never alone when he/she employs identity strategies based on defense, construction, assertion or adaptation. The identifications discussed above imply socialization through education, implementation of social injunctions and integrated behaviors, and the possibility to interact, communicate, and adopt the

values and meanings advocated by reference and social groups.

Therefore, the identity strategies, according to Camilleri (1996), are a way to associate two functional dimensions of identity the *ontological function*, linked with values, and the *instrumental function*, linked with adaptation. Every culture is supposed to provide congruence between value systems and beliefs and ways of adjusting to the conditions of life. The optimal condition is reached when « the representations and the values to which the individual identifies, through which he gives meaning to his life, are those which allow him to be in harmony with his environment».

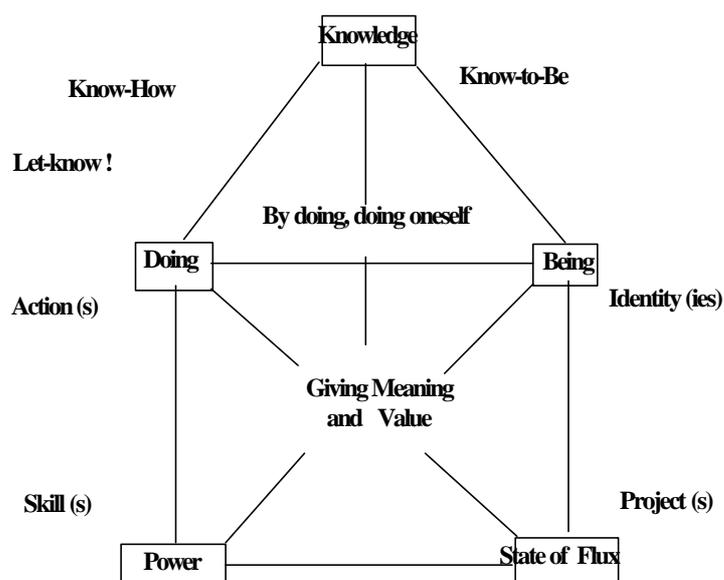
Beyond dualism : the multiple identity

As you may have observed, the previous discussion was based on a dual concept of identity: either an inner duality (personal identity vs. internalized social identity) or about an internal - external duality (identity of the self vs. identification to the Other).

We have shown that there is not a single identity of the ego. Now, we will explain that identity (either individual or collective) cannot be reduced to dualism. To exist, identity must be open to third parties... and to multiple parties.

The following diagram (Figure 1) shows that identity is associated with systems of meaning and values, with a culture allowing its members to develop knowledge, either individually or collectively. As a system of representations and feelings, identity also is associated with the *power* and the *future*: on a collective level, through political action, in its broadest meaning, and on the individual level, through the organization of skills and achievements within a personal or interpersonal schema. These power struggles and relationships necessarily introduce a controversial dimension, the dimension of conflict and crisis within the theory of identity.

Figure 1. The dynamics of the player (individual and collective).



Thus, identity must not be considered as separate from action, useless to its emergence or its organization. It is associated not only to continuity (the feeling of staying the same over time), but also to multiple dimensions (continuity, consistency, positivity, differentiation - internal or external -, assertiveness, originality); identity expresses itself through individual and collective, reactive and resilient mechanisms.

Identity strategies support more general strategies for the control, anchoring, adaptation and orientation of the individual personality: the result of what we will call *personalization-socialization*. These strategies are coordinated with the meanings and interests that the individual constructs him/herself, or that he/she finds in the social environment.

Alienation occurs when the individual, or the group, is in a position of *impotence* (instead of assuming power), of *designificance* and *insignificance* (instead of creating meaning and social significance), *anomie* (instead of developing autonomy and differentiation), and *strangeness to values* (instead of building and categorizing values).

Figure 2 presents a model of personalization-socialization where the two processes, instead of being associated in a binary fashion, work reciprocally through each other. These processes are conveyed through several strategies: individual behaviors

based on *history*, linked with a personalized *culture* (meaning and values), and oriented by what I called *identization* (the process of constructing an identity), the latter being unceasingly *updated in relation to* life changes, losses, or geographic moves (migration, for example), but with an effort to *maintain continuity within the change*: an illusory effort, and yet a vital one, because it contributes to the quest for personal authenticity.

Now, the plan is utilized in a real way (realistic association between a goal and the means to reach it) or an imaginary way (utopia, an unrealistic plan due to the inadequateness of either the aim or the available means...) to *manage crises*. Putting a plan in action allows the individual to value himself (self-esteem is the affective keystone of identity), to establish or re-establish his position in the social network, and to adapt to his the conditions of his life.

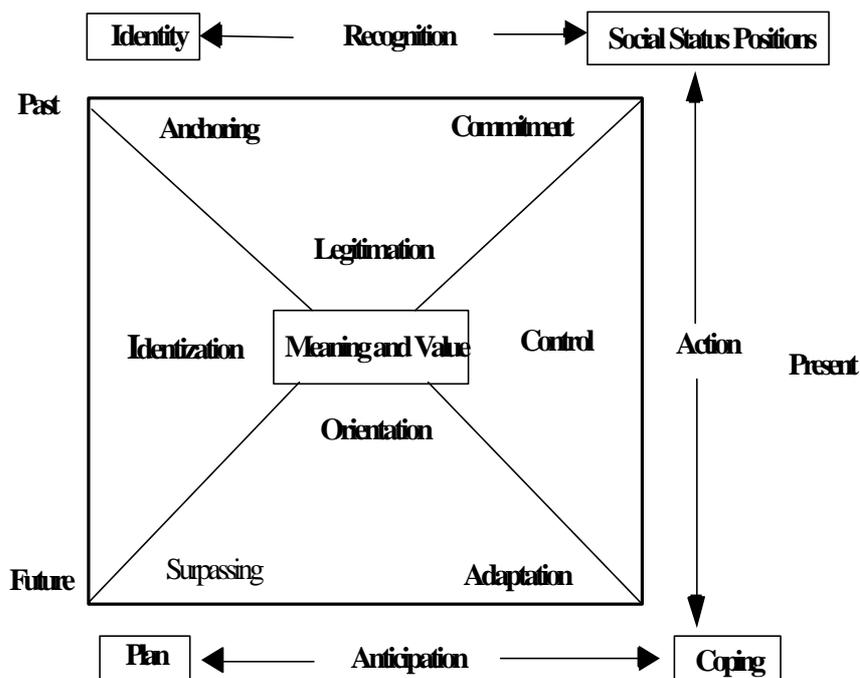


Figure 2: Personalization Strategies of the Players

Collective identity often has been established through personalization: the Historian Michelet has said, « France is a person ».

This metaphor has its limits, but it is true that there is a close relationship between individual and collective identities - between the collective practices, projects and ideologies, on the one hand, and the individual plans and systems of values, on the other hand.

Faced with the demoralization of Western societies, researchers can take either pessimistic or optimistic stands. There is no doubt that the loss of identity in our modern cultures has inhibited their potential to energize, to sustain their power, to strengthen their will, and to gain the courage that would allow them to truly thrive. A strong identity still is the condition by which a social group can maintain its cohesiveness and defeat the threat of dissolution.