

Identity, “Identology” and World Religions

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Identity serves as a vehicle for World Religions (WRs), and WRs are indispensable in the study of identity—Identology. The concept “identity” itself has become an overly used deflationary term that has lost some of its connotation, authenticity, or effectiveness. The claim for a persistent identity is slowly becoming scarce or often illusory. This paper explores the meanings and manifestations of the terms “identity” and “identification,” and then reintroduces “sense of identity” as a more evocative construct for the 21st century, especially in the context of WRs. Sense of Identity is then operationalized into three primary components: 1) personal beliefs, 2) communal attributes, and 3) sociopolitical attitudes, or for the sake of brevity, beliefs, attributes, and attitudes. These three key components furnish a concentric model with beliefs at the core, attributes surrounding that core, and attitudes at the periphery. But this theoretical model is incomplete without a second pivotal structure of concentric circles drawn from different perceptions of Sense of History, with the personal view of history at the core, the communal view of history surrounding that core, and the dominant historiography inhabiting the periphery. These two structures may differ in their configuration from one person or community to another, and from one time to another, but they interact with, shape, and are shaped by, each other. Eventually, the two structures merge into one coherent, sensible, and emancipatory model for any discourse on WRs.

Keywords: Identity; Identification; Sense of Identity; Age of Identity; Identology; Authenticity; Othering; Altruism; Alterity

Introduction

The etymology of the word “identity” is rooted in the Latin words *idem* and *identitas*, meaning, respectively, “same” and “sameness” to something or someone in characteristics or attributes. The new title Identology was initially introduced and its content outlined by this author in recent international forums on diasporic religious identities at SDSU and UCLA. Although it is beyond the scope of this definitional essay to discuss in detail the urgent need for an independent interdisciplinary field of Identology and the central role of WRs in it, some preliminary foundational pointers will suffice.

The use of “identity” can be found in many academic discourses and has been a part of the title of over eighty volumes in recent decades (e.g., Erikson, 1968, 1974, 1980; Heidegger, 1969; Norton, 1988; Giddens, 1991; Calhoun, 1994; Jenkins, 1994; Bradley, 1996; Harney, 1996; Castells, 2004; Hoover, 2004; Appiah, 2005). More importantly, the rise of “dual,” “fractured,” “multiple,” “mixed,” “hyphenated” and many other forms of identities is also becoming more and more noticeable with signs of widening future proliferation.

This rising visibility of new types of identity is perhaps due to the impact on our daily lives of the rapid changes taking place in the global society beginning over sixty years ago. For example, we are told that “the chief problem of people in the middle decade of the twentieth century is emptiness” (May, 1953: p. 14), and that “from the middle of [that] century, the

problem of man’s identity has been in the foreground” (Kung, 1979: p. 117). After the 1960s, it was confirmed that “the cultural values by which people had gotten their sense of identity had been wiped away” (May, 1969: p. 26). Thus, the meaning of identity in the past and up to WWII was unmistakable and quite different from its present ambiguous and problematic notions.

The Focus on the Self

These changes are also due to the renewed focus, especially in liberal democracies, on the importance of the individual and the self. It is *renewed* because the interest in the individual has been with us since ancient times; the Sophists, for example, “glorify” the individual in their teachings (Barker, 1959: p. 27). This renewed interest in the individual and the self, which is tantamount to the development or shaping of one’s identity, may be traced to the Age of Enlightenment in the writings of prominent thinkers like Hume, Voltaire, Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard, to mention only a few. Even in the earlier works of the “old” rationalists, including Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Leibniz, and Berkeley, this emphasis on the individual is prevalent. Such preoccupation with the self has contributed to an increase in circulation of the term identity in many academic disciplines. This in turn has forced individuals to search for a deeper meaning or perhaps for a *new* understanding of identity in the broader context of human history.

Ancient Greek tragedies, for example, utilize the term *anagnorisis*, meaning recognition. It has been suggested that when “we examine the theme of recognition in Euripides’ *Iphigenia in Tauris*, we see the complementary nature of these two modes of explanation, as well as the complex mixture of intellect and emotion that is entailed in identification and misidentification” (Simon, 1978: p. 99). More broadly, however, identity can also be observed in major societal shifts, whether in the transformation from tribal societies to empires, or later from empires to nation-states. While tribal identities were constructed mainly by the socioeconomic realities of the tribe as a collection of clans with some configuration of family blood ties, identities in empires, and later in nation-states, reflect interactions shaped by geographical, political, and economic factors and settings. Relations or enmities based on WRs and other world views (WVs) were not only present, but also often prominent throughout the history of mankind.

In the modern era, philosophers have used the concept of identity mainly since John Locke while psychoanalysts with the work of Sigmund Freud. Freud himself uses the term “identification”. Overall, thinkers were concerned with the nature and continuity of a person as well as the sameness of two or more persons. Moreover, the Marxist distinction between private and public spheres has subsequently led to an emphasis on the relation between the individual and the social, where the latter has over time been reduced to secondary importance. Beginning with the post-WWII era, the social and the individual were reduced to an even lower significance. For example, R. D. Laing discusses the human situation and personal alienation and perceives the self as “divided” (Laing, 1971); Herbert Marcuse observes a “one-dimensional society” that eventually produces a “one-dimensional man” (Marcuse, 1978); and Michel Foucault declares the human as a whole to have “disappeared” (Foucault, 1979).

The Self and Othering

Following the post WWI generation, a new discourse known as “identity politics” and, at times, “the politics of recognition” has emerged (Taylor, 1992/1994). Like how WRs have typically operated, and more so in the Abrahamic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), this form of political life often seems to emphasize difference rather than commonality among people, and to focus on the local rather than the global as the central point of identity. This socially and politically motivated trend, some scholars argue, was stimulated by the rise of capitalism and the emphasis on consumerism (Zaretsky, 1994: pp. 198-199), but also perhaps by the deeply socialized desire for othering; othering aggrandizes the self. Thus, the 1980s and 1990s inspired religious and political moments of enthusiasm that transformed some minds into beginning to think of the common, the global, and/or the environmental. For example, the 1893 Parliament of WRs was reignited (Chicago, 1993), the Pluralism Project was announced (Harvard, 1991), and cold walls so to speak (e.g., the Berlin Wall, 1989) were taken down and replaced with warm reunions and common prospects. These promising developments were being initiated at a time when centeredness was being noted as the number one ecological problem.

(Post)Modernity demands of us to continuously be awake in order to avoid its dark and often unconscious imprint on identity. It suffices to invoke the closing statement of Victor Frankl’s

Search For Meaning: “So let us be alert—alert in a twofold sense—since Auschwitz we know what man is capable of, and since Hiroshima we know what is at stake” (Frankl, 1959: p. 179). These two powerful images must remain alive—for both occurred in less than 150 years from “enlightened” masterpieces, including the 1776 American Declaration of Independence, the 1787-89 American Constitution, and the 1789-99 French Revolution. Declarations like these have shaped a new phase in human relations but their essence is still a work in progress simply because othering still reigns supreme. Moreover, the 9/11 horrific acts, as well as the 20th century massacres, from the genocide against Armenians by the Ottomans (WWI) to the chemical attacks of the Iraqi regime of Saddam Hussein against the Kurds of Halabja (1988), are outcomes of othering. They must remain mandatory reminders as we advance in the 21st century.

Yet throughout these past few decades of tumultuous transformations, some progressive voices continue to offer us hopefulness, optimism, and encouragement for appreciating the self while reducing the attitude of othering. Among philosophers, one must include a prominent defender of rationalism, Jürgen Habermas, who provides conditions for desired “undistorted communication” and a theory for a “communicative rationality” in which the self plays a major role and everyone in society gets the chance to participate, assert their position, and contribute to the ongoing discourse (Habermas, 1981 & 1987). Another example is the late French thinker Jean Baudrillard, who formulates some mandatory “fatal strategies” for “saving” the self from the unfolding despair, and for promoting it as an enlightened entity with its own unique authentic emancipation (Baudrillard, 1990).

The New Age of Identity

Despite the intensity and urgency of intellectual discourses on the self, its relation to the social, and its view of itself, the impact of recurrent horrific tragedies may have instilled cynical or uncertain identities that continue to sweep every corner of the globe, demanding an authentic form of identity. It follows that the notion of a “search for meaning” that presently goes hand in hand with a “search for safety” has also become a “search for identity”. In addition, the search for identity must be infused by a search for commonality of meaning and purpose. The discourse of “we vs. them” must become something of the past in a time shaped by heightened awareness of “technology vs. privacy,” “terror vs. safety,” and “ambiguity vs. authenticity”. Such time is the new Age of Identity. Indeed, we are living in a *new* Age of Identity, which is coinciding with the Age of the Internet. The place and role of WRs in this Age of Identity is slowly (and at times covertly) intensifying due to the unprecedented impact of globalization and technology, the new consciousness of ecological morality and environmental ethics, and the spread of religious pluralism aided by the interfaith and other dialogical and meta-religious movements. These developments ushered in the rise to prominence of Googlization with identity interfacing with technology and with itself unlike ever before. Virtual relations and internet surfing were being launched as the cornerstones of this new Age of Identity. Although this imaginative groundwork for the 21st century was being formulated in the late 1980s and 1990s, such groundwork was tragically interrupted by 9/11 and its subsequent constant hovering of terror. Almost instantly, and in the name of identity, the In-

ternet became a medium for education and propagation, communication and condemnation.

As this Age of Identity continues to unfold, it is positioning itself strategically, and, therefore, it necessitates allocation of resources for a Field of Identology that is free of othering or the marginalization of any form of identity. Indeed, sixty years ago, Erikson wrote that “the study of identity ... becomes as strategic in our time as the study of sexuality in Freud’s time” (Erikson, 1963: p. 282). But since Erikson’s time, the concept “identity” has grown more and more ambiguous and problematic. The question is, how could we reduce ambiguity, and in what ways could the concept become more useful in this new Age of Identity? But before answering this question, one must begin with the history of the concept of “identity”—a history that is closely intertwined with that of “identification”.

From Identification to Identity

The concept “identification” was initially introduced by Sigmund Freud when discussing parents’ identification with their child (Freud, 1950) and mourners’ identification with the lost one (Freud, 1917). Later, Freud generalizes the meaning of identification beyond such situations and describes it as the “earliest expression of an emotional tie” (Freud, 1975: p. 37), “original form of emotional tie with an object” (Freud, 1975: p. 39), and “common quality shared” with another person (Freud, 1975: p. 40). Subsequent writers echo Freud, defining identification as a “sense of emotional merging of oneself with others,” and characterizing such “merging” to be “indistinguishable from love and affection” (Allport, 1958: p. 293).

However, one may argue that the term identification is still ambiguous and enigmatic despite the above helpful descriptions. For example, Robert White addresses this ambiguity and argues that, because Freud himself had meant different things at different times when using the term identification, it has “come to mean too much, too easily” (White, 1963: p. 102). Indeed, in his *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, Freud acknowledges that he himself is “far from satisfied with these remarks on identification” (Freud, 1965: p. 57); others concur that identification is a “broad and ill-defined” term (Allport, 1958: p. 293).

Moreover, being aware of the ambiguities and complexities of the concept, Erik H. Erikson advances the study of identification and calls it “ego identity,” “inner identity,” and finally “identity” (Erikson, 1974). Erikson is known for his outline of life’s eight stages (infancy, childhood, play age, school age, adolescence, young adulthood, adulthood, and old age) and argues successfully that each stage has its own “psychosocial crisis” in one’s development of identity. His ideas of “life-cycle” and “identity crisis” have become important not only in developmental psychology, but also in many fields in the humanities and social sciences. He asserts that the two terms, identification and identity, are interrelated (Erikson, 1968: p. 158) and points out that they “share common roots linguistically and psychologically” (Erikson, 1980: p. 120). Still, while some scholars use the two concepts “synonymously” (Yankalovich & Bennet, 1971: p. 122), others recommend using identity only for cases in which separation between mind and matter is impossible, while identification for cases when “there is a clear recognition of the separation of the two” (Hall, 1979: pp. 42-43). Therefore, any discussion of identity cannot be complete without correlating its meanings and manifestations with those of identification.

Erikson gives identification a major role in the development of the ego. Initially, he sees identification as three components: 1) imitation, 2) feeling of continuity about one’s existence, and 3) ego identity. The latter, ego identity, at times includes the first two meanings, while, in contrast, some authors confine the meaning of identification to imitation only (White, 1963: p. 112). Yet, Freud is clear when he states that “identification” is *not* just “simple imitation,” but also “assimilation that expresses resemblance” and it is derived from a common element that remains in the unconscious (Freud, 1975: pp. 37-42). This Freudian insight is later taken by Erikson when he describes identification as “a largely unconscious process” of modeling “thoughts, feelings, and actions” (Erikson, 1980: pp. 118-131).

The above perceived relationship between identification and imitation brings us to Talcott Parsons’ *Social System*. Identification for Parsons means “taking over, i.e. internalizing the values of the model and establishing a reciprocal role relationship in which value-patterns are shared,” while imitation is “the process by which specific items of culture and specific bits of knowledge, skill and symbolic behavior are taken over from a social object in the interaction process” (Parsons, 1951: pp. 210-211). Imitation, he elaborates, “does not imply any continuing relation to the model or any solidarity attachment” (Ibid.). Thus, identification, as distinguished from imitation, is indeed not only an unconscious process but also a reciprocal and continuous one with a long life span, whereas imitation is temporary, one-sided, and, as characterized by Parsons, “ephemeral”.

As a largely unconscious process, then, scholars have further argued that identification occurs within social *roles* or social *groups* based on economic, geographical, and educational backgrounds. This is relevant here and also essential in the wide range of communities among and within WRs. But it also raises the question of quantity and quality. On the quantitative level, which reflects the number of issues or characteristics involved, identification has been analyzed by Max Scheler as idiopathic, reflecting “the total eclipse and absorption of another self by one’s own,” and heteropathic, where the person is “overwhelmed and hypnotically bound” by the model (Scheler, 1970: pp. 18-19). Whether identification is idiopathic or heteropathic, Scheler’s conceptual analysis is profoundly insightful for the discourse on WRs, and is also consistent with what Parsons says above concerning the “continuing relation” and the “solidarity attachment” to the model.

On the qualitative level, which reflects the place of identification as a part of the whole social system, Erik Erikson argues that identification is the second in three steps by which “the ego grows in ever more mature interplay with the available models” (Erikson, 1980, 122). The first of these steps is “introjection,” which means “the primitive incorporation of another’s image” and it “depends for its integration” [in the family setting] “on the satisfactory mutuality between the mothering adult(s) and the mothered child” (Ibid.). While the first step is introjection and the second is identification, Erikson’s third step is *identity formation*, which, he explains,

begins where the usefulness of identification ends. [It] arises from the selective repudiation and mutual assimilation of childhood identifications and their absorption in a new configuration, which in turn is dependent on the process by which a society (often through sub-societies) identifies the young individual, recognizing him as some-body

who had to become the way he is and who, being the way he is, is taken for granted (Ibid.).

With this family setting, the fate of childhood identifications depends “on the child’s satisfactory interaction with trustworthy representatives of a meaningful hierarchy of roles as provided by the generations living together” (Erikson, 1980: 122). Thus, unlike his predecessors, including Freud who undermined social influences on identity, Erikson brings “the social” back into psychoanalysis and deems it as imperative. Based on these Freudian-Eriksonian-Parsonian considerations, the success of the process of childhood identification may depend on a number of important elements, some of which are enumerated as follows: 1) the social roles that the “trustworthy representatives” play; 2) the consistency in behavior of these representatives; 3) the place of the representatives in the social system; 4) the satisfaction, or lack of it, in the growing child; and 5) the familial structure of, and degree of filiality in, the family, community and WR.

Erikson’s three steps of “introjection,” “identification,” and “identity formation” bring us to the concept of identity, which is here clearly differentiated from identification. Indeed, the third step, that of “identity formation”, confirms this variation. But Erikson thinks of identity as having “many different connotations” and, for the purpose of further emphasis, his perspective may be derived from three of his statements about identity as being:

- 1) “a conscious sense of individual uniqueness,”
- 2) “an unconscious striving for a continuity of experience,” and
- 3) “a solidarity with a group’s ideals” (Erikson, 1968: p. 208).

One may note that the above discussion and this three-part definition of identity drawn from Erikson tell us something about the self, the community, the relationship between the two, and about distinctiveness, uniqueness, and (un)consciousness. To further enrich our understanding of the history and diversity of identity, five common uses are worth critically highlighting; the purpose here is not to assess these uses, but rather to illuminate their presence and complementarity, and also further defend the urgent need for a field of Identity that brings all the uses and disciplines under one roof.

The first is Personal Identity. This construct has been used in reference to the body where person “X” is the same as person “Y,” if, and only if, person “X” has the same body as person “Y.” According to John Locke, memory—or consciousness as he uses it—solely constitutes personal identity. This means that person “X” in time t_1 is the same “X” at t_2 if she or he remembers what was done or experienced during t_1 (Shoemaker and Swinburne, 1984: p. 8). Moreover, the discourse on the “problem of personal identity” helps explain what makes a person innately the same, despite the changes she or he goes through; it also raises more general philosophical questions concerning permanence and change. According to Plato, if permanence is the soul and change is the body, then personal identity is possible, as it is formed by mental processes and may be viewed as related to, or as a product of, experience. For Hume, experience consists of impressions, ideas, emotions, and memories with the latter being singled out as the force that leads us to believe in our identity over time.

The second use is Cultural Identity. Erikson has alluded to the significance of culture in “identity formation” and to the

“anchoring of ego identity in a cultural identity” (Erikson, 1963: pp. 279-282). “Cultural change,” he says elsewhere, “can prove so traumatic to identity formation; it can break the inner consistency of a child’s hierarchy of expectations” (Erikson 1968, 159). Around the same time of Erikson, culture itself is perceived as “a mold in which we are all cast, and it controls our daily lives in many unsuspected ways” (Hall, 1959: p. 30). With emphasis on the word *control*, can identity be said to control our daily lives, do our daily lives control our identity, or is the issue of control irrelevant with regard to identity? More importantly, Hall asserts correctly that “culture hides much more than it reveals, and strangely enough, what it hides is hidden most effectively from its own participants” (Ibid.). In this case, cultural identity may be an elusive phenomenon that is impossible to grasp because of our inability to study it fully and, once again, because it “hides much more than it reveals” (Ibid.). These remarks further unveil the complexities of identity, increase our awareness of such complexities, and underline the argument that culture and families play a fundamental role—more than some of us, including proponents of the rational choice theory, would like to acknowledge—in the formation of identity.

The third use is Social Identity. This is perhaps the most commonly used construct due perhaps to the assumption that the “social” is the corollary of the “personal.” Parsons describes social identity as a “sub-system of personality” and as playing a “major role in determining a person’s participation in the social system” (Ibid.). Similarly, Turner points out that this use entails “a shift towards the perception of self as an interchangeable exemplar of some social category and away from the perception of self as a unique person” (Turner, 1987: p. 50). Moreover, Bradley suggests three levels of social identity: passive, active, and politicized. Passive identities are derived from “the sets of lived relationships (class, gender, ethnicity and so forth) in which individuals are engaged in, but they are not acted on” (Bradley, 1996: p. 25). Thus, passive identities are, like membership, given. Active identities, on the other hand, are “those which individuals are conscious of and which provide a base for their actions” (Ibid.). “Politicized identities” are “formed through political action and provide the base for collective organization” (Bradley, 1996: p. 26).

The fourth use considered here, and which is closely related to cultural and social identities, is Ethnic Identity. An ethnic group has been concisely described as “an aggregate of kinship units, the members of which either trace their origins in terms of descent from a common ancestor or in terms of descent from ancestors who all belonged to the same categorized ethnic group” (Parsons, 1951: p. 172). Thus, some aspects of ethnic identity may include self-identification with the common ancestors of the group, a sense of belonging to such a group, and pride in both the common ancestors and the feeling of belonging to the group. In recent decades and due mainly to political transformations, ethnic studies have flourished.

The fifth use is (Post) Modern Identity. Many observers agree that identity in the pre-modern era “was not an issue,” since one was born into it and had no choice but to carry on the tradition of the community (Kellner, 1992). But with the advent of Modernity, people were provided with more flexibility, mobility, and anonymity, among other things. One writer explains that “as the scale of society expanded, ... personal relationships gave way to generic ones ... anonymous and impersonal” (Einstein, 2013: p. 88). Modern identity was shaped in part by Kantian

Deontology and/or Bentham's and Mill's Utilitarianism. Kantian moral philosophy presupposes a sense of morality based on duty, autonomy, and universal will, whereas, Utilitarianism as an ethical theory redirects the attention to "the greatest good for the greatest number" of people. Both have been criticized incessantly since their inception, and both contain some good aspects as well as some shortcomings. Nevertheless, (Post) Modern society seems to continue idolize Utilitarian principles in almost every aspect of our daily lives. In doing so, we have been promoting ethics and underplaying morality; what is legal is vivid, what is moral is ambiguous; criminals are innocent if they can get away with it; a bad act is not bad if nobody notices or you have a good legal team. Both philosophy and science have perhaps failed to speedily advance us into the initial intent of Modernity—to advance knowledge of the self and others, realize equality, increase leisure time, eradicate othering, and so on.

A new philosophy that is all encompassing and combines the good aspects of the Kantian and Utilitarian systems—let us say "Kantutilitarianism"—has not yet emerged. But in this new Age of Identity we are entering a state of reflection and assessment. Contemporary familiar constructs, such as "the politics of recognition," "multiculturalism," and "identity politics," combined with the various forms of identity, have indirectly neglected many aspects of our primary (human) identity. One may argue that (exclusionary) identities have been the cause or part of the cause for many of the wars and other conflicts throughout history. But there is something new about the last few decades that is promising: the rising visibility of genuine phenomena such as "interfaith dialogue," "multicultural orientations," and "religious diversity." These promising projects and ideas may eventually produce a type of 'Kantutilitarianism' that is widely recognized and upheld in the decades to come. The recent observation that Modernity is "ethics without morality" and Postmodernity as "morality without ethics" is indeed an insightful assessment and representative of some elements in today's emerging genuine forces (Palese, 2013).

This brief discussion of the five selected types of identity helps us realize that our awareness of such forms of identity may ameliorate our sense of understanding of this new Age of identity and, more importantly, improve our knowledge of their complexity, complementarity, and interdisciplinarity. For example, labeling "ethnic" on the identity of a certain person or group may limit them to their ethnic component. Such component may not be the defining characteristic of the individual's orientation or preference. The process of labeling has perhaps been a product of one's own self-serving; we often neglect the fact that many individuals might not wish to highlight the ethnic or cultural component of their identity. Another example is gender identity; females were (and still in many circles are) frequently marginalized as a result of being females even when they contribute the most creative ideas to discourses. Accepting the suggestion introduced earlier that the twenty-first century is the new Age of Identity we need to transcend the ambiguities, limitations, and exclusivity of these usages and revert perhaps instead to the all-inclusive "primary" human identity.

But, do these five usages of identity facilitate a clearer understanding of the concept's intended meaning? Do they alleviate, or even reduce, the challenges of this definitional intricacy? If identity is indeed difficult to define, can we generate ways in which the concept is altered so that it is more meaningful and satisfactory to a greater number of people? Here, we shall invoke an insightful statement about meaning: "mean-

ing is generally attached not to words in isolation but to expressions" (Oppenheim, 1981: p. 4). If we concur with Oppenheim, then the word "identity" has the potential to become more meaningful to a larger number of people by converting it into an expression. Therefore, let us utilize the previously used expression "sense of identity" by a number of authors. Examples may include Rollo May who speaks of "sense of identity" (May, 1969: p. 26) and William James who uses "sense of sameness" when addressing identity (James, 1918: pp. 459-460). More importantly, Erik Erikson himself has at times, incidentally perhaps, used the phrase "sense of identity" in his early writings (Erikson, 1963: p. 237). Therefore, it makes sense to (re)launch the expression Sense of Identity.

From Identity to Sense of Identity

The difference between the reintroduced construct Sense of Identity and the single word identity, as well as the justification for deeming the former as more expressive and favorable than the latter, must now be addressed in more details. The construct Sense of Identity is indeed more meaningful, useful, and effective than identity for a number of reasons, some of which are worth including here.

First, Sense of Identity is more flexible and free of specific expectations. Having a *sense* of something is inherently less rigid, less prescriptive, and therefore more practical. To say that a certain person has a *sense* of something allows that person a margin of error, whereas the word "identity" is non-negotiable and has an air of finality. For example, saying "she is a Christian" places certain expectations on one's involvement with the religion and leaves some impressions that may often be inaccurate; after all the identity "Christian" means different things to different people, even within the religion itself. In contrast, saying "she has a sense of Christianity" is rich in connotation and does not lead the listener to conclusion, and it humbles the speaker. Moreover, in this Age of Identity, it instills harmony and inclusivism. Erik Erikson had, perhaps, this rigidity and air of finality in mind when he initially used the phrase "identity formation." "Identity formation," he says, "is a lifelong development largely unconscious to the individual and his society" (Erikson, 1980: p. 122). If "identity formation" is a "lifelong development," then "identity" itself must be the outcome or product of the process of "identity formation." Identity is, therefore, a *final* state of being that reflects an end goal.

The question that arises is the following: is Erikson's "identity formation" the same as Sense of Identity? The answer is that they may be on some level *the same* if we reformulate Erikson's own implications, but they are certainly *not identical*. During "identity formation" one is indeed like in a (dark) tunnel of sorts that does not tell us about the end of the tunnel or the destination, for identity is in *formation*. One looks ahead and sees darkness or literally nothing. Thus, in its early stages "identity formation" gives us a sense of dissatisfaction and may generate a feeling of anxiety about what is coming in the final stages. Having a Sense of Identity, on the other hand, is like being on a journey, absorbing every moment and is much better than being in a state of *formation*. Unlike being in a state of *formation*, here one is on a scenic route enjoying every *sense* of the ride and knowing that he or she will eventually reach the destination. This compares to God's confident Biblical creation story as it unfolds after each day with a sense of assurance: "and it was good. ... and it was very good" (Genesis, 1:4-31), as

if every day is a sense of the creation and a sense of achievement. Thus, with Sense of Identity one is not preoccupied with the outcome; rather, it represents the here and now and is, therefore, continuously satisfying.

A second reason for favoring the use of the expression Sense of Identity is that, unlike the finality of identity, it is additive. It reflects one's diverse forms of identity—personal, cultural, ethnic, social, postmodern, gender, racial, national, political, professional, civic, and so on. Individuals are free to emphasize whatever they wish, when they wish it, for they are declaring only a *sense* of identity and not the final all inclusive identity. The analogy of the journey and destination described above is helpful, and here these senses may be viewed as landmarks or scenes along the road, a road upon which the process of the journey matters equally if not more than the actual arriving.

Third, in addition to being flexible and additive, Sense of Identity is obviously subtractive. The term implies that it is possible to sustain a total sense of oneself, even after the loss or diminution of one or more senses. Individuals who wish not to emphasize a certain component, for example, may simply *subtract* that factor from the larger picture of their Sense of Identity. This is also applicable to persons or communities who see their religious affiliation as private and prefer to conceal it, or on the contrary view it as so central that they do not want to talk about what was before it. For example, some Catholic and Buddhist monks or Hindu *sannyasin* (renunciate or hermit) prefer not to think or talk about their past; they gradually suppress or *subtract* such past from their Sense of Identity; over time it becomes part of the subconscious. They do not nourish their past Sense of Identity, nor do they let it interfere with their present Sense of Identity; they slowly erase it from the conscious. Many of these devotees adamantly refuse to comment on their life before becoming what they presently are. This is different than missionaries in some WRs who use their past as a strategy to persuade potential converts. More general examples may include immigrants, who wish to absorb new beginnings and forget old hardships or unpleasant experiences. Moreover, almost all minorities withhold talking about their faiths for some time until they feel safe to start a place of gathering or worship; the early African American “concealed” church is a good example. Furthermore, to unlearn one's culture and assimilate in a new one is also a process of *subtracting* or *adding* features to one's Sense of Identity.

Fourth, the expression Sense of Identity is emancipatory. The term identity may be viewed like those of understanding or knowledge. We often claim that we understand or know, but what we often really mean (or should mean) is that we have a *sense of understanding* or a *sense of knowing*. Yet, every individual, community or WR is filled with examples of misunderstanding, misinterpretation, or misjudgment of others throughout history. More interestingly, when one claims knowledge or understanding, the mind is satisfied and tends to proceed to other matters, but when one makes herself or himself aware that knowledge or understanding is an ongoing state, and one has only a *sense* of it, the mind continues to investigate and delve into the matter while going about its other preoccupations. Thus, having a sense of something is, by definition, more enlightening, challenging, and productive. It is, indeed, emancipatory. Many wars and conflicts between WRs or other WVs took place due to misunderstanding and many individuals and communities could have been saved from calamities and misfortunes.

Fifth, the expression Sense of Identity reflects a progressive process. One has a *sense* of her or his identity throughout life. Later in life, or at life's approaching end, Sense of Identity may become Identity if, and *only* if, one realizes such a state of being. Thus, throughout the stages and moments of life, it is imperative that one realizes that she or he has only a *sense* of understanding, a *sense* of knowledge, and accordingly, a Sense of Identity. Sense of Identity, therefore, reflects a progressive process just as understanding and knowledge; the more one climbs on the ladder of identity the more one comes closer to Identity.

Thus, the perception that Sense of Identity is flexible, additive, subtractive, emancipatory, and progressive makes the phrase more expressive, less egotistical, and, therefore, more effective and desirable than the single word “identity.” To pursue this analysis further, three inquiries must be raised in regard to this last advantage, that of progressive process:

1) Does Sense of Identity truly reflect a progressive process consistently and at all times?

2) Is it an internal or external process?

3) Is the outcome of the process similar from one individual, community, WR to another?

In considering these questions, let us assume that Sense of Identity does reflect a progressive process at all times and this assumption is based on earlier discussions and insights including Erikson's “Identity formation.” In order to answer the second question, one may suggest that Sense of Identity is merely a function of:

A) the individual's advancement in self-knowledge and self-awareness, that is, an internal process, characterized here as the “X” axis; and

B) the individual's identification with the community and/or WR, that is, an external process, characterized as the “Y” axis.

This conceptualization of the X-Y axes as a reasonable approach to the second question will help us reach an answer for the third question. Hence, three outcomes emerge:

a) The Self-Dominant: here the person advances in self-knowledge or self-awareness and is considered, therefore, the individualistic, self-oriented, or internalizing type; in other words, a better understanding of the self furnishes a better sense of meaning and purpose for the individual.

b) The Group-Dominant: here the person grows into a greater consciousness of identification with her or his community and/or WR and is, therefore, more likely to be referred to as the group-oriented, communalistic, or externalizing type; a better understanding of one's community or WR and one's place in it provides a better meaning and purpose for the person.

c) The Ideal Type: this may be viewed as the middle road; the person advances equally in terms of self-knowledge and community and/or WR identification; individuals here have a balance between the two previous types, the Self-dominant and the Group-dominant.

Types a) and b) are perceived as forming the two axes, while type c), the ideal type, is located on a symmetric line between them. This theoretical framework will assist us in understanding the outcomes of Sense of Identity among members of communities and WRs, especially with the various forms of identity discussed above—those of personal, cultural, ethnic, social, and postmodern. Most importantly, and perhaps strategically, it will assist us in locating individuals on the X-Y plane. This latter is most instrumental in a variety of ways from interviewing new members, new employees, to negotiating with representatives

and diplomats. It is also most useful for the rising urgent need to understand other WRs or WVs in this new Age of Identity.

But, from what sources may one determine the place of an individual or community on the X-Y axes? What bases can be relied upon to locate the position of different individuals, communities, or WRs? And how would we authenticate these sources? While the question of authenticity is a complex one to be addressed here, the answer to the first question is that a Sense of Identity along both the self-axis and the group-axis may be developed out of various sources, five of which are worth including here.

The first source for Sense of Identity is *biological*. This term is more suitable than, say, “hereditary” or “genetic,” as it is broader and all inclusive. People display certain qualities or characteristics that are biological and such characteristics are, as discussed earlier, *given* and, in certain cases, cannot be changed by the individual no matter how hard she or he tries. Biological identity is, indeed, “fixed” (Singer, 1971: p. 114). One may argue that life is too short to score any success in this endeavor. Gender and racial identities may be the best tangible examples, but more complex examples are ubiquitous. For instance, we still cannot explain why one child or adult in a family (or even in an identical twin) is athletic and gregarious while another is uncoordinated and shy; nor can we provide any answer for why the two appear to be unable to change these traits as they grow up in the same home, go to the same school, and play in the same neighborhood. Similarly, certain identifications of one person with a particular community or WR may be based on physical or mental attributes that are beyond the individual’s control. For example, a blind person may identify with a society for the blind, or the handicapped as a whole, even before considering their community or WR. These factors must have some additional degree of influence on Sense of Identity, and their assessment is essential in future research.

A second source for the development of a Sense of Identity is *psychological*. Psychological processes that happen to a certain person in his or her childhood are still the preoccupation of many Freudian clinicians. Such school of therapists believe that childhood experiences remain in the unconscious and eventually impact one’s behavior later in life. The unconscious comes into focus and produces in us different conduct with disregard to the conscious. For example, Carl Jung tells how Nietzsche, in his book *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, “has plagiarized almost word for word an incident reported in a ship’s log” that he read with his sister fifty years earlier. Jung says “It is inconceivable that Nietzsche had any idea that he was plagiarizing this story” (Erikson, 1964: p. 24). Thus, for our purposes, *temporary* characteristics may be imposed on us by the unconscious and as a result, we lose control of our *prominent* well-learned or even crafted characteristics. Memory also plays a major role in the psychological sources of Sense of Identity. As we have seen earlier, experience reflects memory and it forms the conscious part of our Sense of Identity which is in itself obviously incomplete.

The third source for Sense of Identity is *environmental*. The qualities or characteristics acquired from one’s environment are most profound, and yet they “are not fixed” (Singer, 1971: p. 114). The learning or unlearning of certain characteristics found in one’s surroundings may last a long time, even an entire lifetime. Persons learn from their homes, schools, churches, relatives, workplaces, communities, WRs and mass media about people’s expectations on how they should behave, speak, and

act, or not behave, speak, and act, in certain given situations. Although some lessons from the environment are disregarded or unfathomed, many feed continuously into one’s Sense of Identity, regardless of one’s age, place or time. Furthermore, identification with specific individuals or groups such as one’s adolescent peers and adult colleagues, as well as with one’s community or WR, requires that an individual’s behavior comply with group expectations, maintaining and promoting a unified Sense of Identity for the immediate group, wider community or the WR as a whole. In addition, involvement with the outside natural world as opposed to indoor activities produce different senses of identity.

The fourth source is *preferential*. As a matter of principle, due to ambition or for whatever motivation, individuals may choose to behave in a certain way or to exhibit qualities unique to them personally. Similarly, while identifying with such groups as a professional, literary, or political club, a person may continue to identify with the group or school and occasionally participate in its traditions even after leaving it completely. While the initial interactions with the group may imply a degree of conscious process of imitation, identifications are as argued earlier, embedded in the unconscious. It is very difficult, therefore, to unlearn them. This is evident in persons who convert to another WR, and/or to branches within the same WR while maintaining certain characteristics from their previous community. For example, members of the group “Jews for Jesus” who feel as though they should maintain the conscious reminder of the past—being Jewish—by keeping it in their new title as well as in their hearts and minds. Another example of this categorization is immigrant populations. While some individuals assimilate early and easily and adopt the ways of the new home country and culture, others choose to live with their original identifications dominating their daily lives. The latter simply refuse (or are unable) to adapt to new ways and, therefore, live removed from the larger society linguistically, culturally, and/or socially. The children of such immigrants struggle mightily between a Sense of Identity at home and a challenging or exciting one at school. The more powerful and authoritative the Sense of Identity at home, the less likely that changes will take place within one generation and some characteristics will persist. In a recent study on the Indian immigrant experience, scholars characterize subjects as “changing of Gods” whether suppressing own beliefs or totally transforming into another (Segady & Shirwadkar, 2012).

The fifth source for Sense of Identity is *eschatological*. The thought of the Day of Judgment, end of times, or an Armageddon often shapes people’s thoughts, behaviors, and actions, especially as they attend funerals or participate in memorials. Members of messianic groups are also good examples, though any person may be impacted by such ideas. Moreover, “fear of death” may be a proof that eschatological sources are central to one’s Sense of Identity (Heidegger, 1996), and may of course vary from one person to another and from one moment in life to another. “Constructing family identity close to death” is the emphatic title of one recent study and lends its support to this source of Sense of Identity (Carlander et al., 2013).

Based on the above analysis, the following three assessments or conclusions relating to identity and Sense of Identity are summarized for emphasis:

- 1) *Identity*, which implies persistence, is rare or non-existent until later in life in some individuals. It is extremely difficult or nearly impossible for a person to understand or know her or his

self fully. Also it is becoming more difficult to identify completely with a single group, community, or WR due to individuality in this new Age of Identity. Subjective perceptions of oneself and one's WR, and the individual's gradual growth in objectivity further substantiate this assumption. Thus, objectivity is gained over a long period of time, if at all. Moreover, mystical insights further support the impossibility of identity as a distinct entity.

2) Each individual has a Sense of Identity that differs from one person to another, and, more importantly, from one stage or moment in life to another. As discussed above, conscious and unconscious processes as well as memory and experience further show differences among individuals and within the same individual over time.

3) Sense of Identity is a function of self-knowledge and self-awareness (the "X" axis), on the one side, and the sum of one's identifications with a community, WR, or other groups of association (the "Y" axis), on the other. Such X-Y axes help us identify three main categories of individuals or groups based on the orientation or dominant characteristics of their Sense of Identity: the individualistic, communalistic, and ideal types.

Certain observations must be drawn concerning these three assessments. First, they are not mutually exclusive; rather, they are complementary and overlapping. Second, people may move from one category to another, based on the events they encounter and the ways they evolve within themselves, in a community or WR, and in the society as a whole. Third, being scarce, identity may be realizable at the approaching end of life and among the very few only. In other words, everyone may be on the pleasant journey, but most individuals never reach the final destination, for it is not a preoccupation; every moment is a kind of destination. Self-knowledge is very difficult to achieve, and the statement in some WRs "Know thyself and you will know the divine" is an indicator that identity is impossible to most people. Only a very few individuals have claimed to have come closer to the Supreme Ultimate Being fully. For the masses, deities are not achievable phenomena. Such deities are real for them on the level of faith but not that of Identity. In contrast, Sense of Identity is the medium and is continuously achievable. But how can such a construct be operationalized?

Sense of Identity Operationalized

The construct Sense of Identity is then an older use that is being reintroduced here as a more meaningful and effective than that of the deflationary overly used word "identity." Sense of Identity is singular since it reflects a single state of being or mind; it is an expression of a particular moment or phase in life. But it may also be viewed as plural by nature since it incorporates a multiplicity of layers of identifications which vary from one individual to another and from one time or place to another. These layers of identifications may also be said to complement one another, creating a simultaneous sense of unity and diversity due to the time, place, and circumstances in which persons find themselves. Thus, the two axes of Sense of Identity, as proposed earlier, can be characterized by singularity, plurality, complementarity, unity, and diversity.

A reasonable definition for the construct Sense of Identity can be therefore developed by drawing from the above discussions and insights. But before doing so, it is essential to derive the general characteristics of identity. Five of these characteristics are sufficient here.

1) *Identity is dynamic.* As we have seen earlier, identity is constantly changing, and "over a period of time may have changed completely" (Penelhum, 1955: p. 571). Not only does our physical appearance change, but our "likes and dislikes, attitudes, personality and character also change" (Chalurvedi, 1988: p. 1). As a result of this first characteristic, one may argue that any definitional statement concerning the identity of a certain individual, community or WR, must represent only a short time span, if not a single particular moment in that individual's or group's life. Definitions, after all, imply clarity, and clarity requires some degree of continuity and permanence. But identity is not continuous. For this reason, one may argue, identity becomes the sum of all such moments throughout one's lifetime. Therefore, defining identity is impossible and defining identity in a particular moment, though it may require extensive effort, is more manageable.

2) *Identity is static.* Some aspects of identity are continuous or stable. In other words, woven within a developing identity are threads or elements that *change rarely*, if at all. These are certain likes or dislikes, routines, habits, skills, a position within one's family, community, WR, or the larger society. While religiosity may change in members of WRs, certain core elements about the existence of the father/s and/or founder/s of the WR never change. In other words, we continue to unravel new narratives about Moses, Jesus, Zoroaster, Confucius, Lao Tzu, the Buddha, and so on. But the existence of these figures in the minds of believers is static. Often individuals claim to have, or aspire to have, a special relation with the father/s and or founder/s of the WR. The elements, which may be referred to as static or stable, must also be analyzed to determine the potential degree of stability present in each individual, community, or WR. Those elements that are consistent may vary in degree from one person to another and, therefore, increase the complexity of the definitional process of identity.

3) *Identity is systemic.* This characteristic or quality of identity follows from the previous two. Identity incorporates a number of systems comparable to those of personality in the Freudian analysis—the Id, Ego, and Super Ego. With identity, however, the number of these systems is endless, with some dominant and others marginal, some similar and others different among individuals, communities or WRs. Identity is multi-layered, some layers are complex and others simple, some consist of conscious processes and others totally unconscious. A person learns (or unlearns) from his or her experiences at each stage of life, forming layers, which cumulatively construct identity as distinguishable from, or similar to, identities of others. But the process of constructing these layers of identity is complex; due to the first characteristic of being dynamic, the very process of construction itself must be continuously reconstructed or reconfigured. We can, then, describe layers of the collective identity of those living within the same environment, perhaps even distinguishing the characteristics of that group from other groups elsewhere. This is possible due to the experiences that shape these layers of identity.

4) *Identity is strategic.* The postmodern realities discussed above, and the rapid changes referred to earlier, point to the fact that identity is, indeed, strategic. Individuals may adopt certain characteristics taken from a variety of collectivities and combine different configurations of layers to form their own desired or desirable identity. In this new Age of Identity, the individual may *choose* the characteristics in advance, and accordingly the outcomes preferred. But how is choice involved in identity's

unconscious processes? If some elements of the unconscious rise to full consciousness, choice may become possible again. It goes without saying that certain choices people make are often made unconsciously due to habits and behaviors acquired from the culture as pointed out earlier.

5) *Identity is concentric*. Some elements of identity are at the core and others on the periphery. While the core may be continuously impacting the periphery, the latter has also ways in which it impacts or agitates the core, even potentially replacing it. Such concentric configurations change from one person to another and from one period or place to another. Moreover, the individual's and WR's sense of their views of history and the dominant historiography act as a second set of concentric circles. Thus, Identity, with its authentic meaning, has two complementary sets of concentric circles; one relates to the content of Identity and the other is furnished by Senses of History.

How can we then utilize this multiplicity of layers of identity and apply them to the study of a specific individual, community, or a whole WR in a defined time and place? Which of these layers or components of Sense of Identity are the most important for developing a coherent, reasonably broad outline of that individual, community or WR? More importantly, what could be the criteria for selection of such components? And how could such components relate to Sense of History?

By reflecting on the various discussions above and then on the five sources out of which identity may be developed, we can generate the criteria for such a selection. Once again, these five sources are biological, psychological, environmental, preferential, and eschatological. These sources are interrelated and all provide a sense of materiality and spirituality to the aforementioned common usages of identity. For example, biological sources may be rooted in, but not exclusive to, the personal and ethnic identities, while environmental sources may be dominant in the personal, cultural, and social identities. The preferential sources may be traced mostly in the personal and postmodern identities, while the psychological and eschatological sources may be ubiquitous in all of them.

Considering all of the above insights, one may proceed and generate numerous possible components of Sense of Identity, but three primary ones will suffice here: 1) personal beliefs, 2) communal attributes, and 3) sociopolitical attitudes. These particular ones are selected for this theoretical model because they are a) broad enough for examining a wide spectrum of characteristics of any individual, community, and WR; b) specific enough to find literature available in each of the categories; and c) flexible enough to be rooted in all five types of sources of identity discussed above.

Sense of Identity, as operationalized into these three components, can be viewed on two distinct and complementary levels: that of the individual and that of the community or WR. Each level is crucial, since through one the other may be understood. Here, one is simultaneously perceived to be understood in terms of the other. Therefore, our discussion will combine the two in order to facilitate a better understanding of Sense of Identity.

Figuratively speaking, and as stated earlier, the three components of Sense of Identity are thought of as concentric circles. The first component is at the core or the inner circle, which is the most pivotal to the individual, community and WR; everything revolves around it or reshaped by it. It represents the largest and most important number of identifications. The second component represents the next layer, that is, surrounding

the core, and is secondary in importance. Although it influences the core, this layer is influenced more by the core as already pointed out. In other words, the core nourishes it more than it nourishes the core. But if its nourishment of the core rises high enough due to development of the individual, the community or WR as a whole, then it will replace the core and the core becomes secondary. A good example here includes reformers who separate from mainline religions and eventually become themselves WRs such as Buddhism, or major branches within the same religion as in the case of Protestantism. Another example is when the individual or the community are faced with danger, survival strategies and preoccupation take over the core instead of resignation to despair and hopelessness.

The third component occupies the outside or the periphery. The periphery is nourished and maintained by the other two layers more than it nourishes them. Here, to reiterate, we have limited ourselves to three main components of Sense of Identity that seem to be prominent among the majority of WRs and other WVs and serve as the basis for any future case studies. Naturally, other layers may be added as one sees fit, based on the individual, community or WR under study.

Furthermore, the historical background of the individual, community or WR, along with their own perspective of that history, as well as the outside view—that of the dominant historiography—comprise a system that interacts with, shapes, and is shaped by the three components of Sense of Identity. Thus, Sense of History is viewed as a second independent set of concentric circles, because it takes shape as it develops, just like that of Sense of Identity. Often we find that certain versions of history (when history allows versions) are simply misreadings, and that dominant views at one point may be considered erroneous at another. This is perhaps why Michel Foucault considered history problematic and, therefore, he preferred the terms “genealogy” or “archaeology”. History, after all, has almost always been recorded from the perspective of the victors and predominantly through the eyes of male leaders and/or observers. It needs to be free of gender and other biases and also told from the perspective of the defeated or disadvantaged in order for the various versions to be juxtaposed and critically assessed. Moreover, history must also be told from the perspective of its marginality, materiality, and hyperreality. This gives us an important insight into the second set of concentric circles, that of Sense of History, and the ways in which it interacts with the first set of concentric circles, the three layers of Sense of Identity.

This interaction with the second set is most crucial when the perspectives of history of the individual, community or WR differ from that of the dominant historiography. It suffices to mention sectarian history in Christianity and Islam, a history that for centuries has been told from the perspective of the mainstream of these WRs. This mainstream version of history is often different from the various branches' own views of history. For example, studying the first 300-500 years of Christianity and Islam from the perspective of Monophysitism or Gnosticism and Shi'ism or Isma'ilism, respectively, along with the dominant historiographies of both religions, the picture that emerges would be strikingly different; needless to say that many lives on all sides would have been spared in the process. Sense of History has, as does Sense of Identity, an aspect that is always evolving or being rediscovered. History must be, like court proceedings, a process that unravels evidence and then

examines the authenticity of evidence and delivers just verdicts that are subject to reopening of cases; this is essential because we know today that with the advent of DNA some *just* verdicts were certainly unjust. Together, these two sets of concentric circles that interact with each other on various levels can produce a reasonably coherent dual model and an outline for deep understanding of individuals, communities and WRs. Once the interaction between the two sets of concentric circles matures in time and/or depth these two structures will eventually merge into one combined model. In the final model, the upper half of the inner circle will reflect Personal Beliefs and the lower half of that inner circle is the Personal View of History; the upper part of the middle circle reflects Communal Attributes while the lower side is the Communal or WR View of History; the upper outer circle reflects Sociopolitical Attitudes and the lower outer circle is the Dominant Historiography. Since this paper is about Sense of Identity and WRs, the location of each is thought of here from the perspective of the individual and the community or WR. Finally, a brief discussion of each component is now in order.

Component One: Personal Beliefs

The term “beliefs” is chosen here since it is broad enough in its connotation and flexible enough with wider reaching implications, to include religious and non-religious individuals and groups—for everyone has beliefs, sacred or profane. Beliefs, of course, inculcate values and the two are often used together in almost all discourses on WRs. Personal Beliefs are at the core of one’s Sense of Identity and, therefore, they monitor one’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The importance here is how such beliefs shape and reshape the behaviors of the individual, community or the WR as a whole. Personal Beliefs are often given. They are drawn from sacred sources including oral and written traditions, doctrines, and other instructions. The person or community acquire them gradually. Many Beliefs may be selected here but three broad ones are appropriate to almost all WRs.

The first primary belief is in supernatural entities. Such entities are considered with capacities above those of the ordinary human being. Supernatural entities are divided into two categories: deities and intermediaries. Deities are easily defined but often misunderstood because they are almost always spiritual, intangible, and ethereal. Examples may include, the system of monotheism, where the belief is in one God; henotheism, where the belief is in certain dominant or personal god/s; polytheism, where the belief is in many gods; atheism, where the belief is in no god; and humanism, for individuals concerned with human values and enamored by certain thinkers.

Intermediaries, on the other hand, are complex and with many categories. They are hierarchically below deities and above ordinary humans; they often serve as mediums and models for followers. With the exceptions of angels and other spiritual entities, intermediaries are often persons who are favored by the deities and assigned to deliver a message or provide direction to individuals and communities. Their words and the narratives about them become central in the lives of individuals, communities and WRs. Examples of intermediaries may include prophets, and in some cases perhaps saints and even selected sages. These personages have different statuses, and they shape people’s Sense of Identity as well as Sense of History. One Biblical example is the profound impact of Moses and the

Exodus story on members of the Jewish community; that historical occasion becomes the annual holiday of Passover. Similarly, we may consider the conversion and/or religious experience stories of the Buddha, St. Paul, Muhammad, Joseph Smith, and so on.

One more point is necessary in regard to how beliefs are adopted by intermediaries or how they impact one’s Sense of Identity and others’ view of such Sense of Identity. Let us consider Martin Luther and his famous statement when he refused to listen to the Church authorities: “Here I stand, I can do no other”. This powerful declaration may be viewed as an identification with a reformed meaning of Christianity in his mind at the time but also as a *disidentification* and departure from the Roman Catholic Church. Another similar example is that of John of the Cross, who in the same century refused to comply with the administrators of the Carmelite order, and as a result was held in total seclusion and inhumane conditions. His appeal to God, “if you want me to escape, inspire me,” is well documented; he was inspired and managed to escape his captivity. Both Martin Luther and John of the Cross in their own unique different ways have also established a perception of themselves in the minds of generations to come. Thus, both contributed to shaping the Sense of Identity of many of their followers. They identified their convictions as their core, a core that was taking a new shape unlike their previously-held core; yet they themselves have become a significant part of the core for many devotees or admirers for the centuries to come. At the same time, their opponents who represented the mainline witnessed in them mere renegades who have rejected the accepted core of their communities and/or ancestors.

The second type of personal belief considered here is the belief in leading a sacred life. Sacred life is a meaningful life and contributes to Sense of Identity. Individuals and communities aspire for a purposeful life and discover that meaningfulness is found in adhering fully to sacred sources. Such sources ensure a sacred life and may include oral and written narratives, sacred sites, and images and symbols. Here, questions of authenticity of sources, diversity of hermeneutics, and geographical accuracy of sites, arise and often multiply. Note that the discovery of scriptural texts is often perceived as a threat to religious identity, even before such texts are viewed widely, juxtaposed to existing ones, and studied thoroughly. Examples of newly discovered manuscripts that raised many debates (some more than others) in the 20th century include the Nag Hammadi (1945), the Dead Sea Scrolls (1947), the Yemeni Qur’anic manuscript (1972), and the Ma-Wang-Tui texts (1973). Individuals and communities are threatened and their Sense of Identity and Sense of History are shaken by any discourse on the authenticity of scriptures because the existing texts lend sacred meaning to their lives. On the other hand, the (re)discovery of new sites seems often to excite believers and strengthen their convictions, Sense of Identity, and Sense of History. One example is the sacred site of the appearance of Mary to the peasant Juan Diego in 1531 near Mexico City. The sacred meaning of this site rose even higher after the official canonization of Juan Diego in 2002; the site became the most visited shrine in the world.

In addition to scriptures and sites, rituals with regard to the human body are ubiquitous in all WRs, and the responsibility of the individual, community and WR as the handlers of the body. Rituals are also widespread with regard to washing and maintaining the body in its presentable purity to oneself, the com-

munity and WR; after all, “the body is the Temple of the Lord” as Christian teachings have it. Overall, WRs are replete with instructions for many occasions throughout life, especially in common sacred times, such as times of worship, fasting, holidays, and pilgrimages. Reliving the occasion of many rituals are permanently planted in the minds of individuals and communities. Examples range from the Hindu washing in the Ganges to the Muslim washing rite at the pilgrimage to Mecca. The Hindu heading “I lost my heart in Vrindavan” reflects the sacredness of that ancient forest site of Krishna, and the Muslim title *haajj/haajja* (from Hajj, pilgrimage) is given to a person after performing the pilgrimage.

One additional example considered here deals with a significant point in the life of individuals and communities, that of initiation, baptism, rite of passage, or other similar forms. Such deeply personal and historic days, hours, or even fleeting (though permanent in impact) moments are symbolic events that provide meaning or purpose to persons and remain imprinted in their minds or the minds of relatives and community members as a whole. So whether the event is a Native American vision quest, Jewish *bar/bat mitzvah*, Christian baptism, or even some distinctly unique birthday celebrations, all leave memories that are relived with age and remembered by the individual and the community as a whole. They all provide a sacred meaning to life; and a life without them is often thought of as meaningless and may be viewed as a failure of the community.

The third belief to be introduced here is described as consecrated continuity, or in short continuity. It deals with the after-life or the fate of the body and soul after death. Unlike the previous belief this one may appear at first irrelevant to some individuals, but the very same individuals at some point or another reflect on, if not engage in a discussion on the matter and eventually develop some stand for or against such belief. Thus, even those of us who reject the existence and/or transmigration of the soul and/or resurrection of the body after death are not spared the impact of such on their Sense of Identity through others.

With continuity there are some differences among WRs, and even among individuals within the same community or WR. Persons and communities have different hermeneutics for the same sacred sources. For example, to argue for the (dis)belief in the transmigration of souls becomes indeed a matter of personal conviction that fashions one’s own way of life and as a result her or his Sense of Identity. Some traditions, like the mainline Abrahamic ones, are silent about such belief and some followers in these have developed opinions on the matter, opinions that may change from one phase in life to another. Meanwhile, minority individuals and groups within WRs who uphold the belief, have relied on a specific hermeneutic of certain verses taken from the primary scriptures (e.g., Bible, Qur’an). Examples may include the mystical communities of the Kabbalah with its term for transmigration of souls (*gilgool neshamot*) and Sufism (*tanasukh*). These two traditions arrive at similar conclusions; they both argue that the fate of the soul may have a number of possible destinations based on its karmas so to speak. This example is taken from the Abrahamic traditions since in the Eastern WRs the belief in reincarnation is widely accepted while in the western traditions it is widely rejected.

Finally, as we move from the first to the third belief, the differences among WRs, and individuals and communities within the same WR, multiply in characteristics and diversity at each level. Institutions and leaders adjust to the times, places, and circumstances in their own unique ways.

Component Two: Communal Attributes

Attributes in theology, and especially in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions, are often used with regard to God and are said to be unity, eternity, incorporeality and so on. In philosophy, attributes are conceived as properties. For example, some Greek philosophers such as Aristotle saw the world as consisting of substances and their attributes, and so philosophers held this view until the 17th century. But then, in his dualism of mind-matter, Descartes discusses thought and spatial extension as two different attributes of reality opposing one another. When substances are changed or modified, he calls them “modes,” and when a substance is “distinguishable by a particular modification,” he uses the term “quality”. But when “they exist only in a substance,” he calls them “attributes” (Descartes, 1998: p. 133). He emphasizes that “there are no modes or qualities in a strict sense of God, but only attributes because any change in God is intelligible.” Descartes continues:

Even in the case of created things, whatever remains unchanged in them—for example, existence and duration in a thing that exists or endures—should be called an attribute rather than quality or mode (Ibid.).

Thus, attributes for our purposes are properties inherited by individuals from their families, communities and WRs. They are innate, unchangeable, and almost always impossible to eradicate. When they change, they are modes or qualities. Attributes are diverse and are divided here into three types.

The first type of attributes is belief-based attributes. Some attributes are embedded in the hearts and minds of individuals and communities. For example, moral phenomena reflecting what constitutes right or wrong conduct impact the community or WR as a whole. In reality, moral statements rooted in the sacred sources of WRs are mere reminders of innate attributes residing in the minds, hearts, and souls of individuals. For example, Buddhists advocate following the teachings of the Buddha (the Dharma) and at the same time one must seek refuge in the community (*Sangha/Samgha*). With broad strokes without delving into details, the refuge and adherence to the Dharma and community (of monks) is in itself the medium in which these deeply rooted innate attributes are raised to the surface. Similarly, practicing Jews conform to the *Torah* and the Jewish Law (*Halakhah*), and Muslims adhere to the Qur’an and the Islamic Law (*Shari’a*), even if they have not been directly exposed to the actual teachings in their sacred sources.

In Kantian sense, morality comes from the inside; one knows it. Often we are puzzled by a young person noticing wrong doing while adults around her or him are oblivious to such wrong acts. Moral commandments and directives are rooted in the sacred sources of WRs but the essence is in the minds, hearts and souls of individuals. Moreover, such commandments and directives as reminders force their way into civic laws in secular societies and influence many members of such societies. They however do not become their attributes but rather directives. Most people comply with them as means of civic duty without looking inside themselves. Thus, the attribute of *being good* is a good thing and so is the attribute of *doing good*; the first is innate and inborn, the second is learned. It is true that the second may lead into the first, but being good is authentic and all inclusive.

These belief-based attributes govern the lives of the person and community or WR. Consider for example, the command-

ment of “thy shall speak the truth” (or its various renditions found in many WRs), it is a signpost and a reminder of deeply rooted attribute in people with some on one end and others on the other side of the continuum with many in between. Thus, speaking the truth, austerity, endurance, and so on, are all examples of this first type of attribute.

The second type of attributes is psychophysically-based attributes. This type involves thus inner processes related to the physical and mental faculties of individuals. They manifest themselves in the personality characteristics of the individual. As a result of experience, the individual and community construct certain profound inner characteristics that, like the first type, contribute to the make-up of Sense of Identity. Examples may include inner un-simulated real enthusiasm, motivation, or excitement. Thus, these are distinguishable from their hyperreal learned forms

The third category to be considered here is circumstantially-based attributes. This category manifests itself as a result of the external circumstances of the individual and community. Unlike the first and second type this one is transplanted in the person or community by outer processes. These attributes are invented in the person by the situations in which individuals find themselves. For example, a person or group may naturally have the characteristic of illuminating friendliness (or suspicion) toward members of other WRs based on the individual or communal experiences in the past, such as experiences of persecution, poverty, deep injury and so on. Other examples of this type of attributes may include compassion, hospitality, courage, bravery and so on. These are deeply rooted attributes and do not change with changes in the individual. Here, sectarian and denominational attitudes of hospitality or hostility in the various WRs are good examples.

Component Three: Sociopolitical Attitudes

Like communal attributes, sociopolitical attitudes are a vital component in Sense of Identity and also a case specific and vary from one place or time to another. But unlike attributes, attitudes are changeable though some are harder and take longer time than others. Attitudes are feelings or points of view that evolve from, and are influenced by, one’s past, present or future thoughts and/or experiences. They reflect personal or communal interaction, or lack of, with others. They develop over time as mental positions with regard to someone or something. Members of WRs and humans as a whole (if not all species) are naturally programmed to have attitudes, and also the ability to change them if one chooses to do so. They are diverse with a wide range from positive to negative.

Attitudes have been widely described as consisting of affective, cognitive, and conative dimensions. The affective aspect of attitudes deals with feelings and emotions while the cognitive reflects thoughts and convictions. This second type may relate more directly to the belief system of individuals, communities and WRs. The conative dimension represents action or behavior of individuals and communities. Some scholars have argued that religious language in itself is “attitudinal” whether rooted in emotions, thought, or action. For example, a statement expressing fear of death or the Day of Judgment would be about the affective, while a statement defending the (dis)belief in the existence of such would be classified as cognitive. But an account outlining one’s actions or preparations for such would be within the conative dimension.

Moreover, in the Jungian perspective, individuals are perceived as having two orientations: extraversion and introversion. Carl Jung felt that all humans could be placed in one of these two categories. But when one is extravert, Jung argued, her or his attitude of introversion does exist deep in the unconscious. Thus, one of the two attitudes is active and dominant and, therefore, it rules behavior and consciousness. Jung then introduces four “psychological functions” with “thinking” and “feeling” as rational functions, while “sensing” and “intuiting” as nonrational ones. By combining the two attitudes with the four functions he generates eight psychological types. These eight types are helpful if used in determining the place of the individual and community or WR within society at large (Jung, 1957).

Similarly, scholars have identified two major attitudes or orientations among individuals and communities or WRs. These are the inclusivist and the exclusivist, with the first being more open to engaging with the other WRs and the latter being closed to such engagement. Moreover, the latter has often been characterized to perceive their WR as the only truthful one. These two orientations may be correlated with Jung’s two attitudes. The extravert and inclusivist are open to socializing with different WRs; they are more free from othering. The introvert and the exclusivist, on the other hand, are characteristically different, with the first turning inside and being withdrawn introspectively, and the latter being preoccupied with her or his *only true* WR. But both are with the attitude of othering.

With the emergence of modern democracies, a third orientation was identified, that of Pluralism. In some way, Pluralism has existed in some regions of the world, and different WRs have lived in close proximity for centuries. Pluralism reflects an attitude of tolerance towards others and a sense of responsibility for coexistence and cooperation with more emphasis on civic identities. Though it was perhaps necessary, the attitude of tolerance in itself is now a negative attitude and therefore is unacceptable for the 21st century. This reality of three attitudes or orientations has presented us with the different perspective of empathy. This fourth attitude of being empathetic towards others is still productive for the present and thus positive. However, is empathy indeed what WRs have scripturally instructed over the centuries? The answer is that empathy is only a transitory state of affairs and Sense of Identity must resurrect the deep intent of the teachings of WRs. Thus, a new hermeneutic is in order for this new Age of Identity.

A meta-empathetic state of affairs in the lines of a modified and expanded meanings of altruism and alterity. Altruism, from the Italian *altrui* meaning others, is a philosophy introduced by the French philosopher Auguste Comte in the middle of the 19th century. It advocates a better treatment of others, and also a devotion to the interests of others. Alterity, which comes from the Latin *alteritas* and means the state of being different or being other. It is also common in French as *alterité*, an antonym of *identité*, or identity. It means otherness. But without delving into the evolution of the use of the concept and its shifts from the “epistemic” to the “moral” other, or from the literary application of Mikhail Bakhtin to the philosophical use of Emmanuel Levinas, let us distinguish between two, a simpler and radical, meanings to fit our purposes. The first hermeneutic is a simpler and represents a mere concern and empathy for others and is similar to the fourth view discussed above as the empathetic perspective that transcends the tolerance of the age of Pluralism. The second and radical one is rather promising for

this new Age of Identity as we advance into the 21st century. It implies a radical change in the self and its centeredness in a way where the individual and community begin to shift their orientations to the other, and before the interest of the self or community by eradicating othering from the human experience. It may be described as the new alterity—*neo*-alterity.

This conception of *neo*-alterity is fitting the intent of many scriptures of WRs. Consider for example, the teachings “love thy neighbor as thyself,” or its different renditions in the various WRs. It may be correlated to the connotation of *neo*alterity. But such teachings are often underplayed and kept at distance as some imaginary ideal state of affairs. In other words, with its radical meaning, it infuse a sense of profound love and equality that transcends the meanings of empathy and compassion as used nowadays. Thus, such teachings are often manipulated in order to continue identifying the other as lesser, lower, and at times inferior. Once again, othering aggrandizes the self and its centeredness, and has no place in the authentic messages of WRs. The simpler use is self-serving and is not in service of the other. The 21st century is still in its infancy and it may move most of human relations to the higher authentic meaning of these teachings in all WRs.

Once again, attitudes represent a state of feeling or thought triggered by an interaction with (or lack of), or exposure to relations with others. But these “relations” rise to the surface as a result of the discrepancy between what one *wishes to be engaged in* and what one is capable of or *actually engaged in*. Thus, this peripheral or outside component evolves due to the satisfaction, or lack thereof, of a person, community or a WR; that is, one is concerned with whether her or his interests are protected and their goals achieved. The question concerning the meaning of attitudes must, therefore, be preceded by an exploration of these two issues, the *wish to engage* and the *actual engagement*. They can here be characterized as sociopolitical *interests* and sociopolitical *roles*, respectively.

Are attitudes truly related to the *interests* and *roles* of a certain individual, community or WR? Is the determining factor in sociopolitical attitudes a realization of the *interests* and satisfaction in the *roles*? Attitudes are easier to measure due to the readily available attitude tests and scales, but can these interests and roles be clearly observed? And, finally, in what ways do these interests and roles impact or shape Sense of Identity? Having described attitudes as feelings, thoughts, and actions, and defined Sense of Identity as a moment or phase in which beliefs, attributes, and attitudes manifest themselves in life, then it follows that the impact of interests and roles, or the discrepancy between them, would certainly impact and shape Sense of Identity.

The first basic interest is survival, an interest expressed by almost all WRs at some point or another or at least in their infancy. The interest in survival gives birth to openness (or closeness) to others depending on time and place; roles of cooperation and participation have been noted in many religious minorities around the world. As long as cooperation and participation in the state are productive these are the roles adopted. When such cooperation and participation yield negative or no results, the community has a tendency of distancing itself gradually to total seclusion. A good example here may be drawn from the new settlers in the American colonies in the early 17th century where minority opinions were silenced or banished like Anne Hutchinson or Mary Dyer. Some chose to move and settle in new areas such as the advocate of religious freedom Roger

Williams and his establishment of Providence in 1636. The differences may have appeared at times small but the interests and roles of these individuals were in jeopardy.

A second interest which is related to the first one of survival is individual and communal security, which may generate a role of participation or secrecy. Participation is pursued in societies where some rights are granted. Secrecy, on the other hand, is pursued when persecution is practiced. Examples may include in the case of participation the Jewish Hayim Solomon who contributed extensively to the causes of the American revolution; another example is the African American former slave Richard Allen who contributed to the remodeling of his (white) church, and when church reopened he was not granted equal membership and benefits. Examples may include in the case of secrecy the African American slave community concealed worship in the 17th century or the Latter Day Saints trekking west to seek security and eventually settling in Utah in the 19th century. In both interests of survival and security, communities tend to generate internal harmony and a sense of togetherness nurturing an attitude of solidarity and cohesion.

A third interest is in deep spirituality; such interest often generates the roles that secure a life of simplicity and devotion. Interest in spirituality was central to societies up to the advent of Modernity. With Descartes’ famous statement “*cogito ergo sum*: I think, therefore I am,” along with similar teachings, individuals and communities began to pay less attention to spirituality and inner sources of strength. Thus, the alternative saying *cogito ergo ess*: I think therefore God exists, so to speak, retreated to the inner souls of smaller numbers in almost all WRs. Nietzsche observed rightly that people have repositioned God and spirituality as secondary and marginal. But in the past few decades and due to the changes taking place in society as discussed earlier, there is a unique spiritual revival taking place. More people are engaging in spiritual retreats, joining living room spiritual discussions, and participating in many forms of meditation or spiritual yoga. Such spiritual activities are also showing up in some schools and work places. The new acronym SBNR (spiritual but not religious) is becoming a common expression in this new age of identity.

Conclusions

The purpose of this definitional essay was to establish some preliminary theoretical formulations concerning the meaning, application, shortcomings, and improbability of identity. The exclusionary nature of identity and its relation to the self and othering shifted the attention to the new Age of Identity and *neo*-alterity. Sense of Identity as an alternative to identity was then explained, defended, and operationalized as a more meaningful, flexible, and effective construct for the 21st century, especially in any discourse on WRs and other WVs. The main three components that are examined briefly in this paper are personal beliefs, communal attributes, and sociopolitical attitudes.

Future analyses may take into consideration the following: 1) these components are just three of the many ones that make up one’s Sense of Identity; 2) their order and content may change from individual to individual, WR to WR, or from one time or phase of development to another; 3) for any given individual or group, one of the components may take precedence; thus, case studies will dictate the content and order of such components; 4) a person or group’s Sense of Identity centers on one core level

(usually the personal), surrounded by the second component (usually the communal), and encircled by the third one (usually the sociopolitical); and 5) the personal view of history as the core of a second set of concentric circles, and especially the communal view of that history, shape and is shaped by the Sense of Identity of the WR; from the perspective of the individual, community and WR, the dominant historiography occupies the periphery. Finally, the two structures converge into one coherent emancipatory model. The conditions in which this happens are beyond the scope of the present paper.

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