

SOME RELEVANT ASPECTS OF IDENTITY IN TODAY'S WORLD

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Abstract

This paper entertains a series of aspects that influence modern people's identity in today's world. It delves into history of oppression and exile, which continues to be valid in many countries. It touches on the nature of exile and possible return of exiles to their native country, on economic and ideological principles creating group identities, but also on human relationship to animals and the differences that exist between male and female sense of identity.

Keywords: *identity, aspects of identity, human, humanity, identity crisis*

Being a poet, I deal with this topic on a daily basis in a personal and perhaps hidden way. Writing existential poems means delving into who I am. Who I am is to a large extent what I feel, think, believe in and share. It can be a simple observation, it can be a memory, it can be a certain knowledge or a meditation. Just turning within is an invitation to delving into one's identity.

In the recent past, many of us have been forced into identifying with various group identities. E.g. I have grown up in the Communist system imported from the Soviet Union, which shortly followed in my country of Czechoslovakia the Nazi system imported from Germany. What that meant was being forced into certain type of identity, which I not only did not innerly identify with, but which felt actually outright disgusting to me for its obvious ethical shortcomings and harmful effects on humanity. Who was, however, considered as non-conforming to it, was subjected to severe punishment including losing one's work, losing the right to education, or even to prison, torture or death. Similar situations existed in European history due to militant Christianity in the past and nowadays still thrive in militant muslim communities. Marxism was really in a way an heir of this type of religious thinking as well. Thus both religious and political attitudes are very dangerous and harmful forms of group identity.

Another problematic form of group identity can be a state or a folk mentality, a race or a nation. State and nation are next to religion the most dangerous forms of identity, often leading to wars and violence. States believe they have a licence to kill, where an individual doesn't. Group mentality also often creates prejudices, which is another form of a harmful identity leading to animosity and estrangement between people. That is why it is so important to give a deeper thought to the topic of identity.

Having been an exile for most of my life, this topic is very close to my heart. Becoming an exile is really a clear statement of choice of one's own identity and refusal to have an identity imposed on by a particular group entity one is unwilling to identify with. Exiles are in minority, but exile mentality makes a very important contribution to mankind due to its fervent search for true and

personal identity, uncompromised by social pressures. This typically comes with the price of being forever ostracised by one's own country, one's own nation and perhaps even one's own family and childhood friends. This is a great sacrifice, not easy to make. One might need to sacrifice one's language, customs, the sense of home, social support etc., and not many people are willing to make such sacrifices. Thus paradoxically that, which most people consider their identity, might need to be shed in order to create a true identity of one's own.

This also brings to the fore the famous question posed by many exiles about whether a return is possible. Many answer this question negatively (most famously Milan Kundera among the Czech authors). I believe that return is possible, but one has to be willing to remain faithful to oneself and not overestimate the home environment, which is not able to accept the returned exile into its midst wholeheartedly. In some ways after the return to the home country, one remains in exile, one continues to be different and identify more with their „global“ self than with their national one, as one no longer fits in it. Colleagues are not able to relate to the exile as their own and therefore the exile for the most part remains alone even in their home country. The only thing that changes is paradoxically having access to a surface affinity based on subconscious emotional childhood roots, which give the exile a certain sense of comfort, while in substance they remain different and thus alone.

Most people when they consider the issue of identity think of things like class and material opportunities one has. This issue is becoming very urgent in modern world across cultures, as the abyss between the haves and have-nots is deepening all over the world. Can this be changed? I cannot answer this question, as I am not an economist or politician. I can only approach it as a poet and as a poet I do not distinguish between people according to their wealth and social position, but according to their hearts, their character and level of spiritual awakening. To me, this constitutes the core of identity. Therefore when I think of identity, what is most important to me, is the individual's level of self awareness, as ultimately society will only be as mature and as humane as its individuals are. This will bring true globalisation in the good sense of the word.

We all know that globalisation has brought with itself many problems. It is a uniting force on one hand, dividing on another. People prefer to maintain their uniqueness, which gets often lost in globalising tendencies, while also national economic self-sufficiency gets lost due to too much dependence on global interaction. This often leads to disastrous situations and unhealthy quarrels between nations (see e.g. the current situation of the European Union).

Thus current issues of identity are very different than past, while the past issues still continue to coexist in modern world even today. Many countries continue to have oppressive governments which force citizens into exile and oppress them brutally at home.

Literature, especially poetry is being abandoned in many cultures by the younger generations nowadays, while it is precisely poetry that leads people to their true

self. Young people nowadays prefer games, social servers, messaging and phoning, sports and economic achievements to meditative exercises like poetry. In literature, they prefer comedy and crime stories. All of this is a sign of removing oneself from delving within and from subtle feelings. On the streets, it is common to hear vulgarities and they become acceptable even in public communication forms. Thus the main problem nowadays becomes the fact, that identity is for many humans something disposable.

In Czech Republic, where I currently live, at least every other person has a dog as the most intimate companion. While this cultivates a more humane attitude toward animals, which is to be welcomed, it also means that humans are in a way giving up cultivating personal interhuman relationships in a profound way. Human relationships, especially intimate human relationships have become too difficult, too tedious, too demanding, too painful to deal with on an ongoing basis for many humans. Thus a certain shift of identity is inevitably a result due to being in a more profound relationship with an animal than with another human.

Women have a more complex situations typically to deal with than men. They find it often very difficult to find a suitable male partner with whom they could share their identity, as their potential male partners often show little interest in such issues in general. Women are also often more subtle and sensitive toward interhuman interactions and thus typically more vulnerable. Usually, they have much richer emotional lives than their male counterparts. I am leaving aside the large issue of family burden that they often carry, which contributes strongly, for better and for worse, to their sense of identity. In many countries men still identify themselves mainly with being the so-called „providers“, even though large number of women have to rely on themselves to provide for their families. Also eastern cultures have very different structures of family lives than western ones and thus people have very different sense of identity simply due to their belonging to these different social structures. All these factors have to be taken into consideration when we want to speak meaningfully of identity in global, general ways.