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Introduction: Representation Matters

Anette Hoffmann and
Esther Peeren

I'm not a Derridian in a long-term sense, but I'm a Derridian in a short-term sense in that I think more and more that the most interesting concepts in our field have fallen under erasure in exactly this way. One after the other they tumble from the paradigms where they seem to be settled and come loose in your hands. And then you say: "Shall I stop talking about identity" – but how can you stop talking about identity?
(Stuart Hall)

Almost fifteen years after the publication of Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay's influential anthology on cultural identities, we are dealing with the hangover that inescapably seems to follow a period of popularity for particular concepts within the academy, in this case the "veritable discursive explosion around the concept of 'identity'" (Hall 1). In the 1980s and 1990s debate about identity politics dominated not only academic discussions in the humanities, but also political discourse (which exhibited a mounting backlash against so-called "political correctness" and "special interests") and popular culture. However, as Hall indicates in the epigraph, instead of leading to more precise definitions, this use across cultural spheres has caused identity to grow ever fuzzier as a concept. Much like the similarly elusive term "culture," identity seems to be everywhere, but in a less and less consequential way – our cover illustration provides an apt example of this emptying out of meaning. As with any fashion, it wears off; hence the various calls to move beyond identity and identity politics.¹ However, unlike legwarmers, which simply disappeared from the late 1980s to their brief resurgence around 2004, identity has a cultural and political function that exceeds fashionability and was therefore never truly superseded. In fact, its meanings proliferated. In his entry on "culture" in *Keywords*,

Raymond Williams points out that the reaction to such a proliferation of meanings around a concept should not be to select “one ‘true’ or ‘proper’ or ‘scientific’ sense and dismissing other senses as loose or confused,” but rather to examine the “complexity of actual usage” and to take this complexity seriously (91). Thus, even if we as scholars, along with other consumers of movies, music, clothes, and perfume, are tiring of identity as a catchphrase, it is our responsibility to negotiate its various uses and to make clear why the need to grapple with its meaning, politics, and modes of representation remains. In 1997, Paul Gilroy wrote: “We live in a world where identity matters. It matters both as a concept, theoretically, and as a contested fact of contemporary political life. The word itself has acquired a huge contemporary resonance, inside and outside the academic world” (3). This resonance has not died down and requires further analysis rather than facile dismissal.

Without reliable statistics on the use of the term “identity” in consumer products and advertising, let alone the whole range of cultural production to verify our point, we can suggest its explosion both as trope and title in the movie industry since the 1980s.² Of sixty-three apparently popular movies listed in the international movie database (www.imdb.com) that have “identity” in their titles or even as a title, thirty-eight came out between the late 1980s and 2006. These films mainly deal with lost, found, stolen, false, split, multiple, secret, forgotten, recovered, or borrowed identities (the recurring notion of property is significant). In one way or another, their narratives seem to be contending with what Ien Ang has coined “identity blues”: the concurrent increase in both the necessity and difficulty of dealing with, representing, and making sense of identities in contemporary societies in terms of their uncertainties, ruptures, fissures, (un)representabilities, and credibilities. Often focusing on the notion of a given or recently discovered uncertainty of identity and the subsequent search for a “true” self, many of the films seem to deal with a putatively current – postmodern and postcolonial – predicament of identity construction, that is, a social context in which identities can no longer be taken for granted but still need to be represented as if they were. Both the array of themes and the sheer quantity of movies dealing with identity testifies to societal concerns in terms of what Zygmund Baumann identifies as an intrinsic part of the concept of identity:

One thinks of identity whenever one is not sure of where one belongs; that is, one is not sure how to place oneself among the evident variety of behavioural styles and patterns, and how to make sure that people around would accept this placement as right and proper, so that both sides would know how to go on in each other's presence. (19)

Looking at film titles in a database certainly does not provide more than a summary glimpse of what may be seen as the conjunctures of a fashionable and marketable concept in popular culture. But if we take popular culture as reflecting on – that is, engaging with and processing – currently relevant societal concerns, the quantity of

the films does not simply refer to what could be termed a mere “trend” in popular culture itself.

A film like Doug Liman’s *The Bourne Identity* (2002), for example, provides a sophisticated meditation on identity construction in its action-packed story of an amnesiac (played by Matt Damon) who discovers he was a secret CIA assassin named Jason Bourne; this surname cleverly references both a “born” identity (i.e. an identity that one is born with or into, and which is therefore “true” or “authentic”) and a “borne” identity (i.e. an identity that is imposed on one, but that can also be discarded), thus evoking the tension between essentialist and constructivist views of identity. As Thomas Byers pointed out in a recent conference presentation, the tension is never resolved, as Jason Bourne discovers, in *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007), that his “born” identity was not forcibly taken from him, but voluntarily relinquished by himself.³ In this way, the Bourne franchise rearticulates academic and political debates surrounding identity, thus adding to the complexity of the concept; it also places these debates squarely in the contemporary context of globalization, technologization, and neoliberal and neoconservative politics. Thus, while the vogue for titles that make use of the term “identity” may well reflect a marketing strategy, at the same time it denotes that problems or preoccupations with identity are historically and spatially specific. This volume picks up on this element by featuring localized and historicized readings of identity constructions, ranging from the present-day concerns of Lebanese immigrants in contemporary Sweden, indigenous communities in Bolivia and Uruguay, and Zimbabwean peasants, to the nineteenth-century predicament of an Ottoman painter in Paris.

We want to depart, however, from the way *The Bourne Identity* and most of the other identity-centered films in the movie database present identity as a predominantly individual matter. Taking up Joan W. Scott’s criticism of the way the ideology of individualism has led identity politics and the struggle over multiculturalism away from collective action (17–18), we return the focus to collective identity constructions, but in a way that avoids seeing these constructions as unified, stable, or completely determinate of their members’ individual identities. The term identity is used with increasing frequency in the media as well as in political debates to label political struggles or violent conflicts between different communities, be it in Africa, the Middle East, or within European metropolises. Such simplifying use of the term identity runs the risk of reducing complex political processes to putatively simple, monocausal “clashes of culture.” As Denis-Constant Martin states, by reducing the polysemy of identities, together with their complicated histories and interactions, to homogeneity and permanence, as well as lumping together heterogeneous groups as solid entities of (mainly) “others,” the term has lost its analytic power (5). This flattened use of “identity” (in the uncomplicated singular) perpetuates an image of minority communities, immigrants, and gay and lesbian communities, to name some

possible actors, as perennially caught up in what is patronizingly and derogatorily called “identity struggle.” Whereas collective struggles for the recognition of identities were charged with emancipatory promise in the 1980s (Fraser 107), subsequent genocidal conflicts (e.g. in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia), the aftermath of 9/11, and xenophobic attacks on immigrants in many societies (often accompanied by a resurgence of virulent nationalism) have caused concern about the essentialist side of identity politics, if not altogether discredited too strong and monolithic ethnic or religious identifications.

Thus, in the post-apartheid states of South Africa and Namibia, where the quest for identification with the new nation-state constituted a political move away from the violent, authoritarian racial oligarchy which had governed the countries for decades, the recent reappearance of publicly staged ethnic identification has been observed with dismay. The 2009 South African elections, in which the presidential candidate of the ANC, Jacob Zuma,⁴ actively positioned and represented himself as a Zulu man (to the extent that his supporters wore t-shirts bearing the slogan “100% Zulu Boy”), were criticized as symptomatic of political primitivism (Friedman 116) by analysts who were, in turn, scolded as white middle-class intellectuals. The analysts’ discourse intensified when the ANC received a substantial majority of votes in KwaZulu Natal at the expense of Mangosuthu Buthelezi’s Inkatha Freedom Party. Many attributed this crucial victory to Zuma’s shared ethnicity with the voters in KZN. The complexity of the voters’ choices, which certainly spoke as much to questions of redistribution (especially in rural areas the land question is of great importance), unemployment, and housing, to name but a few of the probable motivations, as to any seamless identification with ethnicity, language, and culture, was glossed over (at least in some debates) in favor of a simplifying “identity talk.” This is but one example of a situation in which identity is taken to define who the actors “are,” precluding the question of what exactly is said, asked, demanded, or promised by whom, where, when, and why. These reductive discourses often trigger arguments for moving beyond identity claims, and, as James Clifford writes, “the effect may be disabling,” missing or erasing the historical necessities and the critical potential of conflicts revolving around identity (96).

In place of assuming “born” identities, the detailed analysis of objects and events of representation or the lack thereof renders it possible to elucidate the historical necessities, critical potential, and conflicts Clifford speaks of. Liz Gunner’s critical engagement with Zuma’s performances on the political stage during the South African (pre-)election campaign is insightful in this regard. She analyzes the complex implications of representation in the mode of a close reading of Zuma’s performance of repeatedly singing a political song. This not only re-established singing and song as a political language in its own right, but had alienating as well as mobilizing powers for the South African public. The song, “*Awuleth’ Umshini wami*” (isiZulu for “bring

me my machine gun”), dates back and refers to the armed struggle against apartheid, speaking of agency and victory in times of crisis; it is “a song from the belly of the struggle” (Gunner 38).⁵ Zuma’s singing caused controversy not only because of the song’s content, which has been said to resuscitate a militant combat tradition (Fikeni 11), but also with regard to the question whether it is proper for a presidential candidate to engage in such public singing performances. Moreover, Zuma commenced his series of performative stagings of the song during the time of the 2005 court case against Shabir Shaik in Durban, in which Zuma, then Deputy President of South Africa, was called to give evidence. Zuma’s association with the fraud case severely damaged his reputation, which led former President Mbeki to release him from his office.⁶ It was in the aftermath of the trial and during the ANC conference in Polokwane in December 2007, where Zuma was elected the new ANC President by the delegates, that the song became a rallying cry for his supporters.

Instead of dismissing Zuma’s performances as a populist recourse to public memory (the anti-apartheid struggle) and traditionalism (sonic genres of performance), Gunner’s analysis provides an informed insight into the effect and efficacy of performance and representation in the quest for recognition on the political stage in times of (in)tense campaigning during and before the elections. In the controversy surrounding *Umshini wami*, the recognizable connection of politics with an articulation of cultural genre spoke to the representability of postmodern, African identities, which are much more complex than any outright dismissal of ethnic identifications would have it.

The representation of African identities was also at stake, though in a different manner, in *The Short Century*, an exhibition of African art created between 1945 and 1994, curated by Nigerian-born American Okwui Enwezor in 2001. According to Ashley Dawson, the exhibition foregrounded “the politics of representing non-Western peoples and their traditions of cultural production,” but did so in an ambiguous manner (227). On the one hand, Dawson argues, the show emphasized the way cultures are engaged in continuous translations and re-presentations of their histories and identities; yet on the other hand, it put forward a false impression of continental unity, in which art from particular regions is taken to be representative of “Africanness,” and it only selected art that would be recognizable in the West as “art” and as somehow related to the project of modernity. Clearly, even in contexts where intentions are noble, representation remains a concept that needs to be carefully parsed: questions like “who is doing the representing?” and “what is the relation between representation and the representative?” have to be asked, especially when dealing with collective identities. For, as Hall has said, representation and identity are intimately interwoven: “identities are . . . constituted within, not outside representation” (10). Moreover, representation itself is understood as constitutive of meaningful realities in the mode of not merely re-staging or accounting for social processes, but creating them in a performative manner. Thus, representation inevitably influences the

way identities are constituted and asserted, and while self-representation has its own problems (as is clear in Zuma's case), an inability to control one's own representation can have particularly dire consequences: "Those who are relatively powerless to represent themselves as complex human beings against the backdrop of degrading stereotypes become invisible and nameless. Identity is shaped, in part, by recognition, absence of recognition, or misrecognition by others" (Weaver 243).

While some critics have argued against the centrality of representation and recognition in postcolonial discourse, in favor of a more directly redistributive or materially revolutionary politics,⁷ we hold that representation remains crucial in relation to emancipatory projects, but we also argue that not all forms of representation are equally conducive. In order to further the cause of marginalized communities, we need, in R. Radhakrishnan's words, "multi-directional, heterogeneous modes of representation and not the premature claim that 'representation no longer exists.' I do not see how representation 'can no longer exist,' until the political 'no longer exists'" ("Postcoloniality" 765). Whereas in this case Radhakrishnan is referring to the culturalist sense of representation, in "Culture as Common Ground: Ethnicity and Beyond" he draws attention to the double meaning of the term as both *Vertreten* (the right to speak for oneself politically and to be represented on the political stage) and *Darstellen* (the right to culturally "image" oneself and to have a particular worldview) and argues that the two work most effectively through each other (10). It is precisely this interaction that the current volume seeks to explore. The various contributions show that, if representation creates realities, discourses, images, fields of knowledge, and political contestation, then it never occurs accidentally or is inconsequential, but embedded in history, power relations, and current politics. Looking at acts of representation, then, provides analytical tools to analyze the meaning of specific spatially and historically distinct processes of signifying (or signifyingin'),⁸ defining, shaping, contrasting, but also criticizing, deconstructing, and opening up, or even attacking notions of identity.

The consideration of the intersection of identity and representation in this volume explicitly situates itself in a postcolonial context. In our broad understanding of the term, postcoloniality is not spatially limited to formerly colonized parts of the world (clearly, ex-colonizers are marked by their colonial histories, also because streams of guest workers, migrants, and refugees are now flowing in their direction) and does not denote a temporal closure (the world cannot be said to be comfortably *after* or *over* colonialism). We do not feel it is necessary to insert, as Chris Bongie does in *Friends and Enemies*, a slash in the post/colonial to indicate its ambiguity as a condition in which "the colonial and the postcolonial appear uneasily as one, joined together and yet also divided in a relation of (dis)continuity" and in which "the one continues to haunt the other" (xi). After all, the chronotope of the *post* – not just in postcolonial but also in postmodern and poststructuralist – has revealed itself as

less one of departure and transcendence than one of continuous tension and dialogic negotiation. We therefore consider postcolonial critique as operative in revealing the ongoing inheritance of the still acute, distressing effects of colonial modernity; an inheritance that manifests as a haunting legacy that invariably keeps secrets, but that, even though it can only ever be selectively and partially deciphered, compels us to deal with it actively and responsibly in a move towards justice.⁹ Postcolonial critique also functions as a counterpoint to narratives of globalization that dismiss or marginalize representations of alterity, as well as to the western bias of many humanist discourses (for example those surrounding human rights). The contributions to this volume present a considerably diverse array of topics bracketed by a shared postcolonial critical and practical commitment. Critically, the volume aims to specify and historicize several concepts prominent in postcolonial studies, while also investigating how such concepts can be translated into practical strategies of grappling with the legacies of colonialism (and its attendant, nationalism), whether such strategies entail the production of counter-memories to re-read and contest colonial histories, the challenging of neo-colonial and resurgent nationalist impulses in the present, or the forging of transnational alliances with other sidelined collectivities to ensure a better future.

Most of the papers selected for this volume were presented in two panels at the 2004 international workshop on Identities/Alterities hosted by the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis (ASCA). These panels, centered on “The Politics of Identity” and “Postcolonialism: Formation as Representation/Representation as Formation,” dealt with questions of identity politics, with the struggles for and over forms of representation waged in the course of various communities’ striving for social and political recognition, as well as with related concepts such as culture, memory, history, tradition, indigeneity, authenticity and hybridity.¹⁰ One of the main aims was to explore the concepts of identity and alterity in the socio-historically specific contexts of postcoloniality and globalization, providing concrete examples of how particular communities (re)articulate and (re)assert themselves as meaningful collectivities to be reckoned with. In terms of Hall’s ideas on the politics of identity articulation and representation, the tactical value of the contributions lies in the way they establish identity in terms of shifting alliances and a continuous redefinition of boundaries, without taking this provisional nature to mean that identity no longer matters or that all identity constructions deserve equal protection and consideration. Faced with numerous identity formations and representations in the contemporary postcolonial context, the contributors question whether and how these can be systematically and responsibly accounted for in terms of their specificity as well as their relations to other identities. The essays set out to explore how we deal with identity formations that are open-ended, productive and often ambivalent, yet constitute and represent communities with regard to cultural politics and global economies.

The first section of this volume includes contributions that take well-known and often taken-for-granted concepts from postcolonial theory and proceed to challenge and fine-tune them by exploring their workings in specific case studies and tracing their theoretical roots and meanderings through various disciplines, historical contexts, and social practices. In this way, the concepts in question – alterity, hybridity, insularity, ubuntu, the West, and orientalism – are revealed as what Mieke Bal has called “traveling concepts,” with the markings of their wanderings rendered visible and meaningful.¹¹ The opening essay in this section was the inaugural keynote lecture to the Identities/Alterities conference. In it, Sudeep Dasgupta aims to move beyond the entrenched, polarized debate about identity (essentialism versus constructivism) and to provide an alternative to *différance*-based deconstruction by developing an Adorno-inspired, authenticity-based critique of the concepts of alterity and hybridity that focuses on the otherness of experience (living-in-the-world) to Being as such and on the object as Other to theoretical discourse. Dasgupta insists that a consideration of the object’s historical specificity reveals that it cannot be approached through a fixed, abstract perspective, but only through concepts that are “contingently articulated.” His reading of the Swedish film *Jalla! Jalla!* (Fares, 2000) stages such a contingent or constellational articulation and proposes a reformulation of the concept of hybridity, against Bhabha, in terms of the acute questions of when and where one is hybrid – in relation to which places, cultures, histories, social relations, and/or economic situations – and which hybridities are institutionally validated in particular socio-political contexts. Although at first sight the film appears to offer little more than a comical clash-of-cultures plot about a Lebanese immigrant in Sweden, its depiction of the complex negotiations, tensions, partial affirmations, and rejections the protagonist, his family, and friends engage in is revealed to disrupt clear distinctions of “bad” authentic cultures versus “good” hybrid lifestyles. Far from enacting abstract concepts, the film stages multiple forms of hybridity, while alterity, in terms of language and culture, turns out to be specifically situated and thus a question of experienced configurations in a time-space of multi-relational and historicized contexts, rather than allowing for a simplifying and convenient practice of nominalism.

In his paper on the concept of insularity and its relation to Martinican identity formation, Marc Brudzinski also insists on terminological specification and historicization. Various Caribbean intellectuals have employed the geography of the island – and the related ones of the sea, the archipelago, and the continent – to symbolically define identity and the process of identification as functions of the Caribbean subject’s relation to space and place, but not all of them conceptualize these *topoi* in the same way or attach the same meanings to them. Since the colonial histories of the different Caribbean islands are not consistent and their current statuses diverse (with some independent and others, like Martinique, overseas departments of former

colonial powers), insularity needs to be explored both as locally inflected and as potentially generating pan-Caribbean solidarity. As Brudzinski shows, even among Martinican intellectuals there is no agreement on how being part of an island-nation constitutes one's identity. In the work of George Desportes, Édouard Glissant, and Thierry Nicolas, insular metaphors are used in divergent ways depending on the cultural critical affiliations of the writer and the period of writing: in the 1970s, Desportes uses insularity to pessimistically figure Martinique's static isolation and the fragmentation and dependency of the Caribbean archipelago, while Glissant employs it to envision a new, anti-colonial way of thinking Caribbean identity and history; in the 2000s, Nicolas configures insularity as an obstacle to the necessary connection or assimilation between France and its overseas departments (Martinique and Guadeloupe) in a globalized world. In his analyses, Brudzinski shows that geography does not symbolize or determine identity configurations in any straightforward way, but is subject to an ideologically and historically variable conceptualization that may activate any of the (often contradictory) connotations a particular geographical constellation evokes.

The next essay, by Nimrod Ben-Cnaan, interrogates and complicates another geographical marker bearing symbolic meaning in relation to collective identity formation: the West, which may be one of the notions most taken for granted in postcolonial theory. Like whiteness, masculinity, and heterosexuality, the West is that pole of an important, culturally constructed binary that was long thought natural, normative, and invisible. Consequently, it was not considered to require explanation, investigation, or even definition. Of course, the West never did speak for itself as a theoretical concept or even a geographical category, and it does so even less now that its boundaries have become blurred after the fall of the Berlin Wall and globalization has brought westernization to the remotest outposts of the world. If, like the hybrid, the West is everywhere in our postcolonial, globalized world, how useful is this category as a point of reference and mobilizing factor? Probing historical notions of Westernness as well as its intersections with concepts of culture (Williams, Hannerz), collective memory (Nora), and collective identity (Snow, Castells), Ben-Cnaan asks what it means to be Western today. Identifying the assumption that the phenomena of the Western and the "modern" seamlessly converge as one of the major fallacies of critical thought, his essay presents postcolonial critique as a key contribution towards the re-modeling of notions of Westernness as decentered and heterogeneous. While the West must continue to be seen and critiqued as an important power block and privileged collective identity, in both postcolonial studies and globalization theory attention should also be given to its internal bifurcations (expressed, for example, in European resistance to Americanization, the U.S. backlash against everything French in the wake of the Iraq invasion, and Western European disdain for immigrants from the former Eastern Block), as well as to the

instability betrayed by its increasingly virulent policing of its boundaries (especially in relation to African and South-American immigrants, and Turkey's possible accession to the European Union).

Ubuntu – as evoked in the Xhosa proverb “*ubuntu ungamntu ngabanye abantu*,” which is most often translated as “I am a person because of other persons” – is an ethical concept articulating a specific non-Western way of thinking oneself as part of one's community. While it is perhaps not yet as well-known (and overused) as hybridity and even insularity, the fact that ubuntu was chosen as the name for an increasingly popular open-source computer operating system both shows that its notion of community has broad appeal and that it is not immune to forces of commercialization (Ubuntu may be free to download, but its website includes an UbuntuShop and is run by a commercial company called Canonical).¹² Hanneke Stuit examines ubuntu in the South African context, exploring the term's history and various interpretations, as well as its prominent use within the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Ubuntu is revealed to be a far from straightforward concept that has undergone its own travels and that positions itself ambivalently on the continuum from an inclusionary humanism to conditional, exclusionary forms of community. Stuit's analyses of various TRC hearings and her reading of ubuntu with (and against) Judith Butler's notion of precarity expose how ubuntu, when it is not seen as an abstract concept but explored contingently, at the level of living-in-the-world, raises important questions about the relationship between identity and alterity (as an inclusive concept, how does ubuntu deal with otherness?), as well as about that between the individual and the community (which should take precedence when it comes to questions of justice and responsibility?).

The final essay in the first section, Gülrü Çakmak's “Resistance or Compliance? The Problem of Orientalism in Osman Hamdi's Paintings,” takes the concept of orientalism and supplements Edward Said's seminal account by concentrating on its highly specific incarnation as a school in nineteenth-century French painting. At the same time, she repeats Said's perspectival shift (the way he emphasizes the effect of Western orientalism on the orientalized subject) by focusing on the work of the Ottoman painter Osman Hamdi, who was faced with the conundrum of having to represent his own culture through the othering perspective offered by the Orientalist school. In particular, Çakmak examines the way Hamdi's impossible position as an “Eastern Orientalist” has been read in art history. While his paintings depict the irreducible difference, i.e. non-Europeanness, of his subjects by making use of the painterly language of French Orientalism, they have often been interpreted as doing so precisely to produce a counter-hegemonic narrative of Turkish identity. Other critics have read this ascription of a political agenda to Hamdi's works as overly facile and optimistic. Çakmak examines both standpoints and concludes that neither has the last word on Hamdi's agency as a painter or on the effect of Western painterly

conventions on the identity of the artist or his work. Her own close reading of the painting *Zeibek at Watch* locates it as a negotiation not just of Orientalism, but also of particular modernizing initiatives in Academic painting of the time.

The second section of the book is entitled “Relational Histories” and focuses on the way collective identities are constructed, consolidated, and asserted in museum contexts through a particular framing of their history as public memory. In the two cases discussed here – that of the Roma and their persecution in the Second World War, and that of the Irish and their suffering during the Famine – this framing is explicitly *relational*: Romani and Irish identity are not presented as unique configurations or relational only in the sense that they are defined against or in competition with other identities, but as sharing certain characteristics and historical trajectories with other collectivities. This reminds us that alterity, both in terms of history and ethnicity, “is not a mere synonym of difference; what it signifies is otherness, a distinction or separation that can entail similarity as well as difference” (Peeren and Horstkotte 10). Conversely, relationality, defined as an active connectivity, does not imply sameness (there would be no need to actively relate to something completely identical) but rather similarity. Thus, the Romani and Irish communities present themselves as related to but not *the same* as other communities in a similar position: for the Roma, their reference point is the Jewish community and the Holocaust, while the Irish Famine is remembered in the context of present-day African famines. Although elements of opportunism may be discerned in relational strategies of representation (in the case of negative histories of suffering especially, constructive relationality may degrade to a distasteful competitiveness in a hierarchy of victimhood), as well as a danger that significant differences between communities and their histories will be elided, they can also open the way for marginalized communities to engage in collective articulations and assertions of identity across space and time – potentially creating what Appadurai calls “grassroots globalization” or “cellular democratization” (Fear 131, 135). Such collective articulations may be more readily intelligible, carry more weight, and thus be more effective in furthering the aim of representation, namely to gain recognition for one’s community and its history. In addition, constructing identities relationally could engender enduring solidarity between communities; for this to transpire, however, the identification needs to exceed the level of representation-as-depiction (*Darstellen*) and include effective, coalitional interventions on the social and political level – as occurred, for example, in the case of the indigenous movement, which will be discussed below. The two essays in this section provide a critical perspective on relational histories, highlighting not just the potentially positive aspects, but also the risks inherent to any predication of one collective identity upon another.

Huub van Baar theorizes the political implications of the Roma’s inclusion within a globalized holocaust discourse. His essay analyzes the permanent exhibition on the extermination of the European Roma located at the Auschwitz-Birkenau State

Museum, which is considered one of the first opportunities for Romani self-representation with an international scope. Although by providing a documentary account of the Romani genocide, the museum may succeed in bringing about their exit from the peripheral category of “other victims” and establish a more equal standing with the Jewish victims of Nazism, van Baar argues that this advance is predicated on the exclusion of references to discrimination suffered in the pre- and postwar periods and thus on the non-articulation of the differences between Romani and Jewish history. By eliding these differences in favor of a sustained claim to similarity, the exhibition does not – and cannot – provide a space to inform visitors about the current crisis of the Romani communities in Eastern and Southern Europe or incite them to political intervention. In this case, therefore, historical relationality threatens to erase a collective identity’s specificity and proves unable to produce a coalitional politics in the present.

Analyzing the displays of the Strokestown Famine Museum, which aims to elucidate the reasons for and effects of the Irish famine, Niamh Ann Kelly provides an account of the museum’s strategies of representation with regard to this salient yet underexposed event in Irish history. She reveals how the museum exhibits negotiate between local specificities and national/universal aspects, and how, by emphasizing relations of similarity (comparing the causes and effects of this historical famine in a western colonized country to present-day situations of poverty in postcolonial Africa) as well as difference (accentuating the deprivation of the Irish peasant population in comparison to the wealth of the landed gentry), they encourage the visitor to experience identity in a relational and contingent manner as involving the active negotiation and affiliation of identities and alterities across time and space.

In addition to emphasizing the relational dimension of identity formation and assertion, both van Baar and Kelly point to the mobilization factor of identity and memory politics – uniting the Irish as a now thriving postcolonial nation and the Roma as a still threatened post-nation-state nation – denoting that we are far from getting beyond identity-based claims for recognition, self-determination, and equality. Such claims are central to the third section of this book, which deals with origin narratives and struggles around indigeneity. The three essays in this section show that to further a marginalized collectivity’s cultural and political goals in the present, it is essential for this collectivity to construct a (link to the) past that stakes a certain claim to territory, whether in terms of actual land or a more metaphorical belonging, which, in turn, can found a demand for rights and, in some cases, restitution. Rejecting the essentialist notion that such a claim can only be based on an authentic and therefore fixed connection or rootedness, the essays emphasize that it is precisely the constructedness of the relation to the past that renders communities capable, through creative and tactical adaptations, of challenging the colonial or postcolonial state’s attempts to either reify or obliterate their histories and identities.

Anette Hoffmann addresses questions of narrated collective identity as related to the history of the community in question, in this case that of the self-representation of the Herero community in praise poetry under and after colonial rule in Namibia. She presents an interpretation of what she identifies as a significant shift from one narration of genesis to another. Whereas in the older story the collective ancestors descended from a tree, in the narration that was recently agreed upon, a journey to and arrival in Namibia is seen as the historical event that constructs ethnic identity together with a notion of belonging. Describing the Ovaherero's articulation of identity as intrinsically connected to their textual construction of landscape, Hoffmann presents these constructions of landscape and identity as fundamentally based upon and mediated by orally transmitted texts. This specific articulation of landscape and identity as communicating and mutually productive forms the analytic premise for her reading of the reasons for and impact of this change on Herero self-representation under a coercive regime. The Ovaherero communities' historically grounded, but also contemporarily operative attempt to appropriate the discourse defining their identity vis-à-vis the state points to the enduring cruciality of Hall's notion of identity as both historically situated and open-ended; origins remain important, but can be molded to the purposes of the present.

This is vital not only when an established origin narrative comes too close to confirming the externally imposed, colonial state's view of a community, as was the case with the Ovaherero's tree story, but also when a hegemonic national origin narrative works to erase indigenous presence altogether. Interrogating the founding narration of Uruguay as a neo-European, white, and modern nation, Vannina Sztainbok asks how its citizens could come to think of Uruguay as so *tan sin indios* 'so indianless.' Her essay identifies the persistent repetition of the narration of the killing of the "last" Charrúas at Salsipuedes as the discursive fetishization of the elimination of the native population and thus as a mode of constructing a national founding myth based on whiteness. The all-encompassing sameness of the population is constructed (in the face of a manifest racial plurality) by narrating the nullification of the Charrúas, which leads to "Indianness" being conceived as the ultimate embodiment of pre-modern alterity. While the present nationalist discourse includes certain Charrúa elements (such as the *garra charrúa* or "Charrúa claw"), it actively forecloses the marking of the native as still present in (and owed by) Uruguayan society. Sztainbok does, however, point to the recent emergence of Charrúa descendents' movements as offering the potential for a reinscription of native identity into Uruguay's present and past. While remaining wary of certain elements of essentialism, unproductive nostalgia, and even racism in this movement, she argues that its growing affiliations with other indigenous movements in the Americas and with Afro-Uruguayans may well open the way for collective counter-narratives able to offer an alternative to Salsipuedes' continuing inscription of whiteness at the heart of Uruguayan identity.

The indigenous movement Sztainbok invokes provides a particularly strong example of the way relationality can strengthen identity-based claims for cultural and political representation. From its quite recent inception – the term “indigenous” was not commonly used to designate human collectivities until the mid twentieth century (Niezen 539) – the indigenous movement has presented itself as a global community that sought to legitimate and support the specific identities of separate groups through a collective appeal voiced on an international level (through the International Labour Organization, various NGOs, and the UN). As Ronald Niezen writes in an article on the way the Internet in particular has facilitated the forging of connections between various indigenous communities:

the collective sense of self, above all the sense of injustice and suffering based upon past wrongs, is not arrived at in isolation from behind closed cultural boundaries, but rather is inspired by and negotiated with others in personal, often professional, relationships and adjusted to the taste of a universal public. The essential features of a community's history and culture are now more than ever an outcome of global collaboration. (538)

While his celebration of the Internet as enabling an “unbridled cultural democracy” (549) appears overly optimistic,¹³ Niezen’s elaboration of the way the collaborative construction of indigeneity as a platform for demanding cultural and political rights engenders both “a source of global identification” (by linking communities together in a shared struggle) and “a local source of cultural reawakening” (since the framework of indigeneity is broad enough to accommodate various localisms) provides an attractive vision of the way relationality can further a community’s aims without effacing its specificity.¹⁴ It needs to be pointed out, though, that, while on the one hand there is “little agreement on precisely what constitutes an indigenous identity,” which means that it can be used relatively freely as a strategic term to mobilize communities, on the other hand the fact that the indigenous, on the level of state and international law, has become a legal status with associated rights means that “[i]dentity is expressed as a measurable or quantifiable entity far more for indigenous people than for any other group” (Weaver 240, 248). In addition, as Alfred and Corntassel show as part of a much more pessimistic and separatist perspective on indigeneity, individual communities do not always strengthen each other’s claims but are also frequently played out against each other “in battles over authentic histories” (601).¹⁵ Like the concepts discussed in section one, therefore, indigeneity, too, needs to be carefully specified and historicized, since it cannot be assumed to work the same way in all contexts.

One such specification takes place in Claret Vargas’s essay, which addresses the rhetoric of indigenous rights in Bolivia in the 1990s. Vargas reveals, by way of Hall’s theory of identity, the operational effectiveness of an incomplete, almost utopian, flexible-yet-contested concept of indigenous identity. The practice of “legislating and

naming identities,” as critiqued by Dasgupta, here appears in a literal sense, as Vargas analyzes the 1994 Law of Popular Participation (LPP). While this law could have transfixed indigenous identity, producing exclusions and a potential struggle for legitimacy between various indigeneities, its lack of definition instead led to the formation of a tactical, fluid, or “thin” understanding of indigenous identity, which allowed various groups to assert themselves and put demands to the state, either separately or in concert. In Vargas’s reading, indigenous groups do not necessarily have to anchor their claims in a fixed historical origin, but can use the legal framework (as long as it is not overly constrictive) to develop various tactics to improve their living conditions in the present and their opportunities in the future. The fact that Evo Morales, who is of Aymara descent, was able to unite the indigenous vote with the *campesino* vote in order to be elected as the first fully indigenous Bolivian head of state in 2005 is cited as evidence of the power a “thin” notion of indigeneity can unleash.

While Alfred and Cornthassel envision an indigenous resurgence based on “a return to the natural sources of food and the active, hard-working, physical lives lived by our ancestors” (613) – in other words, a return to a tradition that is authentic, stable, recognizable, and retrievable – Morales deliberately instrumentalizes tradition. He does not just invent it in Hobsbawm’s sense, where the invention is naturalized to make the tradition appear invariable (1–2), but engages in a continuous pragmatic and overt *re-invention*. This accords with Appadurai’s argument, in “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy,” that globalization has complicated the invention of tradition:

in this [globalized] atmosphere . . . the invention of tradition (and of ethnicity, kinship and other identity markers) can become slippery, as the search for certainties is regularly frustrated by the fluidities of transnational communication. As group pasts become increasingly parts of museums, exhibits and collections, both in national and transnational spectacles, culture becomes less what Bourdieu would have called a habitus (a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions) and more an area for conscious choice, justification and representation. (18)

Culture and tradition as realms for “conscious choice, justification and representation” are central to the fourth and final section of this volume, which deals with reinventions of specific traditions and their effects on collective identity constructions in the present.

In an interrogation of the concept of agency in relation to the formation, representation, and possible critique or subversion of gendered identities, Beatrix Hauser explores the meaning and function of Mangala *puja*, a votive rite performed by women in Orissa, India, to confirm their religious commitment to the wellbeing of their husbands, brothers, and sons. A case study conducted in Berhampur reveals that the ritual is relatively new to the area and, under the guidance of a senior local woman,

has been inflected in creative ways. Although the notion of individual creative input is played down by the woman herself, Hauser argues that she does derive a ritual agency from her role. For the other participants, the rite at once stresses the notion of female suffering while simultaneously transforming this suffering through religious practice and the festive social context. Looking at the efficacy of the rite in terms of the performative construction of at times conflicting features of identity – religion, gender, and individuality – Hauser suggests the need for reconceptualizing the notion of agency, since its common definition as actively willed expression may neglect the (unintended) effects of embodied experience. She argues that the participation in a collective performance – even one designed to reinforce women’s subservience – allows for reflexivity and an increasing awareness of gender roles that are usually not questioned. Although the rite is not performed with the aim of altering the self-definition of the worshipping women, the iterative aspect of performativity as that which requires the affirmation of the collective may have the capacity to effect gradual change as the rite is subjected to further reinventions.

Guy Thompson’s contribution explores the discourses of residents within peasant communities in Madziwa, Zimbabwe. In these communities, especially older people attempt to capture the ambiguities of their contradictory experiences with modernity through two key Shona terms: *chivanhu*, the way of the people, and *chirungu*, meaning English, European, but also modern and foreign. The juxtaposition of these concepts allows Madziwans to theorize the experience of colonial rule, capitalist expansion, and cultural change in their lifetime. Tracing the history of the two terms from the colonial period via the political debates of the early post-colonial 1960s to their recent essentialist appropriation as anti-western state propaganda by Mugabe’s government, Thompson argues that the continued use of the terms by Madziwan peasants should be conceptualized as a politics of popular memory that contains oppositional elements (both in relation to colonialism and the current regime). Interviews reveal that while *chivanhu* is related to oversimplified, nostalgic ideas about the early colonial period, this construction also functions as a counter-discourse to protest a continuing decline in community autonomy. Thus, the retroactive consolidation of tradition is put in the service of negotiating and interpreting the present. Comparable to the revised origin story of the Herero community described by Hoffmann, Madziwans reinvent tradition in order to establish their own reading of a specific, locally defined modernity within which they struggle to define their contemporary identities and protect their material interests.

The problematic imbrication of tradition and authenticity, which suffuses the *chivanhu-chirungu* binary, is also central to Sonja van Wichelen’s essay, which analyzes the process of re-sinicization of Chinese-Indonesians in post-Suharto Indonesia. After decades of discrimination and forced assimilation, culminating in the violence of the May 1998 riots, the fall of Suharto’s regime that same year

opened up a space for this community to begin participating in Indonesia's cultural and political life. By analyzing entries from an Internet discussion forum called *Chinese Culture*, van Wichelen reveals the conflicted nature of the ensuing resurgence of "Chineseness," which involved a diasporic community that did not always speak the languages or have any knowledge of Chinese traditions and ways of life. Using Dominick LaCapra, she argues that in this case, absence (a structural lack of something one never had) is conflated with loss (associated with a historical trauma), causing many Chinese-Indonesians to engage in a nostalgic desire for a "homeland" they never knew, and a quest for authenticity that not only erases the way Chinese traditions have been adapted in their migration to Indonesia, but also prevents the working through of the trauma of the silencing of Chineseness under Suharto and the racist violence preceding his ousting. In this case, therefore, the re-invention of tradition is foreclosed in favor of a return to an invented tradition that the community will always be inadequate to.

The final essay in this volume by Saskia Lourens presents a more constructive relation to tradition in its reading of mythology and metaphor in André Brink's 2005 novel *Praying Mantis*. Brink's multi-faceted re-telling of the nineteenth-century life of Cupido Cockroach, South Africa's first Khoi missionary (a historical figure), undermines the traditional opposition between African mythology and western religion and rationalism. In the fact that Cupido is told various incompatible stories about his own origins, myth is transformed from unassailable tradition into a discourse open to appropriation and reinvention, while the inclusion in Brink's novel of lists that resemble and parody the pseudo-scientific tabulations of colonial record, and of a Christianity that cannot deliver the literalness that Cupido seeks in it, reveals the mythological and metaphorical nature of western history and religion (as narrative structures rather than essences). Cupido's life story, as told by Brink's multiple narrators, problematizes the stubborn adherence to a unitary identity that fits into a singular tradition and ultimately privileges a more syncretistic or even "magical" attitude that considers identities and traditions as multiple and changeable. This reflects not only on South African history but also on the current political situation in a country where a variety of identities are supposed to unite under the banner of the post-apartheid nation. As we saw in our earlier discussion of Jacob Zuma, invocations of fixed and unitary identities ("100% Zulu Boy") are not necessarily as helpful in this as the reinvention of traditions in a more inclusionary and relational manner would be.

Significantly, in almost all of the cases discussed in this volume we are dealing with an identity politics that has either abandoned essentialism or adopts it only strategically and self-reflexively. This causes identity formation and representation to emerge as creative, open-ended processes that are, moreover, no longer designed to exclude or separate, but display a clear relational tendency. The latter tendency could potentially herald a renewed strengthening of the "claims for egalitarian

redistribution” that Nancy Fraser saw displaced by claims based on the recognition of difference, without having to subscribe to her individualist “status model” (119). A shift from asserting absolute difference to considering *both* communality and specificity – as displayed, for example, in the indigenous movement – can bring marginalized communities together in a shared quest for political, economic and social justice, rather than allowing the dominant culture to play them out against each other, thus providing (with the appropriate caution about not losing sight of the specificity of each community’s position and accountability in the local and global context) a positive answer to Radhakrishnan’s question “Is freedom conceivable as a proactive project undertaken in multiple solidarities rather than as a game of mutual negotiations and objectifications?” (“Globalization” 328). In addition, taking up a view of identities (and their origins and traditions) as constructions that are open to strategic reformulation no longer needs to be seen as robbing decolonized and other marginalized communities of their political grounding or right to self-determination, but, as bell hooks already argued in “Postmodern Blackness,” provides a way to challenge the reification of marginalized identities by dominant groups, which often works through essentialism. James Clifford has said that “shelving” identity altogether would “risk being left with a narrowly foreshortened view of contemporary social movements around culture and identity, missing their complex volatility, ambivalent potential, and historical necessity” (1). It is precisely the continued – and renewed – vitality of identity discourses into the twenty-first century that this volume demonstrates by using contingent concepts, relational histories, and reinvented origins and traditions to analyze postcolonial collective identities in concrete case studies from various parts of the world.

Notes

1. This trend was particularly strong in feminist criticism. See, for example, Susan Hekman's "Beyond Identity: Feminism, Identity and Identity Politics," and Mona Lloyd's *Beyond Identity Politics: Feminism, Power and Politics*.
2. Anette Hoffmann thanks her son Simon for the suggestion to check the movie database, but even more for airing the view that identity became an awkward concept, exhausted by its excessive use as a catchphrase to sell consumer products, and therefore almost useless for politics.
3. Byers's presentation was entitled "The Bourne Allegory: Secret Agent, the Grid, and Global Positioning of the Subject of Modernity" and delivered at the 2009 International Conference on Narrative in Birmingham, 6 June 2009.
4. Zuma's candidacy was overshadowed by a corruption trial that was dropped in 2009 and a rape case in which he was found not guilty. Both cases prompted debate on the moral credibility of Zuma as a potential president of both the ANC and South Africa. See, for instance, <http://pumlaggola.wordpress.com/2007/05/07/a-year-since-the-zuma-rape-case-judgement/>.
5. Gunner is a researcher at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER) at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg who has published on oral genres, as well as on orality and constructions of masculinity in South Africa. At the time when "*Umshini wami*" was causing much controversial debate, her article provided an in-depth analysis of the genre, history, performativity, and polysemic qualities of the song, which was so popular that it became a much-used ring tone for cell phones in South Africa. See also the feature on "*Umshini wami*" in the December 2008 issue of *Art South Africa* (Bloom et al.) and several videos on YouTube.
6. See, for instance, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/4328360.stm>.
7. See Fraser's "Rethinking Recognition" and Bongie's discussion of postcolonial studies' turn to the "properly political" in the Preface and Introduction to *Friends and Enemies*.
8. See *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* by Henry Louis Gates Jr.
9. See Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx*, where he argues that "[n]o justice . . . seems possible or thinkable without the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond all living present, within that which disjoins the living present, before the ghosts of those who are not yet born or who are already dead, be they victims of wars, political or other kinds of violence, nationalist, racist, colonialist, sexist, or other kinds of exterminations, victims of the oppressions of capitalist imperialism or any of the forms of totalitarianism" (xix).
10. Selected papers from the other two panels at the conference (on intersubjectivity and postmodern identities) were published under the title *The Shock of the Other: Situating Alterities* as number 15 in the Thamyris/Intersecting series. That volume, edited by Esther Peeren and Silke Horstkotte, includes submissions dealing with the way alterity and its situated negotiations with identity are configured through the body, the psyche, and translational politics.
11. See chapter 1 ("Concept") in Bal's *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities*.
12. See www.ubuntu.com. The "What is Ubuntu?" page explains that "Ubuntu is an African word meaning 'Humanity to others', or 'I am what I am because of who we all are'. The Ubuntu distribution brings the spirit of Ubuntu to the software world."
13. Niezen is not blind to the drawbacks of using the Internet as a platform, noting that its demand for technical prowess may displace the traditional structures of authority in indigenous communities and that its "[u]ncensored cultural representation makes possible the presentation of community ideals that originate in no recognizable community. More than ever before,

it has become possible to express nostalgia for times that one has never experienced and pride towards peoples among whom one has never belonged” (546).

14. A similar positive assessment of the relational or “shared” identities within the indigenous movement can be found in Joy

Hendry’s *Reclaiming Culture: Indigenous People and Self-Representation* (see, especially, chapter 7).

15. Alfred and Corntassel prefer the term “peoplehood” as a “flexible and dynamic alternative to static political and legal definitional approaches to Indigenous identities” (610).

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