

The Power of Identity

Second edition
With a new preface

Manuel Castells

 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**

A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication

The Information Age

Economy, Society, and Culture

Volume II The Power of Identity

Originally published in 1997, *The Power of Identity*, the second volume in *The Information Age* trilogy, saw the writing on the global wall – recognizing identity as a defining principle of social organization and analyzing the importance of cultural, religious, and national identities as sources of meaning for people, and the implications of these identities for social movements.

Now with an extensive new preface following the recent global economic crisis, this second edition analyzes the major social and political events directly derived from the diagnosis of the book: Al Qaeda and fundamentalist terror networks; the Iraq War; the geopolitics of fear under the Bush Administration; and the Internet-based networking of global social movements fighting for global justice.

Studying grassroots mobilizations against the unfettered globalization of wealth and power, and the formation of alternative projects of social organization, this book charts the transformation of the nation-state into a network state, and the submission of political representation to the dictates of media politics.

Table of Contents for Volumes I and III of Manuel Castells' *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*

Volume I: The Rise of the Network Society

Prologue: The Net and the Self

- 1 The Information Technology Revolution
 - 2 The New Economy: Informationalism, Globalization, Networking
 - 3 The Network Enterprise: The Culture, Institutions, and Organizations of the Informational Economy
 - 4 The Transformation of Work and Employment: Networkers, Jobless, and Flex-timers
 - 5 The Culture of Real Virtuality: The Integration of Electronic Communication, the End of the Mass Audience, and the Rise of Interactive Networks
 - 6 The Space of Flows
 - 7 The Edge of Forever: Timeless Time
- Conclusion: The Network Society

Volume III: End of Millennium

A Time of Change

- 1 The Crisis of Industrial Statism and the Collapse of the Soviet Union
 - 2 The Rise of the Fourth World: Informational Capitalism, Poverty, and Social Exclusion
 - 3 The Perverse Connection: The Global Criminal Economy
 - 4 Development and Crisis in the Asian Pacific: Globalization and the State
 - 5 The Unification of Europe: Globalization, Identity, and the Network State
- Conclusion: Making Sense of our World

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*Para Irene Castells Oliván,
historiadora de utopías*

Contents

| | |
|---|----------|
| List of Figures | xii |
| List of Tables | xiv |
| List of Charts | xvi |
| Preface to the 2010 Edition of <i>The Power of Identity</i> | xvii |
| Preface and Acknowledgments 2003 | xxxvii |
| Acknowledgments 1996 | xliii |
| Our World, our Lives | 1 |
| 1 Communal Heavens: Identity and Meaning in the Network Society | 5 |
| The Construction of Identity | 6 |
| God's Heavens: Religious Fundamentalism and Cultural Identity | 12 |
| <i>Umma versus Jahiliya: Islamic fundamentalism</i> | 13 |
| <i>God save me! American Christian fundamentalism</i> | 23 |
| Nations and Nationalisms in the Age of Globalization: Imagined Communities or Communal Images? | 30 |
| <i>Nations against the state: the breakup of the Soviet Union and the Commonwealth of Impossible States</i> (Sojuz Nevozmoznykh Gosudarstv) | 35 |
| <i>Nations without a state: Catalunya</i> | 45 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| <i>Nations of the information age</i> | 54 |
| Ethnic Unbonding: Race, Class, and Identity in the Network Society | 56 |
| Territorial Identities: The Local Community | 63 |
| Conclusion: The Cultural Communes of the Information Age | 68 |
| 2 The Other Face of the Earth: Social Movements against the New Global Order | 71 |
| Globalization, Informationalization, and Social Movements | 72 |
| Mexico's <i>Zapatistas</i> : The First Informational Guerrilla Movement | 75 |
| <i>Who are the Zapatistas?</i> | 77 |
| <i>The value structure of the Zapatistas: identity, adversaries, and goals</i> | 80 |
| <i>The communication strategy of the Zapatistas: the Internet and the media</i> | 82 |
| <i>The contradictory relationship between social movement and political institution</i> | 85 |
| Up in Arms against the New World Order: | |
| The American Militia and the Patriot Movement | 87 |
| <i>The militias and the Patriots: a multi-thematic information network</i> | 90 |
| <i>The Patriots' banners</i> | 95 |
| <i>Who are the Patriots?</i> | 98 |
| <i>The militia, the Patriots, and American society</i> | 99 |
| The Lamas of Apocalypse: Japan's <i>Aum Shinrikyo</i> | 100 |
| <i>Asahara and the development of Aum Shinrikyo</i> | 101 |
| <i>Aum's beliefs and methodology</i> | 104 |
| <i>Aum and Japanese society</i> | 105 |
| <i>Al-Qaeda, 9/11, and Beyond: Global Terror</i> in the Name of God | 108 |
| <i>The goals and values of al-Qaeda</i> | 111 |
| <i>The evolving process of al-Qaeda's struggle</i> | 115 |
| <i>The mujahedeen and their support bases</i> | 119 |
| <i>The young lion of the global jihad: Osama bin Laden</i> | 124 |
| <i>From bin Laden to bin Mahfouz: financial networks, Islamic networks, terrorist networks</i> | 128 |
| <i>Networking and media politics: the organization, tactics, and strategy of al-Qaeda</i> | 135 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| <i>9/11 and beyond: death or birth of a networked, global, fundamentalist movement?</i> | 140 |
| “No Globalization without Representation!”: The Anti-globalization Movement | 145 |
| “El pueblo desunido jamas sera vencido”: <i>the diversity of the anti-globalization movement</i> | 147 |
| <i>The values and goals of the movement against globalization</i> | 152 |
| <i>Networking as a political way of being</i> | 154 |
| <i>An informational movement: the theatrical tactics of anti-globalization militants</i> | 156 |
| <i>The movement in context: social change and institutional change</i> | 158 |
| The Meaning of Insurgencies against the New Global Order | 160 |
| Conclusion: The Challenge to Globalization | 166 |
| 3 The Greening of the Self: The Environmental Movement | 168 |
| The Creative Cacophony of Environmentalism: A Typology | 170 |
| The Meaning of Greening: Societal Issues and the Ecologists’ Challenge | 179 |
| Environmentalism in Action: Reaching Minds, Taming Capital, Courting the State, Tap-dancing with the Media | 186 |
| Environmental Justice: Ecologists’ New Frontier | 190 |
| 4 The End of Patriarchalism: Social Movements, Family, and Sexuality in the Information Age | 192 |
| The Crisis of the Patriarchal Family | 196 |
| Women at Work | 215 |
| Sisterhood is Powerful: The Feminist Movement | 234 |
| <i>American feminism: a discontinuous continuity</i> | 235 |
| <i>Is feminism global?</i> | 243 |
| <i>Feminism: an inducive polyphony</i> | 252 |
| The Power of Love: Lesbian and Gay Liberation Movements | 261 |
| <i>Feminism, lesbianism, and sexual liberation movements in Taipei</i> | 266 |
| <i>Spaces of freedom: the gay community in San Francisco</i> | 271 |
| <i>Summing up: sexual identity and the patriarchal family</i> | 279 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| Family, Sexuality, and Personality in the Crisis of Patriarchalism | 280 |
| <i>The incredibly shrinking family</i> | 280 |
| <i>The reproduction of mothering under the non-reproduction of patriarchy</i> | 288 |
| <i>Body identity: the (re)construction of sexuality</i> | 294 |
| <i>Flexible personalities in a post-patriarchal world</i> | 299 |
| The End of Patriarchy? | 301 |
| 5 Globalization, Identification, and the State: A Powerless State or a Network State? | 303 |
| Globalization and the State | 304 |
| <i>The transnational core of national economies</i> | 305 |
| <i>A statistical appraisal of the new fiscal crisis of the state in the global economy</i> | 307 |
| <i>Globalization and the welfare state</i> | 312 |
| <i>Global communication networks, local audiences, uncertain regulators</i> | 316 |
| <i>A lawless world?</i> | 321 |
| The Nation-state in the Age of Multilateralism | 323 |
| Global Governance and Networks of Nation-states | 328 |
| Identities, Local Governments, and the Deconstruction of the Nation-state | 332 |
| The Identification of the State | 337 |
| The Return of the State | 340 |
| <i>The state, violence, and surveillance: from Big Brother to little sisters</i> | 340 |
| <i>American unilateralism and the new geopolitics</i> | 344 |
| <i>The Iraq War and its aftermath</i> | 349 |
| <i>The consequences of American unilateralism</i> | 353 |
| The Crisis of the Nation-state, the Network State, and the Theory of the State | 356 |
| Conclusion: The King of the Universe, Sun Tzu, and the Crisis of Democracy | 364 |
| 6 Informational Politics and the Crisis of Democracy | 367 |
| Introduction: The Politics of Society | 367 |
| Media as the Space of Politics in the Information Age | 371 |
| <i>Politics and the media: the citizens' connection</i> | 371 |
| <i>Show politics and political marketing: the American model</i> | 375 |
| <i>Is European politics being "Americanized"?</i> | 381 |

| | |
|---|------------|
| <i>Bolivia's electronic populism: compadre Palenque and the coming of Jach'a Uru</i> | 386 |
| Informational Politics in Action: The Politics of Scandal | 391 |
| The Crisis of Democracy | 402 |
| Conclusion: Reconstructing Democracy? | 414 |
| Conclusion: Social Change in the Network Society | 419 |
| Methodological Appendix | 429 |
| Appendix for Tables 5.1 and 5.2 | 429 |
| Appendix for Figure 6.9: Level of Support for Mainstream Parties in National Elections, 1980–2002 | 456 |
| Summary of Contents of Volumes I and III | 464 |
| References | 466 |
| Index | 512 |

Figures

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| 2.1 | Geographical distribution of Patriot groups in the US by number of groups and paramilitary training sites in each state, 1996 | 92 |
| 4.1 | Marriage survival curves for Italy, West Germany, and Sweden: mothers born in 1934–38 and 1949–53 | 200 |
| 4.2 | Evolution of first marriage in countries of the European Union since 1960 | 202 |
| 4.3 | Crude marriage rates in selected countries | 203 |
| 4.4 | Percentage of women (15–34 years) with first birth occurring before first marriage, by race and ethnic origin, in US, 1960–89 | 207 |
| 4.5 | Synthetic index of fertility in European countries since 1960 | 212 |
| 4.6 | Total fertility rate and number of births in US, 1920–90 | 213 |
| 4.7 | Growth in service sector employment and in female participation rates, 1980–90 | 221 |
| 4.8a | Women as a percentage of the labor force by type of employment | 222 |
| 4.8b | Married couple families with wives in the labor force, in US, 1960–90 | 223 |
| 4.9 | Women in part-time employment by family status in European Community member states, 1991 | 233 |
| 4.10 | Interrelation of different aspects of same-gender sexuality | 265 |
| 4.11 | Gay residential areas in San Francisco | 275 |

| | | |
|-------|--|-----|
| 4.12a | Household composition in US, 1960–90 | 282 |
| 4.12b | Household composition in US, 1970–95 | 283 |
| 4.13 | Living arrangements of children under the age of 18, by presence of parent, in US, 1960–90 | 284 |
| 4.14 | Lifetime occurrence of oral sex, by cohort: men and women | 297 |
| 5.1 | General government gross financial liabilities | 312 |
| 5.2 | Labor costs in manufacturing, 1994 | 313 |
| 6.1 | Credibility of news source in US, 1959–91 | 372 |
| 6.2 | Average number of corruption stories per periodical in US, 1890–1992 | 394 |
| 6.3 | Percentage of citizens expressing not very much or no confidence in government in selected countries | 405 |
| 6.4 | Percentage of citizens expressing not very much or no confidence in political parties for selected countries | 406 |
| 6.5 | Percentage of people in selected countries expressing the view that their country is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves | 407 |
| 6.6 | Perception of government by citizens of 60 countries (1999) | 408 |
| 6.7 | Percentage of citizens in 47 countries expressing the view that their country is governed by the will of the people (2002) | 408 |
| 6.8 | Trust in institutions to operate in society’s best interest (2002) | 409 |
| 6.9 | Level of support for the mainstream parties in national elections, 1980–2002 | 412 |

Tables

| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 4.1 | Rate of change in crude divorce rate in selected countries, 1971–90 | 199 |
| 4.2 | Trends in divorce rates per 100 marriages in developed countries | 199 |
| 4.3 | Percentage of first marriages dissolved through separation, divorce, or death among women aged 40–49 in less-developed countries | 201 |
| 4.4 | Trends in percentage of women aged 20–24 who have never been married | 204 |
| 4.5 | Non-marital births as a percentage of all births by region (country averages) | 206 |
| 4.6 | Trends in single-parent households as a percentage of all households with dependent children and at least one resident parent in developed countries | 208 |
| 4.7 | Trends in percentage of households headed by women <i>de jure</i> | 208 |
| 4.8 | Indicators of recent changes in family and household formation: selected Western countries, 1975–90 | 210 |
| 4.9 | Percentage of one-person households over total number of households for selected countries, 1990–93 | 211 |
| 4.10 | Total fertility rate by main regions of the world | 214 |
| 4.11 | Labor force participation rates by sex (%) | 216 |
| 4.12 | Total employment by sex (% average annual growth rates) | 217 |

| | | |
|------|--|-----|
| 4.13 | Economic activity rates, 1970–90 | 219 |
| 4.14 | Growth of women's economic activity rate, 1970–90 | 220 |
| 4.15 | Female service employment by activities and rank of information intensity of total employment (%), 1973–93 | 224 |
| 4.16 | Rates of growth for each category of female service employment as a percentage of total female employment, 1973–93 | 225 |
| 4.17 | Distribution of female employment by occupation, 1980 and 1989 (%) | 226 |
| 4.18 | Size and composition of part-time employment, 1973–94 (%) | 229 |
| 4.19 | Share of self-employment in total employment, by sex and activity (%) | 231 |
| 5.1 | Internationalization of the economy and public finance: rates of change, 1980–93 (and 1993 ratios, unless otherwise indicated) | 308 |
| 5.2 | Government role in the economy and public finance: rates of change, 1980–92 (and 1992 ratios, unless otherwise indicated) | 309 |
| 6.1 | Sources of news in the US, 1993–2002 (%) | 371 |
| 6.2 | Sources of political information of residents of Cochabamba, Bolivia, 1996 | 372 |
| 6.3 | Opinion of Bolivian citizens on which institutions represent their interests | 390 |
| 6.4 | Turnout in national elections: recent figures compared to rates for the 1970s and 1980s (%) | 410 |

Charts

| | | |
|-----|--|-----|
| 2.1 | Structure of values and beliefs of insurgent movements against globalization | 163 |
| 3.1 | Typology of environmental movements | 171 |
| 4.1 | Analytical typology of feminist movements | 254 |

Preface to the 2010 Edition of *The Power of Identity*

This volume explores the construction of collective identities as they relate to social movements and power struggles in the network society. It also deals with the transformation of the state, politics, and democracy under the conditions of globalization and new communication technologies. The understanding of these processes aims to provide new perspectives for the study of social change in the Information Age. In this preface I use the vantage point offered by a new publication of this book in 2010 to assess social and political developments in the early twenty-first century by using the analytical framework proposed in 1997 and updated in 2004 in the first and second editions of *The Power of Identity*.

The most dramatic social conflicts we have witnessed since the publication of the first edition of this volume have been induced by the confrontation between opposing identities. Having detected the construction and assertion of identity as being a fundamental lever of social change, regardless of the content of such change, the theoretical interpretation I proposed in my trilogy on *The Information Age* was anchored on the dynamic contradiction between the Net and the Self as an organizing principle of the new historical landscape. The rise of the network society and the growing power of identity are the intertwined social processes that jointly define globalization, geopolitics, and social transformation in the early twenty-first century. In fact, I updated the 1997 analysis of identity in the 2004 edition of this

book to document the explosion of fundamentalism and its impact on world affairs without modifying the original argument, as the observation of Al Qaeda and other expressions of religious fundamentalism came to confirm (unfortunately) the main hypotheses I had formulated earlier while abstaining from any prediction, as is customary in my approach. Furthermore, the revolt of oppressed nations around the world, the conquest of governments by indigenous movements in Latin America, the growing importance of religious movements as sources of social challenge and social change, the grassrootsing of democracy in territorial identity, the affirmation of the specificity of women's values, the critique of patriarchy by the gay and lesbian movement, and the constitution of new forms of individual and collective identity, often using electronic communication networks, have shown the prevalence of cultural values over structurally determined economic interests in constructing the meaning of human action. After the relentless rationalist effort of the last two centuries to proclaim the death of God and the disenchantment of the world, we are again in – if we ever left – an enchanted world, where the way we feel determines what we believe and how we act, in coherence with recent discoveries in neuroscience and behavioral psychology.

A summary overview of social trends in the last decade as they relate to the construction and expression of identity may provide a measure of the accuracy or inadequacy of the analysis presented in this volume, as the only criterion to judge the interest of any social theory is its capacity to make sense of the observed human experience. I will not re-state my theory of identity and power in this Preface, instead inviting the interested reader to make the effort to turn a few pages to find the passages that are relevant to the issues discussed here.

God's Planet

The news about God's death has been greatly exaggerated. She is alive and well, as she inhabits our hearts and thus shapes our minds. She is not everywhere and is not for everybody, but she is present for most human beings, in growing numbers, and with greater intensity every day. Only about 15 percent of people on the planet are non-religious or atheists, while between 1990 and 2000 the number of Christians increased worldwide at an average annual rate of 1.36 percent, accounting in 2000 for about 33 percent of the world's total population. Muslims increased at an annual rate of 2.13 percent to reach 19.6 percent of the total population. Figures for Hindus are

1.69 percent annual growth rate and 13.4 percent of the population, and for Buddhists, 1.09 percent annual growth rate and 5.9 percent of the population (Barrett et al., 2001). This simple observation often surprises the intellectuals of a very small but still highly influential area of the world: Western Europe. With the exception of Ireland, in most Western European countries religious observance has dwindled and religious beliefs are lukewarm at best for the large majority of the usually Christianized population, in spite of the continuing influence of the Church as a political institution. Even in Italy, Spain, and Portugal, the mainstays of Catholicism throughout history, only a fraction of the population attends mass on Sundays and the vast majority of the youth feel disaffected from religion in general. It would be interesting to explore the causes of such historical reversal but it would distract us from the main thrust of my argument. Furthermore, even in these lands of religious indifference there is a revival of beliefs and practice among a small but very vocal segment of young people, although not enough to refill the overwhelmingly abandoned convents and seminaries or the empty coffers of what used to be the wealthiest institution in the world. Significantly enough, the active presence of God in Western Europe is mainly due to the growing Muslim community (4.3 percent of Europeans in 2000), whose submission to God in everyday life clashes with the secular character of public institutions, including the school.

Eastern Europe is becoming increasingly religious as the remaining ashes from the historical communist drive to subdue alternative idols have been reignited while, of course, Poland has maintained its identity as a beacon of unreconstructed Catholicism. Turkey, one of the most populous European countries, has accentuated its Muslim identity, placing its democracy on a collision course with the intransigent secularism embodied in the armed forces modeled by Atatürk.

Beyond the European shores, East Asia was never committed to God, as Buddhism and its derivatives oscillated between a collection of spiritual practices (mainly Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism) and philosophical guidelines (Confucianism, Taoism) and a series of rituals legitimizing the power of the state (explicitly in the case of Shintoism). The most important act of worship for Chinese, Japanese, or Korean families concerns the cult of the ancestors, in the form of household gods for domestic consumption (the so-called ethno-religion and folk religion). Yet, this noncommittal form of religiosity does not preclude the appearance of religious fundamentalism in East Asia, as exemplified by Aum Shinrikyo, the Japanese Buddhist-based cult that I analyzed in this volume. This is an indication that fundamentalism is not necessarily an exacerbation of religiosity but

an expression of radicalized resistance identity that nests in any cultural form that fits its development.

Elsewhere in Asia, there is strong religious influence in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, among Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs alike with growing fundamentalist tendencies in all religions. Christianity dominates in the Philippines (in spite of a strong Muslim minority in Mindanao), and is growing in South Korea and Vietnam. Of course, Indonesia and Malaysia are largely devout Muslim countries, although Malaysia has considerably reduced the impact of fundamentalist Islam, another interesting lesson to follow. The Central Asian republics have very large Muslim populations, even if the state keeps religion in the service of its political interests.

Naturally, the endless crises of the Middle East are constructed on the basis of conflicting religious identities. Islamic fundamentalism in all its versions is the dominant cultural and political trend, as the project of a secular Arab nationalist state (Nasser, Sadat, Saddam Hussein, Assad, Khadafi) collapsed in all countries, and its successors (e.g. Mubarak, Khadafi in its new incarnation, Assad's son) had to repress God on behalf of God in order to survive. As for Israel, religious identity, ethnic identity (the Jewish people), and territorial identity in support of historical identity combine to make any negotiation based on a non-identity principle practically impossible to achieve success. The Jewish people were prosecuted throughout history because of who they were and so their survival, in their view, depends on the existence of a land-based state, constructed around their identity. This is why there is a strong current of Jewish fundamentalism (remember the assassination of Yizhak Rabin) that is symmetrically opposed to the Islamic fundamentalism of the most popular component of the Palestinian movement (Hamas). And this is why peaceful coexistence between Jews and Palestinians will have to deal not just with coexisting states but with coexisting identities, as exemplified by the thorny issue of sharing Jerusalem.

Africa is also a continent of religion, based on the juxtaposition of Christianity, Islam and animism. Yet, identity politics in sub-Saharan Africa is mainly constructed around ethnicity and territoriality rather than religion, as I will review later. It is important to remember that this continent largely forgotten by the outside world has not forgotten God, who is usually most welcome among the distressed people who seek refuge from despair.

Latin America continues to be God's territory, with the particularity that where the powerful Catholic Church became too obviously uninterested in the plight of its huddled masses in order to indulge in the favors of the rich and powerful, new cults arose, usually under the

form of Pentecostalism often imported from the United States – perhaps the most successful American influence in a subcontinent obviously fatigued from Yankee imperialism. Indeed, Pentecostalism is the fastest growing religion worldwide, expanding from 155 million to 588.5 million global adherents between 2000 and 2005.

The United States, the harbinger of representative democracy and the leading scientific power in the world, is one of the most religious countries on Earth, with over 85 percent declaring themselves religious (76 percent of Americans are Christians) 50 percent of people believing that the Bible is the source of truth, and 70 percent believing in a personal god. In 2008, 34 percent of Americans considered themselves “Born Again or Evangelical Christian” (ARIS, 2008). Thus, in spite of a recent growth of atheists and agnostics (from 8.2 percent in 1990 to 15 percent in 2008), churches, in their diversity, remain the main form of social organization for ethnic minorities; evangelicals play a decisive role in American politics; and Christian fundamentalism, as documented in this book, is a major force in shaping the values and social practices of American society. The strength of religion in America shows that scientific and technological development, supposedly the harvest of rationalism, can expand in a highly religious context. There are many ways to scientific discovery based on the deployment of reason, but more often than not they share the path with God’s way, in spite of obvious contradictions, as exemplified by the religious opposition to stem cell research. Why and how the United States is both the land of science and the kingdom of God is one the themes addressed in this volume.

However, the analysis presented here does not refer to the continuing presence of religion as a basic feature of societies around the world in the twenty-first century, but to its decisive role in nurturing the construction of resistance identities against the dominance of market values and the so-called Western culture in the process of globalization. Large segments of people that are economically, culturally, and politically disenfranchised around the world do not recognize themselves in the triumphant values of cosmopolitan conquerors (not even in the depressed lands of old industrial and rural America), and so they turn to their religion as a source of meaning and communal feeling in opposition to the new order. A new order that not only fails to benefit most of the poor on the planet but also deprives them of their own values, as they are invited to sing the glory of our globalized, technological condition without the possibility of relating to the new lyrics. What follows is not only marginalization but something deeper: humiliation. In this volume, I show how the terrorist leaders of the global Muslim *jihad* are often intellectuals, some of

them members of wealthy families, whose revolt is not against economic oppression but against the disrespect of their culture and traditions, as symbolized in the Quran.

And so, since my early writing on religious fundamentalism in the mid-1990s, we have witnessed a global uprising, spearheaded by Al Qaeda, whose actions, together with our often misguided reactions, have transformed the political and geopolitical landscape as well as our everyday lives, marked by fear and the rituals of security measures. Al Qaeda is a loose global network of networks of activists who follow their own impulses and strategies while alluding to the mythical command of Osama bin Laden. It is an extraordinary example of the effectiveness of networking as an organizing form, but it is also an expression of a relentless revolt among the Muslim youth of the world, with an increasing influence among the Muslim minorities of Western Europe, who are often submitted to discrimination and abuse. Significantly, fundamentalism can hardly be found among the relatively affluent communities of Arab Americans in the United States. The rare cases of Muslim militants suspected of terrorist inclinations in America are usually poor African-Americans or Muslim immigrants.

But the growing influence of Muslim fundamentalism, whose roots and characteristics are studied in this volume, goes beyond al-Qaeda and terrorist networks. It is also behind the process of destabilization in Pakistan, a nuclear power, as an influential group of its armed forces and intelligence services supports the Taliban and similar groups in Afghanistan, in Kashmir, and in Pakistan itself, where the armed revolt of fundamentalists has been growing over the last decade. Indonesia, Thailand, and the Philippines are submitted to pressures from radical Islamic groups with a growing presence in the mosques, the universities, and among the impoverished public bureaucracy. The connection between radical Islam and warlords is feeding war and banditism in Africa.

Even more significant is the emergence of fundamentalist Iran as a dominant power in the Middle East, playing the nuclear card as a bargaining chip to obtain an international guarantee of its safety. Furthermore, because of the extraordinary blunder of the Bush-Cheney administration, which is also analyzed in this volume, the US has established a Shiite-dominated regime in Iraq, paving the way for a future strategic alliance between the two mainstays of the Shiite minority in the world: Iran and Iraq. Such an alliance is conducive to confrontation not only with Israel, but also the opposing Sunni fundamentalism represented by the House of Saud. The economic and political interests of different actors in the Middle East are at play in

this chain of potential conflicts. But religious fundamentalism is more than a pretext; it is the value system that binds together different social groups and political actors: the Iranian Ayatollahs, the sectarian Shiite leaders of Iraq, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Palestine, and, on the opposite side, the network of Sunni fundamentalist groups throughout the Middle East, from the Muslim Brothers in Egypt to the radical religious opposition in the Arabian Peninsula, Syria, and beyond.

Religious militancy, in its different forms, is playing a growing role in the political and cultural dynamics of a variety of countries. One-third of American voters are Christian fundamentalists, ready to mobilize on behalf of their cause, with no particular allegiance to any leader or party other than their God. Falun Gong (a spiritualist cult rather than a religion) has been the most feared source of political opposition in China in the last decade, prompting the Communist party to unleash all its repressive power to prevent a sort of modern Taiping rebellion against the process of globalization in China. In sum, the crisis of political legitimacy analyzed in this volume has created a vacuum in the mechanisms of political representation and social mobilization that is being filled with identity-based movements, the most important of which are the religious movements. What appeared as embryos of an emerging social dynamics a decade ago are now at the forefront of the social struggles and political dramas of our world. The analysis contained in this volume explains why and how.

My People, My Home, My Nation

Data show time and again that the more the world becomes global, the more people feel local. The proportion of “cosmopolitans,” people who feel they are “citizens of the world,” remains at barely 13 percent of people surveyed worldwide, as documented in this volume. More recent surveys show a continuation of this trend. People identify themselves primarily with their locality. Territorial identity is a fundamental anchor of belonging that is not even lost in the rapid process of generalized urbanization we are now experiencing. The village is not left behind; it is transported with its communal ties. And new urban villages are constructed, shrinking the size of the human experience to a dimension that can be managed and defended by people feeling lost in the whirlwind of a destructured world. When people need to expand their community, they refer to their nations, their islands in the global ocean of flows of capital, technology, and communication.

Sometimes these nations coincide with the historically constructed nation-state, but not always; and then we abet the process of affirming nations without states, as well as opposing the nation to the state.

In the first case, nations as cultural communities have become trenches of mobilization and resistance against secular repression of their rights and identities. A nation-state as historical as Spain continues to be shaken by the unresolved conflict of the integration of Catalunya, Euskadi, and Galicia into the democratic Spanish state, in spite of the considerable effort of administrative decentralization conducted by Madrid in the last 30 years. Belgium is on the edge of disintegration at the time of this writing, as Wallonie and Flanders, two national communities, cannot resolve the differences resulting from their historical marriage of convenience. The quiet Scots, the fiery Irish, and the nostalgic Welsh are in the gradual but relentless process of reminding England that they are not the same nation; not only for historical reasons or economic grievances, but because many of them feel this way, as the national community is constructed primarily in the minds of its members. In less institutionalized contexts, nationalist struggles have been a fundamental component of social dynamics and political confrontation in the decade since I called attention to the preeminence of modern nationalism in the first edition of this volume. Serbian, Croatian, Eslovenian, Bosnian and Albanian nationalism have made the Balkans explode in a process that is far from resolution. Chechnya, Abkhazia, and Osetia continue to be the key sources of conflict for Russia, and the brief war provoked by Georgia almost induced a new cold war, which was ultimately deactivated by the pacifist standing of President Obama. Furthermore, the reconstruction of state power in Russia under Putin has operated on the basis of the recovery of Russian national pride, including the strengthening of military power as the ultimate attribute of the state.

In Latin America, after the collapse of the neoliberal discourse, nationalism has recovered its dominant role as the ideological rallying banner for countries around the continent, with Hugo Chavez engaging in latter-day socialism on behalf of the Venezuelan nation, in spite of his claims to the pan-continental Bolivarian revolution. In Asia, nationalism has replaced communism as the most effective ideology of the Chinese regime, as it has the support of the majority of the population, who cheer for the rise of Chinese power in the context of the historical humiliation they have suffered from the West. Both Japan and South Korea have accentuated their nationalist stand, often in opposition to each other, so that Japan remains the object of nationalist ire for both China and South Korea while the Japanese

elites affirm themselves against the world in spite of the massive Americanization of their powerless youth.

This is a world of nations increasingly at odds with the nation-states that have engaged in networks of global governance to manage the global dimension of everything, at the expense of representing the nations' interests. This is a process that I identified in the first edition of this volume and it is now in full swing around the world, with social movements and political actors challenging the globalizing state on behalf of the national interests betrayed by the nation-state. This has been the case in most Latin American countries, with the exception of Chile and Colombia, leading to a reversal of the globalization process in Latin America, while the Washington consensus has become a bad memory and a political liability. But this is also the case in the United States, as shown by the depth of the opposition to the NAFTA treaty among large segments of the working class, to the point that political candidates must be careful with their support of free trade, as the winds of protectionism are fueled by the crisis of the global economy.

Ethnicity has always been a basic attribute of self-identification. Not only because of shared historical practice, but because "the others" remind people everyday that they are "others" themselves. This generalized "otherness," be it defined by skin color, language, or any other external attribute, characterizes the reality of our multicultural world. It is precisely because people from different cultures live side by side that they differentiate themselves in terms of ethnicity in order to find solidarity in the in-group as a refuge and a defense against uncontrollable market forces and the prejudice of the dominant ethnic groups in each context. When oppression and repression induce revolts, ethnicity often provides the material basis that constructs the commune of resistance. Thus, the crises resulting in Latin America from the failed process of integration of local and national societies into the global economy have intensified the strength and reach of indigenous social movements, spearheaded some time ago by the Mexican Zapatistas, a group that I analyzed in this volume. In Bolivia, in one of the most fascinating, albeit dramatic, laboratories of social transformation in the world, the indigenous people, led by Evo Morales, have not only secured access to the parliament and the government, but have also restructured the country under a new constitution that enshrines the principle of a plurality of ethnic nations as a foundational component of the nation-state. Throughout the Andean region, with the exception of Chile, indigenous movements have become a defining social actor, either in government or in opposition, so that the voices of the original inhabitants can no longer

be ignored. Elsewhere on the planet, ethnicity has become a major source of self-organization, confrontation and, often, hatred and violence. Ethnicity continues to be the dominant factor in the politics of sub-Saharan Africa, as the nation-states constructed on the boundaries of colonialism have never coincided with the cultural roots of their people. Furthermore, ethnicity has been used by most African political elites as a key mechanism to build their networks of patronage, and to make sure that their constituents hate each other, thus weakening their autonomy as political subjects.

And while the United States has learned throughout its history as an immigrant nation to cope with ethnicity (to the point that ethnic politics is fully acknowledged in political practices), Europe is painfully discovering that the abstract principle of individual citizenship is directly challenged by the multiculturalism of an increasingly multi-ethnic continent. The more Europe integrates new nations and the more it globalizes its labor force, the more ethnicity becomes a major component of social dynamics and power struggles. Paradoxically, for most people in this global Information Age, who they are matters more than what they do.

Project Identities

A key conceptual component of the analysis presented in this volume is the distinction between three major forms of collective identities: legitimizing identity, resistance identity, and project identity. I refer the reader to the elaboration of these concepts as presented in chapter 1 of this volume. I have commented above on how resistance identities, usually constructed by using the materials inherited from history (god, nation, ethnicity, locality), have intensified their significance in the social conflicts and social organization of our world in the last decade. In a parallel trend, we have also witnessed a major development of project identities aiming to change society by introducing new sets of values. In my view, a project identity emerges when social actors, on the basis of whatever cultural materials are available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, in so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure. This has been the case of major proactive social movements throughout history. And this was the case of what I consider to be two of the most significant such social movements in our context: feminism and environmentalism. In both cases, the last decade has been the time when the values that both movements have projected on to society have become either dominant or at least very influential in most

countries around the world, paving the way for their institutionalization in the state and their broadcasting in the media.

This is the case for environmentalism. In the first decade of the twenty-first century the awareness of global warming, and its potentially catastrophic consequences, became universal. While scientific knowledge on the process has existed for a long time, at least since the 1950s, it took the increasing influence of a multifaceted environmental movement in the media and in society at large to bring the issue to the attention of a majority of the population, and not only in developed countries. Today, most people consider global warming a threat to humankind that should be counteracted with decisive policy measures. Indeed, the United Nations Conference on Climate Change held in Paris in February 2007 represented a watershed of information, awareness, and public commitment from governments and international institutions to act on the matter. While politics as usual often lags on solemn promises, in this case there has actually been a significant follow-up in terms of public policies, partly thanks to the election of Barack Obama to the presidency of the most polluting country in the world. The process by which an issue that was largely ignored until the 1980s, both in public opinion and in public policies, came to the forefront of policy making, was long and complex. It was the result of weaving together the practices of scientists and environmental activists with those of mainstream media and, later, global Internet networks, so they could be heard by a small group of daring politicians (such as Al Gore or Margot Wallström) who became the conveyors of the movement's warnings in the hallways of power. It was amplified by the mobilization of celebrities from the world of music and cinema who took the opportunity to use their fame for a good cause while increasing their own celebrity. Finally, it mobilized citizens to put pressure on their political representatives so that, barring an increasingly discredited group of reactionary politicians, such as the Bush–Cheney clique and their friends around the world, the majority of political campaigns included a “green platform” in their programs, with an emphasis on policies to counter the process of climate change. It followed a flurry of meetings, conventions, agreements, and treaties that slowly but surely trickled down into national legislations. To provide a rough measure of the extent of mobilization achieved by the global environmental movement, let me remind the reader that Earth Day, the symbolic annual celebration that started in the United States, was celebrated by 20 million people in its first year (1970), a stunning success at the time. It was celebrated by 1 billion people around the world in 2008. If the grandchildren of our grandchildren can still live on this planet one day, it will be because of what

the environmental movement has accomplished in the last four decades. The movement acted on behalf of our collective identity as a human species searching for our harmonious coexistence with the blue planet, after millennia of being submitted to the forces of nature and our catastrophic attempt during the last two centuries to use our environment for its consumable resources rather than preserve it as our irreplaceable home.

The crisis of patriarchy, largely induced by feminism and by the gay and lesbian movement, has intensified in the first decade of this century, although in specific forms depending on cultural and social contexts in each area of the world. The most important revolution has already occurred: the transformation of the way in which women think about themselves and the way in which gays and lesbians think about themselves. Because domination is primarily based on the construction of reality in the human mind, along the lines suggested by Michel Foucault and demonstrated by contemporary neuroscience, if patriarchy is not internalized by the subjects under patriarchy, its demise is only a matter of time, struggle, and suffering, with much suffering still to come. Occasional backlash periodically invokes the forces of religious fundamentalism to re-state the sanctity of the patriarchal family, even in the midst of its disintegration as a way of life in many countries. Yet, in a growing number of countries, women have conquered legal parity in the work place, in spite of persistent, yet diminishing discrimination; the political system is gradually opening up to female leadership; and the majority of college graduates are women, even in fundamentalist countries, such as Iran.

Gays and lesbians continue to be imprisoned and executed around the world, yet in a number of countries, including the historically homophobic United States, they have won battle after battle (though losing some as well), in the streets, in the courts, in the media, and in the political system, so that they have undoubtedly torn down the walls of the closet to live out in the open, thus transforming the way society thinks about sexuality, and therefore personality as a whole.

As suggested in chapter 4 of this volume, written in 1997, the key battleground has been the transformation of the family. Regardless of what the laws say or what the state tries to enforce, if people form different kinds of families, the cornerstone of patriarchy is called into question. The heterosexual, nuclear, patriarchal family built around a long-lasting marriage is today the exception rather than the rule in the United States and in the majority of Western Europe. Interestingly enough, the gay and lesbian movement has focused its efforts during the last years on obtaining legal recognition