



Between History and Universality: Understanding Identity in the Public Sphere

Nisar Alungal Chungath*

Abstract

Identity is not a fixed and frozen prison-house for the self, but a liquid continuum, affected and shaped by the 'outside' or the world. The self, which is situated and which undergoes revisions and transformations, keeps identity as a frame within which it makes sense of things. On the one hand, there is a 'history' within which an identity is rooted and through which meaning-making is made possible, and on the other hand, every person aspires to be a 'universal' and recognition-worthy human being. Both inherent identity and inherent universality of the self should be considered in their interactions in the public sphere, which has been traditionally viewed as a space of discrete individualities. The ontological force of this argument aside, the paper demonstrates that reduction of an identity without crediting its aspiration for universality and consideration of universality without crediting the historical underpinnings of identity are both acts of violation.

Keywords: Identity and History, Public Recognition

1. Introduction

The self is a socially entrenched being which *is* always in the making. It is negotiating with and affected by the social and cultural forces outside. Hence, an identity, single or collective, cannot be self-enclosed and insulated. The ambiguity regarding the essence of the self is inherently connected to the negativity of the

* Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay, India; nizarac@gmail.com

self. A non-substantial Hegelian ontology of the self dismisses any attempt to solidify self-identity, negate its indefinite possibilities, and reduce human beings to their immediate identity. Self-identity is nothing outside the relentless interpretive framework of transforming, discontinuing, reappropriating and refusing. Identity does not create and imprison its subject within its web; by their everyday doings and interpretations selves, in turn, are simultaneously making their identity just as they make themselves in that interpretive process. In other words, the interpretive or meaning-making activity of the self is a two-way process in the sense that the self makes itself meaningful with regard to its cultural situatedness and history while at the same time aspiring for the ideal of universality through its interactions and communications. Grounded in social rather than individual ontology and made or unmade by the 'outside', the self simultaneously aspires for universal meaning. In this paper, I will argue that the claim of an identity for recognition in the public sphere must consider both its historical situatedness and its aspiration for universality.

In the first section, the author will establish the Hegelian conception of the negative self, which undergoes an ontological rupture or self-division due to its constitution by infinite experiences and exposures, and will emphasize on the need to recognize this reality concerning the self. I will then show how any public or political space of diversity should be seen as a space of tension between identity-assertion and aspiration for universality. My argument is that recognition of an identity must capture the space between the history of identity and its aspiration for universality, and that either essentialization/reduction of identity or universalization of mere 'humanity' is violence.

2. Inescapable Horizons of Self-Identity and the Demand for Recognition

Hegel engages with the question of the relation of the self to itself, others, history and the world when he discusses the dynamics of the self in *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel provides a dialectical account of the historical essence of the self, which is not simple and immediate, but complex and mediated, because there are no

immediate experiences that constitute the self. In his phenomenological investigation of experience, Hegel shows that a self inherently fails to have immediately given experiences and that all our seemingly 'immediate experiences' get constituted by 'mediation' and subsequently we have only 'mediated experiences' (1977, p. 10). After establishing that we have only mediated, complex and infinite experiences, Hegel argues that we do not have a stable and fixed self-identity.

Hegel dismisses the self as a given 'immediate unity' and establishes the self as a 'process of its own becoming'. He describes the inherent negation of self-consciousness as "both the first division existing-in-itself of the simplicity of the concept and the return from out of this division" (1977, p. 457). The constant splitting apart of the self (self-division) and return out of the split into unity is the inherent character of the Hegelian self. This ceaseless determinately negating activity is essential to self-actualization, to find the self's 'substantial' basis and actuality in the world. The phenomenon of the human self and its experience is nothing but this endless process of self-replenishment and self-repulsion. By establishing that our 'immediate experiences' get constituted by 'mediation' and thus we have only 'mediated experiences,' he conceptualizes a 'negative' self which undercuts a fixed self-consciousness in the case of both single and collective self (p. 20). That is, the self, single or collective, is the tumultuous movement, which necessarily and chaotically 'sublates' each stage of consciousness. Dismissal of the given immediate self and conceptualization of it as 'negative' takes Hegel to the basic point that the self is a socially entrenched being which *is* only its *doing* with the substance, thus in constant making. Put it in other words, there is only the social ontology of the self, and the individuality we take for granted is the negotiation of the substance—the social and cultural ethos outside the self in a particular way (a self-negotiation).

The social ontology of the self, radicalized by Hegel, revolutionized the concept of self and other, and transformed the concept of the public sphere and the debates in social and political philosophy concerning identity-recognition and rights movements. Primarily, if the self is embedded in society in its existence and essence, what

are the implications for the identity of a human being? How far can one strive to be recognized in his/her identity? The Hegelian philosopher Charles Taylor in his phenomenological account of self and identity in *Sources of the Self* (1989) views identity as the category that provides the frame within which things have significance for us, and according to which we can determine where do we stand with regard to what is good, valuable, worthwhile, what we endorse or oppose. In line with the Hegelian non-substantial social ontology of the self, Taylor locates the self within 'inescapable horizons' with strongly valued preferences and 'constitutive concerns' which according to him is its identity. He strongly argues against a 'disengaged super individual' and emphasizes that the self *exists* only through 'constitutive concerns' and 'qualitative evaluations' always orienting itself towards a space of questions about the good (1989, p. 33). He argues that human beings exist in historical 'horizons' or 'frameworks' which give meaning for the things significant to them. Thrust of his argument is on the relation of one's identity to his/her moral evaluations or preferences in terms of good and bad.

Taylor's basic stand is a criticism against the liberal notion of the *disengaged* individual (without identity) and the liberal emphasis on the neutrality of the politics of rights. His conceptualization of the self as socially and culturally situated is against the liberal notion of the 'universal' rational being abstracted from all specific contingencies of context or history. According to Taylor, horizons are the 'inescapable structural requirements of human agency' and thus having an identity within them is what makes an individual actual 'agent.' He argues that it is this identity and agency that need to be recognized by others. In other words, from the inherent connection between identity and the conceptualization of the good, he ascertains what each self wants to get recognized by others. It is the horizon within which a self does meaning making and moral evaluations in life that needs to be recognized. Thus, for the Taylorian political project of the recognition of identity on the basis of inescapable horizons within which the self necessarily exists and makes meaning, the conceptualization of the atomistic individual cut off from the 'horizons' of evaluative concerns is a deliberate disregard for the significant aspects of a person's identity.ⁱ Taylor

explicitly states that the one big problem of modern identity is the 'search for meaning' (1989, p. 18).

The fundamental connection between identity and recognition is based, according to Taylor, on the fundamental dialogical character of human life. The language we need for self-recognition is not acquired individually; rather, we are introduced to language by interaction with significant others who matter to us in life. One's identity is defined only in 'dialogue' with or in 'struggle' against the moral concerns and evaluations of others which, according to him, is not a denial of individual agency altogether.ⁱⁱ For Taylor, identity and recognition are not only linked, but also "our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others" (1994, p. 25). That is, human beings can suffer real damage, 'real distortion,' when society misrecognizes them by endorsing a 'demeaning' or 'contemptible' picture of them. It is a mode of reduction or disfiguration of being. An imposed, demonized and distorted identity leads to the internalization of an inferior picture of the self, resulting in 'self-hatred' and often the tendency to play by the pejorative script written for one by others. Hence, "due recognition is not just a courtesy we owe people. It is a vital human need" (Taylor, 1989, p. 26).ⁱⁱⁱ Needless to say, the fundamental dialogical character of human life is premised on the social ontology of the self in contrast to individual ontology.

The fact that only inter subjectively constituted experiences can provide me existence, coherence and integrity means, as Shannon Hoff states while considering Hegel's conception of the law, that "my reality as a self is not merely inward and subjective, or merely for me, but has objective, concrete reality and is part of the true, shared world" (2014, p. 177). That the self obtains its coherence and integrity only in relation to its 'outside' is a stronger claim. Put differently, I need to get my reality confirmed by others by making them available for me as the 'organs of interpretation.' In developing the sense of the self, of our own understanding, they are 'necessary reference points' and the criteria for our effective engagement with reality. Without others who are my 'organs of interpretations,' I have neither a constitution nor an interpretation of my *self*. Hence, "our reality as individuals is an abstraction from a more primordial reality, an interpersonal situation. It is a heavily

mediated reality, an accomplishment, not a starting point" (Hoff, 2014, p. 178).

The positive aspect of our reliance on recognition of others to become, realize and develop ourselves as 'human' is that in this way the constituents of our individuality come to us from the outside and so our individual reality becomes much richer than if it were based solely on our own designs. On the other hand, our dependence on others to develop as 'significant' and 'capable' persons can negatively impact our development before we could distinguish between positive and negative interventions and reject the negative ones. The very fact that our identity is scattered into pieces in the world surrounding us shows our vulnerability in the face of others and their views about us and our helplessness in being shaped by their values and expectations, which could be severely mistaken. So Hoff writes: "What gives us the capacity to be human, it also threatens to take it away" (2014, p. 182).

Even as Taylor talks about identity as the frame of meaning-making, he views it fluidly and rejects absolute identification^{iv} of individuals with their identity. Taylor notes that "our identities, as defined by whatever gives us our fundamental orientations, are in fact complex and many-tiered" (1989, p. 29), and that "our identity is deeper and more many-sided than any of our possible articulations of it" (Ibid., 29). Even though Taylor seemingly takes a rigid communitarian view of identity, and calls for its recognition in "The Politics of Recognition" (1994), his *Sources of the Self* (1989) viewed identity as complex and fluid. That is, while he elaborates on the making of modern identity, he also shows how modern identity is constantly unmade due to the complex productions and transformations of self in modern times. According to him, the interior depth of the modern subject and its effort to be authentic, true to itself and original gives the modern individual a propensity to be 'seeker' and 'finder' of oneself. While we have a tendency to identify ourselves with a certain community, culture, ethnicity, religion and nation for various reasons, we also tend to transcend them and think of embracing what is beyond them. This unrestricted freedom for self and world transformation gives an air of 'ambivalence' to our sense of self, which is both troubling and liberating simultaneously.

The Hegelian notion of unfixed identity is based on the negative self and its constitutive element of 'desire.' Hegel views self-consciousness as desire. Desire is reflexivity of the self (reflection into itself) and an ontological striving for something more. Human desire is not the mere animalistic desire for life, but the desire for recognition, as seen in the master-servant dialectic, where the self wants to negate or annihilate the Other initially, but having realized that pure negation would only deprive itself of essential recognition by the Other, is eventually satisfied by the recognition received from the Other. Judith Butler defines the desire of self in Hegel as "the incessant human effort to overcome external differences, a project to become self-sufficient subject for whom all things apparently different finally emerge as immanent features of the subject itself" (1987, p. 6). It is a process of becoming the self by making what is external to it internal and its own without forgetting that in the process of self-making the self also loses its given selfhood. Interpreting desire as the 'principle of ontological displacement' of the human subject, which fractures the metaphysically integrated self and disrupts the internal harmony of the subject and its ontological intimacy with the world, Butler argues for understanding identity in an anti-essentialist way and recognizing it as such. The subject is always in the ontological pursuit of itself, which is conditioned by the fundamental desire for self-reflection and the 'pursuit of identity' in whatever appears as 'different' to it. Desire in the subject signifies *reflexivity* of consciousness, the necessity to become other to itself in order to know itself. As desire, consciousness finds itself outside each moment, and thus it become self-conscious (Butler, 1987, p. 7). In the Hegelian paradigm, what conditions the subject is the metaphysical doctrine of internal relations established through desire. Identity and the place where self-consciousness gets reflected are co-extensive, for Hegelian autonomy depends upon the doctrine of internal relations and each reflection of consciousness presupposes 'ontological relatedness.' When the subject is made by the 'outside' world, it knows that "it shares a common structure with that piece of world, that a prior and constituting relation conditions the possibility of reflection, and that the object of reflection is nothing other than that relation itself"

(Ibid.). It is in this way Hegel establishes the ontological relatedness of the self with the world, or the self with the substance.

Assuming the inherent ontological relatedness of the self with the world, John Russon talks about 'infinite phenomenology' in the *Phenomenology*. In his *Infinite Phenomenology* (2015), Russon argues that the primary lesson of *Phenomenology* centers on the 'dimensions of infinity' within experience. According to him, Hegel shows us that experience is "inherently characterized by a conflict of infinities, most especially the conflict of the infinity of substance and the infinity of subjectivity" (Russon, 2015, pp. 3-4). The inherent complexity of/within experience is such that the terms 'is' and 'now', which we use for describing particular experiences cannot capture the form of experience as such. There is always an excess of the form of experience over the terms we use to describe it. "What we experience is not just an indeterminate, immediate field of being, but a world of diverse things" (Ibid., 7). In other words, the world of diverse things is ontologically related to us and part of us in terms of our constitution, experience and interpretation.

Russon defines experience as "the explicit appearing of an object and an implicit appearing of a subject, a simultaneity of substance and subject..." (2015, p. 8), and notes that simple descriptions like 'is,' 'now,' and 'here' hide within 'a richness of mediation' and subsequently the simultaneities in a single experience. According to him, the 'fabric of experience' is the 'co-occurrence of substance and subject.' That is to say, what appears to us or what we experience is always infinite. He explains the indefinite, infinite exposure within our experience thus:

We exist in a state of exposure: this is the basic form of experience recognized by both Kant and Hegel. By exposure, I mean the way that we are unprotectedly in contact with an outside that defines us but that exceeds our grasp, an infinity that claims us without our having the option to refuse, a consecutive imperative to which our experience is answerable.... With Hegel, we notice that we are exposed in further ways, and, furthermore, the dimensions of our exposure are in tension with each other. Desire—the experience of our singular subjectivity—is one

such dimension, one such domain of opaque, alien determination (Russon, 2015, pp. 14-15).

That is, our experience is a finite situatedness—a ‘being in the world,’ in Heidegger’s language, and at the same time, finite situatedness has an ‘infinity of substance (reality) and subject that is its form.’ “I exist *as* an inherently finite crystallization of what is inherently infinite” (p. 12). One must note here that the fact that we exist in a radically infinite exposure within our each experience makes our *selves* more penetrable and porous. Hoff writes: “The experience of each human being is not strictly had or made by that single human being; it is, rather, an experience made with and by others, directly and indirectly, and thus each human being is, in some particular sense, dependent on those others, needy of those others, for its own sense of self” (2014, p. 175).

Butler’s conceptualization of identity must be seen from the background of this radical exposure of human beings and their infinite experience. The subject who already understands itself as limited, confined and less autonomous, discovers later the possibility of reflection and relation as part of its very constitution. “The subjects thus cultivate a more expanded conception of its place” (Butler, 1987, p. 8). Analysis of desire and experience of desire will take us to the conclusion that each moment the subject desires in pursuit of its identity, it experiences desire as posing the problem of identity too. That the subject desires identity means that it throws into problem the same identity and poses the question of the metaphysical place of human identity. In the satisfaction of desire, this question is answered for the subject, but only to get dissatisfied more due to its incapacity to consume the unending objects of desire. “In effect, desire is an interrogative mode of being, a corporeal questioning of identity and place” (Ibid., 9). This calls for questioning and subverting a given identity each time for better ones, according to Butler. It is Hegelian ontology of the self that prompts Butler to suggest a ‘social ontology of the body’ based on the anti essentialist notion of identity and reject the ‘individual ontology of the body,’ based on an essentialist notion of identity. As an interrogative mode of being/identity, desiring subjects each time subvert themselves and other selves,^v and so, to enhance an

essential sociality among them the 'generalized precariousness' of human condition has to be recognized.

3. Identity, History and the Public Sphere

Modernity as a historical condition of human experience is an attempt to consider the human being as the abstract individual in her universality without taking into account the inescapable horizons behind the formation of self-identity, and at the same time a momentous failure of the realization of this project because markers of identity continued to colour the supposedly 'modern' judgments' about abstract individuals. The articulation of recognition of the inescapable horizons of identity and the aspiration for universality, which is my focal point in this paper, is typified nowhere more starkly in the life of the modern Indian nation than in Ambedkar, who fought for the recognition of Dalit identity while remaining the principal architect of the modern Indian Constitution that vouches for secularism and equal citizenship. Partha Chatterjee observes that "the tension between utopian homogeneity and real heterogeneity" was played out most dramatically in the intellectual and political career of Ambedkar (2004, p. 8). Ambedkar's speech to the Constituent Assembly on 25 November 1949 is revealing in this regard.

[W]e are going to enter into a life of contradictions. In politics we will have equality and in social and economic life we will have inequality. In politics we will be recognizing the principle of one man one vote and one vote one value. In our social and economic life, we shall, by reason of our social and economic structure, continue to deny the principle of one man one value ... If we continue to deny it for long, we will do so only by putting our political democracy in peril. (1994, p. 1216)

Hannah Arendt observes in a similar vein that "one can resist only in terms of the identity that is under attack" even as one aspires for universal human respect (1955, p. 18). While it is clear from the life and writings of Ambedkar and several other contemporary figures of resistance that recognition of identity must go along with the desire for universality and neutrality, the ontological

considerations about the self that I have discussed in the first section of this paper get more complicated when we come to the public sphere where social and political interactions do take place. A case in point is the well-known 2015 suicide note of Rohith Vemula, a Dalit research scholar at the University of Hyderabad, in which he wrote poignantly that “[t]he value of a man was reduced to his immediate identity and nearest possibility. To a vote, to a number, to a thing. Never was a man treated as a mind” (Sawhney, 2016, p. 119). Rohith, like Ambedkar, asserted and demanded recognition of his Dalit identity, despite clearly rejecting the reduction of human beings to their immediate identity and resisting the hyper-recognition of identity. The following verse of the African-American lesbian feminist, Pat Parker, occurring in her poem “For the White Person Who Wants to Know How to Be My Friend” is representative of this yearning for recognition without hyper-recognition: “The first thing you do is to forget that I’m black./ Second, you must never forget that I’m black” (1978, p. 68).

This necessary contradiction between identity and universality could be seen in any demand for recognition, be it of a single person or of a group. There is an extent to which someone wants her/his identity to be recognized. The self feels throttled and misrecognized by hyper-recognition of the identity that she/he wants others to recognize. Hyper-recognition denies one’s universal humanity and openness towards indeterminate and infinite possibilities. In other words, while the horizon of one’s own meaning-making needs to be recognized by others in public, one cannot be reduced purely to one’s identity without the possibilities for achieving liberation from its oppressive markers in terms of universal humanness.

This discussion on identity and universality is meaningless without a considered conception of the public sphere. In the traditional understanding of the public sphere, we are obliged to appear in public not as selves born and brought up in families with distinct cultural, regional, historical, linguistic, religious and ethnic backgrounds, but as abstract individuals having the potential to be removed from history. Hoff rejects this view for disregarding the significance of ‘history’ for an identity in an attempt to impose on a person an ideal universality of bare humanity. In “Politics in

Public” (2015), Hoff elucidates the significance of talking about imagined universal humanness in the public sphere only after taking cognizance of and in juxtaposition with ‘history’ because the public sphere is a space where these two aspects of human beings get intertwined, come in dialogue and conflict with each other. To do this, she makes a qualitative difference between private and the public sphere with a typical understanding of the former as a space of ‘dynamic familiarity’ and a ‘non-neutral orientation’ towards specific human beings, which does not demand from us an explanation of ourselves, and a concern about our appearance so as to give an account of ourselves to others and validate our pursuits (Hoff, 2015, p. 260). On the other hand, in public we are interacting with less familiar people while being extra conscious about the fact that “we are on display to others for whom our identity is a question. We are ‘looked at’ in public, in a way that implies a question about who we are and what we are like, and we speak and act in ways that are ‘on display’ insofar as they are unfamiliar to those with whom we are interacting” (Ibid., 261).

From this point of view, Hoff shows how our ‘intimate and social history with others’ will necessarily have an impact on our public interaction. Referring to Frantz Fanon’s commanding account of how the history of colonialism altered the ways in which ‘people relate to each other and the public space,’ Hoff dismisses the idea of a discrete individuality that is supposed to *neutrally* engage in the public sphere with others. She emphasizes that the ‘history’ of identity needs to be seriously considered in the public sphere, which is imagined as a site of sophisticated and cultured interaction. Hoff asserts,

“To presume that we are dealing solely with individuals is to effectively erase the histories by which their significance is constituted and to misconceive their identity as the result of their decisions and a matter of their responsibility”.
(Hoff, 2014, p. 263)

Because of this, according to Hoff, we never interact with ‘discrete individuality’ in the public sphere but with all significant others and communities that have formed the individual’s ‘preferences and orientations’ and, therefore, implicitly with these parties as well (p. 262). Despite the revolutionary aspects of modern

individuality that invests persons with rights, its inherent tendency to conceptualize human beings in abstraction from society, and its aspiration to universalize human identity by erasing history could turn out to be limiting and tyrannical. This tendency of modernity should be resisted because we don't merely *exist* merely in the present, cut off from others and the world, but are affected by the past, aspire for the future and are exposed to the 'outside'. As per the original Latin meaning of 'existence', we always 'stand out.'

Having discussed the ontology of identity and the need for identity to be recognized in the social interactions of the public sphere, I now want to turn to polity. How must a polity, an organized population of different identity-groups with their own history, engage with an identity? If political life is about organizing and uniting human beings in their universality and integrating them into a genuine 'public,' how should the polity relate to historically oppressed identities? It is in this context that Ambedkar's concern with social and economic inequalities embedded in the Indian society and his longing for universal equality becomes meaningful. The inherent tension between identity and universality is situated in our finite being exposed to infinity. We can experience infinity only in our fragile finiteness. It is in relation to determinate ways of life and communities that we can experience human life and to that extent their significance cannot be denied; but they do not fully determine the trajectories of our existence because we can outgrow them as they necessarily are finite sites of exposure to infinity. Hoff further asserts that, "[T]he various contexts of human life operate as contexts of determination but also as contexts of exposure or propulsion out into the world" (Hoff, 2014, p. 183). Ambedkar asserted the cultural specificity of Dalit oppression and identity, mobilized and sensitized them, fought for their dignity and recognition in the public sphere, and reminded India that equal voting rights would not ensure social and economic equality. At the same time, he also stood in the forefront of building a polity founded on universal equality and individual rights as the architect of the Indian Constitution. In other words, he aspired to realize the infinite possibilities of the modern horizon without being blind to the severely limiting realities of the situation.

However, when we examine the cost of the political production of identities, there is an urgency to be vigilant. The tendency of modern nation states to produce the 'internal other' in opposition to the 'national self' and found nationalism on xenophobia makes marginal identities appallingly vulnerable. In *Frames of War* (2009), Judith Butler demonstrates how grievable and recognition-worthy lives of citizens of powerful nations like America and how un-grievable and recognition-unworthy lives of others such as the Iraqis are politically produced. The core issue, she observes, is not merely representational/epistemological; rather, it is 'ontological' because it is about the being of life and its recognition. The ontological framework decides in such contexts about the being of life through selective and exclusive means. That is, 'human identity'^{vi} is decided by 'mechanisms of power' according to majoritarian norms after removing certain sections of people from the moral space of concerns. The tendency to isolate certain sections of people from their historical and temporal realities in order to establish a 'regulative ideal of humanness', be it in morphological, sociological, or moral terms, leads to the production of exclusion. Humanness produced by 'ontological frameworks' and represented by 'epistemological frameworks' divide human beings into recognition-worthy and recognition-unworthy. Since any regulation of human beings is a political operation to exclude the unpopular others, Butler calls for frequent revisions of existing views of 'humanness'. While it is not possible to have a politics without regulation, Butler calls for relentless subversion of officially recognized human identity.

According to Butler, life and death are possible only in a relation to a 'framework', which is deeper and philosophically more significant than Taylor's 'frame' in which human beings form identities and make meaning. "There is no 'life itself', rather, only conditions of life. Life is something which requires conditions in order to become livable life and indeed in order to become grievable" (Butler, 2009, p. 5). To be a body, as we have seen, one must be exposed to sociopolitical forces and claims. Like Hegel, Butler, thus, conceptualizes a desiring and inherently open self-consciousness, which does not allow one to 'belong' fixedly to anywhere. This is to say, ontology of the body exists only as a social

ontology and a social ontology of the body already always envelops the human being. Human beings are condemned to be in social and political 'frameworks' according to Butler. Normative frameworks delimiting the sphere of humanness, lead to 'normative recognition' and produce subjects worthy and unworthy of recognition. Thus, recognizability is not a quality of individual human beings; rather, both recognizability and grievability are a function of social norms. Only if one's loss matters, value of his/her life appears. "Grievability is a presupposition for the life that matters" (Butler, 2009, p. 14). Life would be inconceivable without grievability as its precondition, and so grievability precedes or makes possible the apprehension of the precariousness of a life. Butler embraces an anti-idealizing and anti-identifying view of humans with her conception of an incessantly self-replenishing and self-repulsing self as its basis. Arguing that "human being is a differentiating effect of power" in *Precarious Life*, she calls for the recognition of the 'generalized precariousness' of the human condition (Butler, 2004, p. 40). There is no universal norm of humanness, no universal humanness or human identity. There is no human life as such. Rather there are only 'conditions' which make humanness/human life possible, or 'conditions' which produce and sustain humanness in one form and destroy it in another form. Hence, recognition has to be concerned with 'generalized precariousness'. Butler, thus, proposes a universal in response to the contemporary dialectic of the political valuation of life. She states in *Giving an Account of Oneself*: "The problem is not with universality as such but with an operation of universality that fails to be responsive to cultural particularity and fails to undergo a reformulation of itself in response to the social and cultural conditions it includes within its scope of applicability" (2005, p. 6).

The ultimate lesson from the dialectical principles which Hegel puts forth in his *Phenomenology* is that the differences between the infinite and the finite, between particular and universal never lead to a totally abstract universal. From this, we should understand Hegel as someone who does not propose an imagined universality, which has an ultimate capacity to wield hegemony over particularities and differences, but as someone who proposes a tolerant embrace of the differences. In current scholarship,

Hegelianism is an attitude that promotes a patient exploration of plurality of attitudes and a viewpoint that does not end up in a closed *ism*. Russon states that the *Phenomenology's* method and project is “ultimately to bear witness in vigilant openness to the unacknowledged absolutes that leave their trace in finite experience” (2015, p. 4). Hegel ultimately declares that ‘infinity’ or ‘absoluteness’ is the ingredient of and is immanent in our present experience and is not an abstract entity beyond experience. For Russon, this project, therefore, is one of “unearthing of more and more fundamental ‘infinities,’ more fundamental ‘absolutes,’ that characterize, contextualize, or constitute our experience” (Ibid., 15).

In conclusion, it must be reiterated that the self as a fixed identity without negations is inconceivable because it is open to the outside, socially embedded, constituted from without and never an entity unto itself. It follows from the notion of the negative self that human identity *is* not in a possession of the self, but it emerges out of a process of dynamic interactions. On the basis of this Hegelian insight, contemporary Hegelian philosophers, as we have seen, give an account of the complex reality behind our appearance in space and time as seemingly individuated and self-enclosed beings. The division of the self in constant dialectic does not give room for a *dead reality*, which has no further dialectical potential. The complications emanating from the constant making, unmaking and remaking of the self in the public sphere in its yearning for both identity and universality through the recognition, misrecognition and condemnation invested on it by others has been the subject matter of this paper. The only certain conclusion that can be drawn from this discussion is the following: since the humanness that we recognize is not an absolute and universal notion but a contextual and historical construct, a function of power and force, if there is any provisionally universal ethical guide for the negotiation between recognition of the Other’s identity and universality, this seems to be the Other’s precariousness and vulnerability—the ungrievability of the ‘other’ life.

References

Ambedkar, B. (1994). *Writings and speeches*, Vol. 13. Bombay: Government of Maharashtra.

- Arendt, H. (1955). *Men in dark times*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Butler, J. (1987). *Subjects of desire: Hegelian reflections in twentieth-century France*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious life: the powers of mourning and violence*. London: Verso.
- Butler, J. (2005). *Giving an account of oneself*. New York: Fordham University Press.
- Butler, J. (2009). *Frames of war: when is life grievable*. London: Verso.
- Chatterjee, P. (2004). *The politics of the governed: reflections of popular politics in most of the world*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hegel, G.W.F. (1977). *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hoff, S. (2014). *The laws of the spirit: a Hegelian theory of justice*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Hoff, S. (2015). Politics in public: the history of identity and the aspiration to universality. In D. Dwivedi and V. Sanil (Eds.), *The public sphere from outside the west*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Parker, P. (1978). *Movement in black: the collected poetry of Pat Parker, 1961-1978*. Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books.
- Russon, J. (2015). *Infinite phenomenology: the lessons of Hegel's science of experience*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Sawhney, S. (2016). End notes. *Cultural Critique*, 94, 113-123. DOI: 10.5749/culturalcritique.94.2016.0113.
- Taylor, C. (1989). *Sources of the self: the making of the modern identity*. Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Taylor, C. (1994). Politics of recognition. In A. Gutmann (Ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, 25-73. New York: Princeton University Press.

Endnotes

- i The basis of identity could be linguistic, religious, regional, cultural or ethnic, but in all of them evaluations based on notions of the good and the meaningful unfailingly happen.
- ii Taylor adds that though the 'conversation' with significant others who 'shaped' us lasts even after we outgrow them, "we should strive to define ourselves on our own to the fullest extent possible.... We need relationships to fulfill, but not to define, ourselves" (1994, p. 33).
- iii Taylor traces the history of 'individualized dignity' and notes that social hierarchies, which used to be the basis for 'honor' and inequalities, came to be disregarded with modernity, and thus 'dignity' of individual human beings and equal recognition came into existence. Identity,

which was by social position in earlier societies where one's glory was the other's shame, came to be undermined by the ideal of individualized dignity. This democratic conception of 'individualized identity' was established on the basis of Kantian morality, the source of which was *from within*, and it replaced both the idea of utilitarian morality of calculations and consequences, and the idea of Divine morality based on reward and punishment. The individualization of identity is *modern* in the sense that it invokes human beings to be in touch with themselves, with their inner voices, rather than with God, community or nature. Taylor views the modern individualization of identity as leading to the conception of *authenticity* because it rejects externally imposed identity. His conception of identity in terms of individually negotiated social being is a call to recognize the authenticity of socially embedded individuality.

iv Identification strictly means here what Butler calls solidification of one's identity, be it culture, caste, region, religion or nationality, an easy way to negate the differences within that identity and homogenize it. Identification in this sense is homogenization considered negatively. By identification of one identity, we miss the *differencing* of/in that identity, its fluid and endless (re)formations, and thus its complexity and richness.

v Hegel calls the desired Other as 'desired Desire'.

vi Butler uses the phrase 'human identity' to emphasize that humanness as such is selectively and politically 'produced' in contrast to my juxtaposition of 'identity' with 'universal humanness.'