



Dialectics of Identity in Politics: A Deleuzo-Guattarian Perspective

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Abstract

In post-modern times there is a shift from an institutional structured politics to the domain of micro-politics which is a dynamic interplay of constitutive relations. This realm of 'becoming' in its perpetual attempt to self-problematize is creative as well as critical. This renders in it a fluidity of 'rhizomatic' exchanges that affect macro-level politics. The paper looks into the dialectics of identity in the politics from Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective.

Keywords: Micropolitics, Molecular, Molar, Lines of flight, Rhizome, Machinic Assemblage, Desiring Machine, Deterritorialization, Re-territorialization.

We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer too much'

(*ATP* Intro 5)

Introduction

The post-modernity has re-territorialized space (as it has done to the other concepts and theories) in a way that refuses to conform to their parallels of the modern age. Yet, they are re-visitations that helps us to re-conceptualise the fundamentals of polity, populace, identity, and cultural difference. Politics, like time and becoming, consists of multiple dispersed layers that are interwoven and folded into one another, and where it might seem like a mundane and repetitive 'politics as usual' dominates one level, important transformations and repetitions of difference may take place on another. Politics, for Deleuze, emerges

from becomings in which what changes first and foremost is not our world but our own selves, without which no worldly change can be accomplished. These changes, in turn, are a matter of repetition. The ontological turn in political theory shifts the focus from the science of being to Heideggarian 'being-in-the-world.' Post-war liberal political thought conceived human self in minimalist terms, and was based on abstract rationalism and empiricism like other turns, it is also circulatory, in a sense this displacement – a forward shift – is actually a return to pre-modern philosophical and theological doctrines: spirit and matter, eternal truths, free will versus determinism among others.

Politics, traditionally based on philosophy of transcendence treats identity as a political *sine qua non*; focus on how individual and collective identities are constructed. This institutional construction fails to explore Deleuze's micro-political domain. But this does not invalidate transcendence as transcendence is the predominant sense where predominance is a function of power. Deleuze and Guattari discuss society and politics in terms of machinic assemblages, becomings, nomadism, forms of capture and processes of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation:

All we talk about are multiplicities, lines, strata and segmentarities, lines of flight and intensities, machinic assemblages and their various types' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:4)

We are micro-political before we are political

The micropolitical is a domain of constitutive relations, and Deleuze's philosophy is an unwavering attempt to expose this domain, investigate its mechanisms and

dynamics which, for Deleuze, are fundamentally different than those found in the macropolitical domain; shows how it unfolds to form the concepts and categories that define so much of personal, social, and political life; and explore how it can be engaged and adjusted. In this last respect, the micropolitical is also a realm of self-problematization and of critical and creative self-formation, where this 'self' is as much collective and social as it is individual. We have the political and social lives and values that we ought to have given the micropolitics that constitute us, and if we wish to move our politics beyond what it is at its most spiteful, vindictive, and reactionary, we must begin here. (Widder Preface X). Only in this way, for Deleuze, can a political and ethical pluralism be truly affirmed and realized. And Deleuze is, despite the view of some very strange yet influential interpretations of his work, above all a pluralist thinker, in his ontology, epistemology, politics, and ethics.

The shift of this disciplinary power focuses on the 'micropower' relations where individual and collective standards of normality and deviance, authority and subordination, are constituted. The microscopic realm of power relations by virtue of their inequality engenders local and unstable states of power which in turn give meaning and direction to power regimes. The connectedness among these relations at a more baser levels allow the mobility among them and the effect of these fluid 'rhizomatic' exchanges, in turn, affect the macroscopic realms above.

Micropower

Micropower relations construct the meaningful truths and identities necessary for macro-level powers to operate. Exceeding the individuals whose roles are constituted by

them, and remaining “constantly in tension, in activity”, micro power relations are diffused throughout society and its Institutions. Moreover, they are inherently porous and unstable, as they are always accompanied by relations of resistance that can use the very rules and strategies that power relations engender to mutate and overturn them. Micro and macro levels are immanent to each other but related by way of a “double conditioning” (99–100) ; the relations at the micro-political level can uphold or depose the authorial powers which in turn can always exercise their powers in order to strengthen, counteract or even sabotage the expanding microscopic sections, now being visible in the societal framework. Interestingly, both the positions engaged in “double conditioning” influencing each other in elevation or subversion; unfailingly depend on each other too. The exercise of power at either level often has multiple and conflicting effects in this regard: the use of police force to maintain police authority, for example, often fortifies and undercuts it at the same time.

Deleuze and Guattari in their works on psychoanalysis link the politics and libidinal economy. From their analysis, they deduce that psychoanalysis works with capitalism to channel and control desire, not to liberate it. Thus, their term “schizoanalysis” is a radical critique of both psychoanalysis and capitalism. It scrutinizes the established Freud-Lacan psychoanalysis which is structured approach; however it may look at the unconscious as a sign-system. Further, their concept of “desiring-machine” is a revolutionary aim which intercepts the constructed identities represented by the “molar lines.” This is a repeated ever growing attempt of mobilising at the molecular level to inhibit growing monsters of group identities. For that reason, they aim at taking apart the group identities constructed by its “molar lines” and its

presuppositions, and at energetically keeping on “breaking through” without “breaking down.” They write:

The task of schizoanalysis is that of tirelessly taking apart egos and their presuppositions; liberating the personal singularities they enclose and repress; ‘mobilizing the flows they would be capable of transmitting, receiving, or intercepting; establishing always further and more sharply the schizes and the breaks well below conditions of identity and assembling the desiring-machines that countersect everyone and group everyone with others.’ (*Anti-Oedipus* 362)

This can be better understood with their fundamental concept of “rhizome”-- it very conveniently gives a lucid dynamics of this “deterritorialized” movement, a revolutionary resistance to the territorialization tendencies towards totalization. In terms of praxis, Deleuze and Guattari’s endlessly destructive task is to continue haunting capitalism, to erase the boundaries capitalism places on this deterritorialization. This task consequently frees the desiring-machines and dismantles the subject and the tyrannical State. Through their desiring machines, they explain social machines, which are identically constituted by connective, disjunctive and conjunctive syntheses. They organize productive flows at a molar level, including flows of individuals, populations, technologies and goods, which are all ultimately flows of desire.

Politics have always remained inseparable from the ethics and this relation begins at the micro level. Deleuze and Guattari’s theoretical strategies have always been akin to the minorities and they have rather attempted to study “Minor politics” with its effect and contribution. The “macro” level politics or majority has never been subject

of their claim. This is the reason that their philosophy is replete with the ethical concerns. Their sense of “ethics” is Levinasian; it concerns the relationship between the subject and the Other. Such a relation should be seen as more inclusive in nature and should not suffer the shackles of the constructed binaries again. Thus, it can be derived from such an approach that there is an intrinsic unpredictability and anarchy that can never be regulated by the structured knowledge systems. Such Levinasian ethics is structured around the differences among the “Other/s” which can never be limited as it remains irreducible and infinite. And we know that these social systems are built on systematic systems of knowledge that are restricted in more than one way. In this way this “minor politics” which inadvertently but compulsively operates within their ethics conceptualizes the oppressed in “cramped spaces.”

Thus, for Deleuze and Guattari it is not contraries/contradictions or opposition that define a society but its ‘lines of flight’ or a process of “deterritorialisation;” they reject Marxian economic determinism. Like post-structuralist political thinkers and Foucault they envisage not a revolutionary change, not at the global level but at the sub-levels of the political and economic institutions. Thereby the ‘minority’ is considered game changer owing to their qualitative contribution and recognition. This is far from their quantitative inclusion in the structures of the social systems. It acknowledges the importance of minority in their political potential which lies in their diversion from the norm. Their refusal to abide by the given knowledge/social system is the potential of social flux and resurgence. This can also be understood by Deleuze and Guattarian process of “deterritorialization” of the dominant social codes. It is not the control of the State power but rather the forms of social change which takes place

alongside or beneath any given form of State (Patton, 2000:8) As there is no such power at the centre that controls the state, it does not ensure uni-directional progress which endangers the harmony not only of the social institution but misaligns the co-existence at large. Instead of a single set of values, there are multiplicities within the machinic assemblage that is inclusive and holistic. These are not mere theoretical but practical assemblages that are interconnected and the play among them is a complex maze that deterritorialises against the ontological background. Now, the state is overcoded with a rigid segmentarity that regulates the transfers and translations from one heterogeneous code to another. A line of flight can also end up returning to the very strata that code and overcode it instead of getting released. In fact both the extremes can prove to be cancerous; for like clinging to stratifications, quick and violent destratification can also lead to empty 'black hole'.

Social machines also have an element corresponding to 'The Body without Organs': "the forms of social production, like those of desiring-production, involve an unengendered non-productive attitude, an element of antiproduction coupled with the process, a full body that functions as a *socius*" (AO 10). The *socius* is a molar recording surface. It carries out the disjunctive syntheses that inscribe social production with meaning, while being unproductive and meaningless itself. Social machines thus associate flows with chains of connected signs, separate these through exclusive disjunctions and establish conjunctions among them. The form the resulting assemblages take delineates the type of social machine at work. In all cases social machines struggle to contain desire's schizophrenic process of inclusive connection, disjunction and conjunction, precisely because it poses the

greatest threat to them: 'If desire is repressed, it is because every position of desire, no matter how small, is capable of calling into question the established order of a society . . . desire is revolutionary in its essence . . . and no society can tolerate a position of real desire without its structures of exploitation, servitude and hierarchy being compromised' (*AO* 118).

Molar – Molecular Relation

Molar formations also react back upon the forces from which they emerge, attempting to appropriate these molecular forces, though this process "implies hit-and-miss changes in rhythm and mode rather than any omnipotence; and something always escapes" (*ATP* 217).

Molar categories depend on molecular flows that are always in tension and flux at another level underneath. While molecular forces continue to surpass molar formations and flee on all sides, this does not mean that their dynamics are not often occluded by the dominance of molar perspectives, and so an important political task lies in overcoming these perspectives and tapping into molecular desires. But molar formations and categories must also be engaged on their own level, and even though this is the most superficial level of political and social life, it remains significant in its own right. The molar forces operate at the institutional structured levels of "segmentarity" which includes social coded domains of identity -- family, school, workplace, factories -- alongside differentiated categories of identity, such as child, adult, worker, businessman, senior citizen, criminal delinquent and homosexual. There is also a corresponding molar 'line' of movement that goes from one segment to another. The state is overcoded with a rigid segmentarity that regulates the transfers and translations from one heterogeneous code

to another. On the other hand, codes point to molecular or microscopic regimes of power relations that constitute the truths on which they operate. These coded formations depend on the production and multiplicity of molecular desiring-machines. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari introduce various names for this terrain, and its line of movement, which is a 'line of flight'. They call it a 'rhizomatic' plurality, whose relations of inclusive disjunction do not conform to any 'arboreal' model that submits differences to principles of identity (*ATP* 3–25). They also call it a 'smooth space' or 'plane of consistency.' It is a space, in other words, that is smooth by virtue of having no transcendent dimension, and so it is also differentiated. Finally, they call it a 'war machine', a name that expresses the antagonism of this constitutive domain of difference. Molar segments, power relations, desiring-machines and their various lines are 'immanent, caught up in one another.' They form a single assemblage, with molecular levels of desire and power constituting the molar formations that code and axiomatize flows. Nevertheless, molecular desire has an ontological primacy in so far as it constitutes the forms that seem to arrest, divide and control it, and in so far as society is defined not by its segments but its lines of flight:

It is wrongly said (in Marxism in particular) that a society is defined by its contradictions. That is true only on the larger scale of things. From the viewpoint of micropolitics, a society is defined by its lines of flight, which are molecular. (*ATP* 216)

Lines of flight deterritorialize segments and codes. But deterritorialization, which dissolves or surpasses formations of identity, can be partial or absolute. Where partial, these same lines of flight establish new forms of identity into which they are appropriated. As Deleuze and

Guattari argue in *Anti-Oedipus*, capitalism's decoding is only a partial deterritorialization. But the same is true of the forms of resistance set in opposition to power relations, for at this level 'the deterritorializations are merely relative, always compensated by reterritorializations which impose on them so many loops, detours, of equilibrium and stabilization' (136). The point remains, however, that absolute deterritorializations or 'lines of flight' must go beyond opposition. Absolute deterritorializations may not in themselves lead back to reterritorializations, but this does not disconnect them from these formations. Indeed, 'molecular escapes and movements would be nothing if they did not return to the molar organizations to reshuffle their segments, their binary distributions of sexes, classes, and parties' (ATP 216–17). Deleuze and Guattari speak of a revolutionary becoming of desire that is a 'nomadic' becoming or a 'becoming minor'. Nomadic and minor becomings are 'false movements', in so far as they can remain stationary and intensive, and also movements at 'infinite speed', which immediately connect heterogeneities. In other words, these becomings are *events*. They are the events of thought as it encounters that which forces it to think, and they create lines of flight that are experimental and thus political: 'Politics is active experimentation since we do not know in advance which way a line is going to turn.' (Widder 133)

In the introduction to *Difference and Repetition*, Deleuze declares that 'all identities are only simulated, produced as an optical "effect" by the more profound game of difference and repetition' (*Difference and Repetition* xix), and in his later writings on micropolitics and the many levels of politics, he continues to treat the stability of identity as a notion applicable only to the most superficial levels of political life. An identity is also problematic, as it

is always compromised by the way its being is always already lacking. On the political register these exclusions must take the ultimate form of an antagonistic friend/enemy distinction. The Other's ambiguous and alien character is thus considered to be such that it necessarily negates a collective identity within which different individuals and groups might negate but nonetheless also recognize and affirm one another. If Otherness entails the incompleteness of structures of identity, it also implies its excessiveness in relation to these structures.

The recent shift in the Indian politics has problematised the dominance of established forms of power structures. Social and economic changes, new capitalist modes of production and exchange, the rise of social contract understandings of sovereignty, and liberal ideas of individual freedom are few forms of 'governmentality' that enable to constitute individuals in ways that counterbalance new economic and political freedoms. Largely, such governance involves the subordinate participation in his own subjection against the norms that measured them. Self formation is ethical, but also political as any experimentation with molecular fluxes and creative deterritorialisation can either reify or problematize these social and political forms.

Though this paper is not a deep study of the country's politics but presents it in a very general manner as this is evidence of the rise of a strain of neo-liberal, semi-authoritarian populism. The micropolitics which has always been left out of the mainstream mention has been revisited in the recent political authorities. The macropolitics world-wide especially where it was determined to take nations from their decolonising to globalising them showed this with uneven development. And such a shift proved to be a promise that reduced these

differences based on the analysis of economic growth, human development or multi-dimensional poverty. This seems convincing as such politics promises to sense socio-spatial dimensions which includes not only the politics of class but in addition to it, it examines poor in terms of social categories. Such an attempt includes overlapping axes of disadvantage: gender, caste and ethnicity categories also feature significantly. Further, this takes a shape of an ‘assemblage’ – where new arisen political identities are perhaps pan-nation in character or at least in affiliation.

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