

Levels of Identity in the Age of Globalization and its Role on Policy-making

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Received 14 June 2015

Revised 23 July 2015

Accepted 24 August 2015

Abstract: *This article explores the intricate interrelationships between discourses on identity and the multiple processes associated with increasing globalization in the modern age. Globalization is not only often exclusively associated with worldwide economic integration and the emergence of a borderless global market but also involves sweeping changes on the social, cultural and political domains. Furthermore, it entails contradictory processes of homogenization and universalization on the one hand and localization and differentiation on the other which has led to wide-ranging changes in the processes of identity formation. Fundamentally, discourses of identity are discussed on individual, subnational, national, supranational and global levels. Attention is furthermore given to the role of the media, information and communication technologies in these struggles and the implications for policy-making within the media and communications sector. So, this paper is trying to explore the interrelations of different levels of identity and measures its influence on the processes of policy-making.*

Keywords: *Identity, globalization, policy making, technology, diversity.*

Introduction

The opening of a new century has always served as a symbolic turning point in human history. In this regard, globalization is an extremely complex and multifaceted phenomenon. On the one hand there is the tendency towards homogeneity, synchronization, integration, unity and universalism. On the other hand, there is the propensity for localization, heterogeneity, differentiation, diversity and particularism. These processes are intricately interwoven and represent two faces of the same coin. Thus the term “globalizations” is sometimes used to indicate that globalization is not an ubiquitous or uniform process, but involves various arenas, manifests differently in various contexts and has different effects for people in different contexts (Braman & van Staden 2000; Servaes, Lie & Terzis 2000).

Within this fast globalizing world with all its contradictions, struggles for identity have emerged as one of the most striking characteristics of the social, cultural and political scene. One of the most important features of the identity discourse is the relative regency of its emergence and proliferation. In fact, the concept identity has also become the prism through which most other aspects of contemporary life are studied. Struggles of identity have also become an integral part of intra-individual processes as well as of the social and political scene. As such discourses and struggles of identity have important and far-reaching implications for policy-making on all levels. Also, in an attempt to develop global, national and local people-centered policies with regard to the media, information and communication technologies, cognizance will have to be taken of these discourses and struggles. Given the prominence and importance of these discourses and struggles and their implications, I will furthermore give attention to the intricate relationship between processes associated with globalization on various levels and

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struggles for identity. In contemplating identity discourses on various levels, attention will also be given to the role of international communication in the processes associated with globalization and concomitant identity issues.

Globalization and Discourse of Identity

The spectacular rise of the discourse on identity since the last part of the 20th century should be perceived as a reflection of human experience in the age of globalization. In this regard, the 'identity discourse' reflects more of the current states of human society than all the theorizing and analytical results of identity studies do. Whereas past generations seemingly handled identity formation and related problems and issues in a matter-of-fact way, new dimensions have been added to old problems. Circumstances in the current world have not only changed the processes of identity formation, but have added new dimensions to both personal and collective identity. Furthermore, whereas the term 'identity' implies continuity, that is a solid basis in which people anchor themselves, the rapid changes that characterizes the age of globalization, eroded most of the bases on which people used to anchor their identity. The age old problem of identity has thus changed its shape and content. Bauman (2001a) held that the new centrality of the identity discourse is a reflection of the fact that identity issues are not as simple and straightforward as they used to be. Indeed, the acquiring of identity (as task, struggle or quest) has become problematic. These struggles are waged on various levels. However, these struggles are closely interconnected and often represent different facets of the various homogenizing and diversifying processes associated with globalization. Some aspects of the interplay between struggles for identity and the processes associated with globalization are discussed in the following sections.

The Individual Level

Though, the fact that globalization as well struggles for identity is mostly associated with the economic, political and social spheres, these processes also have far-reaching effects in the lives of individuals. According to Bauman (2001a), disruptions in identity formation on the individual level can be ascribed to the combined effects of globalization, on the one hand, as well as to the new and extreme forms that liberal ideas on individualism has acquired in the modern age. In traditional societies individuals' identity was largely based on their position within the social hierarchy that, in turn, have mostly been determined by birth. However, due to the widespread acceptance of the principle of the equality of all people, traditional hierarchies associated with, for example, estate or caste have melted down and lost their significance. The individual has thus been emancipated from the ascribed, inherited and/or inborn nature of his or her identity (Bauman 2001a; Taylor 1991). Furthermore, whereas the emphasis on the individual and individual rights can be regarded as one of the most important achievements of modernity, the postmodern age has given rise to more extreme forms of individualism (Taylor 1991). In this more self-centered form of individualism the emphasis falls almost exclusively on the fulfilment and authenticity of the individual. Moreover, the notion of individual freedom emphasizes that all humans are free to self-create, to realize their own authenticity. However, individuals not only have the freedom to become whatever they want to; they also have the responsibility and obligation to realize their own authenticity and to fulfil their potential that is to become what they already is. Self-constitution, self-assertion and self-transformation have thus become the slogans of the time.

In the age of globalization, few localities for embedding or anchoring identity are solid enough to stand the run of an individual's life. Disembeddedness has consequently become a frequent life experience. Furthermore, in an era characterized by what Max Weber calls "instrumental rationality", human relations are perceived to be merely functional to the individual's strive towards self-actualization and personal happiness. Gaining or obtaining an identity that offers "sameness" or "continuity", usually implies the forfeiting or closing of other options. Identities are consequently sought that can be adopted and discarded like a costume. Although they are freely chosen, these choices seldom imply commitment and the acceptance of responsibility of the consequences of an enduring relationship.

Thus in many instances globalization and modernity has brought about the collapse of a sense of community (Bauman 2001a; Taylor 1991). The loss of the safe shelter offered by communal relationships has, in turn, reinforced the fear and anxiety associated with identity achievement. It has also left the highly privatized and isolated individual powerless and defenseless against the powers of the state. Feelings of powerlessness are furthermore enhanced by the fact that the powers that shape the conditions under which people have to live and solve their problems, are becoming increasingly global in nature and therefore almost completely beyond the reach of the individual. Social atomism bears little hope of joining forces with others against national and global powers to change the rules of the game. Furthermore, while globalization has increased the options for identification on a personal and collective level, it has also contributed towards the fragmentation of identity (Servaes, Lie & Terzis 2000). The forces associated with identity formation are thus no longer restricted to the local space, but have their origin on different levels varying from the local to the global. Individuals' identities have consequently become a complex mixture of both local and global elements. Some of these forces are discussed in the following sections.

These changes to identity formation on the individual level bring important implications for the media. The role of the national media and public broadcasters has long been perceived to promote nation-building and identification with the state and state nation. However, not only has the processes of individualization and globalization alienated the individual from the state and society at large, but the individual requires from the media to cater for his or her individual needs and preferences. The public sphere is furthermore increasingly supplanted by privately produced, privately owned and privately administered spheres (Bauman 1998). Due to technological development and digitalization, national media now also have to compete with local and global media frameworks for the attention of the individual consumer.

The sub-national Level

Protection of identity development in the modern and fast globalizing world requires a sense of belonging and community that will stand the test of time and involves life-long commitment and solidarity. The term "community" offers a place of relaxation and safety sheltered from a world rife with conflict, danger and uncertainty. It implies an understanding shared by all its members. Such understanding is not a finishing line, but the starting point of all forms of togetherness; a reciprocal and binding sentiment. It is due to this understanding that the members of a community remain united in spite of all separating factors. The Swedish analyst, Göran Rosenberg (Bauman 2001b), uses the term "warm circle" to depict a sense of community. Human loyalties offered within this warm circle, are not derived from social logic or cold cost-benefit analyses. Membership does not need to be "owned" and within this circle, the members do not need to prove anything; and whatever they do, they can always reckon on sympathy and help.

However, the globalizing world is characterized by the shrinking of spatial and temporal limitations and an increase in international communication due to the development of transport technology, the electronic media and information and communication technologies. The balance between "inside" and "outside" communication - once heavily skewed towards the "inside" - has thus been skewed, thereby blurring the distinctions between insiders and outsiders. For many communities it has become increasingly difficult to draw and sustain the boundaries between "insiders" and "outsiders". Thus the globalizing world have seen the "melting down" of many traditional communities and society as a whole. Moreover, the emphasis on individualism, self-choice and self-achievement in the modern world, has resulted in the rise of "handpicked" and artificially "produced" communities where membership is usually based on individual achievement. Interest groups, professional groups, virtual groups - these are but a few examples of surrogate communities that characterize our age. However, due to the fact that membership of these communities mostly has to be earned and/or the temporal nature of the groups, the identities they offer remain insecure, fragile and vulnerable. In contrast, ethnic communities represent an important and perhaps the sole exemption to the disintegration of enduring communities in the globalizing world (Bauman 1998). The strange thing is that the ascriptive nature of ethnic identities is

not a matter of choice and, in fact, goes against the grain of the principle of free decision-making imprinted in the liberal, modern society.

Other authors like Kymlicka (1995) and Kloskowska (1998) emphasize on the role of the ethnic culture that- despite the universalization of cultures and an emergent world culture, still provides the framework for major, and particularly early human experiences. Although global and supra-national identities may play an important role, they do not provide a secure basis for the development of identity in a similar way that ethnic groups do. Furthermore, the erosion of the legitimacy and authority of the nation state has resulted in a weakening of the association between the state and ethnicity. Ethnic and cultural minorities that have been subjugated or absorbed by the state have thus been "freed" resulting in the worldwide revitalization of ethnic and cultural loyalties and the mobilization of ethnic groups both within and across the borders of nation states. In contrast to the homogenizing effect of global identities and the spread of a Western consumer culture ethnic movements as a form of localization focus on the differences between cultures rather than on similarities. However, these movements are "global" in the way that they use modern information and communication technologies to communicate with fellow ethnics that have migrated all over the world (Servaes, Lie & Terzis 2000). It is, however, not only cultural and religious identities that have become sites of localized identities. Regional and religious identities have also become ways in which groups and communities resist the hegemony of global processes (Tehrani 1999).

Another factor that plays a role in ethnic identification and the revitalization of ethnicity in the modern world is the wide migration associated with globalization. Appadurai (1993) speaks in this regard of "ethno-escapes", that is the worldwide spread of mobile human groups such as tourists, government officials, guest workers, exiles, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The consequence is that the "local space" of many ethnic or cultural groups is becoming more and more heterogeneous, while more people than ever before have contact with a culture. According to Featherstone (1990) the term "multicultural" should consequently be used instead of "intercultural" when referring to the new cultural sphere. One of the consequences of multicultural interaction within local spaces is that the enhanced need for sustaining boundaries between the own group and other groups furthermore fosters ethnic identification and ethnic mobilization.

The ethnic Diasporas of globalization have to deal with identity struggles of their own. They have to incorporate the transnational experience of displacement, disembeddedness, adaptation to and hybridization with the culture of their host societies in their identities. For many migrants this process of identity formation and reformation is aided to some degree by the availability of the electronic media and information and communication technologies that provide a link to their home communities. However, their communities of origin can offer little help in the lived experience of hybridity- the migrant's so-called 'double vision' - that often leads to feelings of not belonging to any community or culture and the longing for the recovering of the cultural purity that has been lost (Corcoran 1998). Finally, the contradictory forces of globalization and localization are in fact, resulting in the pulverization of society that, in turn, reinforces the processes associated with globalization. It has consequently become almost impossible to halt or reverse these processes: globalization has become the intractable fate of the world.

The national Level

Globalization furthermore has far-reaching implications for the position of the nation state that is the medium-sized, territorial, centralized, sovereign type of polity that has become the dominant, if not sole form of political organization in the post 1789 era. During the period of the dominance of the nation state the "global scene" was a theatre of inter-state politics where states - though actions such as armed conflict, bargaining and negotiation - drew and defended the boundaries that set apart the enclosed territory of each state's executive and legislative territory. Global politics were therefore almost exclusively concerned with sustaining the principle of full and uncontested sovereignty of each state over its territory (Bauman 1998; Lacarrieu & Raggio 1997; Le Pere & Lambrechts 1999; Waters 1995).

The fact that the nation state held territorial sovereignty over a particular area also implied that pride of place was primarily vested in the state (Bauman 1998, 2001b). A shared nationhood, that is a common national identity, played a crucial legitimizing role in the political unification of the state. The invocation of common roots and a common character was furthermore one of the major tools for producing patriotic loyalty and obedience, the main principles for ideological mobilization. The "state nation" consequently becomes one of the major sources - if not the most important source - in which the citizens of the state found a sense of community and collective or group identity. However, there is a contradiction in the term "nation state". The term "nation" is derived from the Greek "natio" that is associated with ethnicity and a common culture. According to Habermas (1998) nations were originally communities with a shared descent and culture. In contrast, Rhodie and Liebenberg (1994) write that only 10% of the member states of the United Nations in 1994 could be described as homogeneous on the basis of ethnicity. In most other states there is a lack of convergence between the political (the state) and the cultural (the nation). In order to comply with the characteristics of a true nation state and to successfully implement their executive and legislative sovereignty, governance of homogeneous states often also involves the suppression of the ambitions of lesser population (e.g., minority groups) towards cultural and political autonomy. Usually, ethnic and/or cultural groups are often reluctant to succumb their uniqueness and distinctive identities to become part of an overarching state nation. A strategy of nation-building consequently became one of the major tools in the pursuit of the "one state, one nation" ideal in heterogeneous states (Bauman 1998). Thus it is now commonly recognized that national identities are seldom natural or pre-political. They are socio-culturally constructed identities- the term "imagined communities" or "imagined communalities" are often used in this regard (McCarthy 1999). Nation-building often implies the denial of the diversity of the citizens of a state. From the nation-building perspective the differences in language, culture and/or religion found under the state's jurisdiction are regarded as undesirable not-yet-fully-extinct relics of the past often also associated with backwardness and a lack of progress. "Enlightenment" and "progress" usually means forsaking diversity and ethnic, cultural and religious distinctiveness in favor of a common to all level of citizenship, community or nationhood.

According to Bauman (2001b), the practice of nation-building can have two faces. The nationalist perspective usually implies that the various means available to the state (e.g., political institutions, national symbols, the educational system as well as the media) are employed to forge an overarching national identity. In doing so, the varieties of languages are usually replaced by one standard national language and the traditions and habits of diverse groups by one standard historical narrative and calendar of memory rituals. However, when education, persuasion and indoctrination do not work or their fruits are slow to come, states often resort to measures of coercion such as the criminalization of struggles to defend the diversity or autonomy of minority groups. The nationalist plan is therefore to assimilate the variety of cultural forms under the state's jurisdiction and to dissolve them in one standard national form by making use of the powers vested in the state. The liberal strategy appears to be the complete opposite to the nationalistic face. It is primarily based on the liberal idea that regards the freedom and autonomy of the individual as the primary political values (Kymlicka 1995). The ideal state is perceived to be a collection of free and unbound individual citizens. Ethnic and other local communities are regarded as primary sources of intolerance and parochialism and, most importantly, as conservative coercive forces that hold the individual back from self-assertion and self-determination. As liberalism believes that true freedom will emerge only if freedom is refused to the enemies of freedom and the enemies of tolerance are no longer tolerated, ethnic and other sub-national forms of community becomes the targets of state action. It is believed that the annihilation of these enemies to freedom and tolerance will, in the end, result in all citizens of the state freely choosing the singular loyalty and state identity offered to all (Bauman 2001b). However, as the cultural forms and practices of the state often reflect those of the majority of dominant group, Rex (1996) warns that the modern state is not necessarily the product of an abstract process of modernisation, but could become the way in which a dominant or majority group asserts its rule over groups or communities. Bauman (2001b) holds the opinion that, although nationalism and liberalism might follow different strategies, they share the same purpose. They leave little or no room for forms of community beyond the levels of the state and loyalty to the state. Whereas nationalism aims to annihilate difference; the purpose of liberalism is to annihilate the different. In both

cases the "others" have to be stripped from their "otherness" in order to become indistinguishable from the rest of the nation. Ethnic and other forms of local identities have thus to be melted down to become part of the singular mold of the national identity.

However, the waves of change represented by the forces of globalization have changed the position and role of the nation state (Bauman 1998). The sovereignty, legitimacy and authority of the nation-state have come under constant siege. The eroding forces are global and local; transnational as well as sub-national; centrifugal as well as centripetal. According to Bauman (1998) all three legs of the tripod on which the executive and legislative powers of the state rest, have in the process been broken beyond repair. On a transnational level, states are no longer able to control the flow of capital and information via the media and information and communication technologies across their borders. Due to the unqualified and unstoppable spread of free trade rules and the free movement of capital and finances, the economy is progressively exempt from the nation state. Not only have the borders of states become porous, but global forces beyond the reach and control of the nation-state are also imposing their laws and precepts on the planet. In order to function more effectively in the global economy and to retain some degree of its law-and-order policing ability, the governments of nation states are increasingly forced to seek alliances with other states. Thus at least part of the state's legitimacy, sovereignty and authority have to be surrendered to larger power blocks.

The weakening of the authority and legitimacy of the state undermines the emotive and normative commitment to membership of a nation state. The state's monopoly over the emotive commitments of its citizens- at least on a collective level- is challenged by global, supranational as well as sub-national and localized forces. The weakening of the nation state has "freed" ethnic and/or cultural groups from the bonds with a national identity. The consequence is revitalization of even those ethnicities that have been believed to have withered away or died long ago. Thus the sovereignty, legitimacy and authority of the nation state are not only challenged by global forces, but also by localized forces from within. The presence of ethnic diasporas- due to their permeable, overlapping and shifting nature - presents a further challenge to the hegemony of the claim of the nation state over the citizenship, collective identity and loyalty of its inhabitants (Skinner 1999). Migrants are largely impervious to the nation-building strategies of their host governments. Enhanced cultural differentiation and hybridization - in the "host" as well as diasporic communities - has thus become a common feature of society in most nation states (Corcoran 2003). Furthermore, the presence of ethnic strangers in the form of migrants also has complex cultural effects in their host countries. What is often experienced as "cultural invasion", triggers ethnic instincts also in local majorities that leads to the re-evaluation of the value of so-called "national" identities- a process furthermore stimulated by membership of supra-national power blocks. The strategies that follow these instincts are often similar to those of ethnic minorities: separation, self-closure, xenophobic attitudes and strategies to strengthen boundaries and separate and ghettoise foreign elements. The confusion related to former certainties and unquestionable assumptions can furthermore be observed in the right-wing political movements in various European countries (Bauman 1998; Corcoran 1998; Eriksen 1996).

The predicament of the nation state has, on the hand, problematized the role of the media - and especially the national press and public service broadcasting. The special relationship of the press and public service broadcasting to the national identity and nation-building has always been one of its key tenets. According to Habermas (2001), national consciousness as a modern form of social solidarity - as opposed to loyalties to communities shaped by descent, language and history - could indeed be regarded as a product of the development of new forms of communication and especially mass communication. Within the new international environment, governments of nation states usually expect the media to continue its role in the protection and continuance of a sense of national identity amidst global, supranational and sub-national threats. However, the heterogeneous nature of their populations as well as the renewed importance attached to ethnicity and other local identities demand not only tolerance for diversity, but also diversification in the contents, control and ownership of the media. Failure in catering for the cultural and identity needs of various groups and communities within the boundaries of the state, could not only alienate certain groups and individuals, but could also results in the national media to

become increasingly irrelevant. The media and information and communication technologies in particular are, on the other hand, important role-players in the processes that are contributing to the decline of the nation state. Information and communication technologies have furthermore led to devolution of power downwards to the people and the liberation of ethnic and other groups from the constraints of the power of the state and the singular voice of the national press and public broadcasting media. The development of technology has furthermore promoted the development of local media that, in turn, play a vital role in the strengthening of these identities and maintaining the links between Diasporas and their communities of origin. The conclusion can be drawn that, due to the contradictory forces of globalization and localization, the two-pronged strategy of nation-building has become largely unrealistic; less eagerly sought; regarded as undesirable by significant sections of the populations of heterogeneous states; and unlikely to succeed. As the existential security offered by the state has been shattered; the old identity stories that have replenished a sense of belongingness in the state have largely lost their credibility. As the old certainties and loyalties are swept away, people increasingly seek for new or alternative communities in which they can vest their sense of identity. On the other hand, the normative void left open by the state and state regulation, offers more freedom - freedom that has been seized by both supra-national and global power blocks as well as by ethnic minorities to claim and reclaim the collective identities of the citizens of nation states.

The Supra-national Level

The emergence of a global market and the reduction of trade tariffs and other factors in the way of a free flow of capital, are increasingly forcing nation states to become members of larger regional power blocks in order to be able to be more competitive in the new world economy (Bauman 2001b; Lacarrieu & Raggio 1997). The most well-known of these power blocks are without doubt the European Union. Other examples of regional power blocks are Mercosur (the unity formed by a number of countries in South America), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the newly formed African Union (AU). However, the influences of these power blocks are not restricted to the economy (Schopflin 1997). They also create new power relationships, new forms and hierarchies of power, new forms of social knowledge and information. Apart from the fact that nation states succumb part of their authority and legitimacy to these power blocks, they are also in a position to side-step the governments of nation states and to establish direct connection with sub-national communities and other groups. These power blocks are also increasingly filling the void left by the withering away of the authority and legitimacy of the nation state.

The identity struggles emerging from these regional power blocks furthermore have the potential to restructure and recast regional, national and local power structures and identities. It is almost self-evident that nation states have to share the commitment and loyalty that is the collective identity, of their citizens with these units. Furthermore, many of these power blocks actively strive towards the forging of supra-national identities. European integration has moved through various stages (Delanty 1998; Habermas 2001). The project of European integration started after the end of the Second World War and was viewed as an attempt to ensure peace on the continent, to solve the German problem and to contain the former USSR. At this stage it was believed that integration would enhance the sovereignty of nation states. As the memory of the Second World War faded and the Cold War ended, economic imperatives became paramount within the context of increasing economic globalization. In general, the idea was then to rescue the nation state through co-operation. A second vision of European identification was the federal vision of unification. According to this view Europe is perceived as a cultural and political unity with common historical roots. This vision of Europe can be perceived as the reproduction on a transnational European level of the project of nation state building where the existing nation states are regarded as subordinate to the larger unity. Although the federalist idea has not been very popular, it has been the first to introduce the debate on culture, cultural and symbolic integration and the nature of the European identity in an otherwise culturally deficit project.

A third vision of European integration has evolved since the 1980s. This vision represents, according to Habermas (2001), a new political form that lies somewhere between the federalist model and the model

of co-operation. This model - the product of the increasingly global world order - sees a united Europe not merely as the co-operation of nation states, but more as a regulatory order. The Union is perceived as a functional entity that takes over the dysfunctional aspects of national governance and compensates for the weaknesses of the nation state within the new global environment. However, the uncertainty of the regulatory model has brought the need for a degree of social integration and cultural cohesion - that is of a supra-national European identity - again to the fore. The failure of European integration on certain fronts is furthermore ascribed to issues of social integration and identity. The process of institution-building has furthermore transformed the transnational polity into a social, political and cultural framework that have led to the re-emergence of old questions traditionally associated with the nation state and nation-building: How is social order possible? What is the collective representation of Europe? Who are Europeans and who are not? What is the basis of social integration? What constitutes a European identity and/or a European nation? How can social integration and a supra-national identity be constituted?

Although the need for a cultural dimension for the project of uniting Europe has been voiced, Delanty (1998) voices the opinion that Europe lacks the key elements that usually support national identities: a common language, a shared history and religion, an educational system and a press or media. In his view the only substantial sense of an emerging European identity is emerging around boundaries for the inclusion of Europeans and the exclusion of non-Europeans. The uncertainty regarding internal commonalities, the political vacuum in the institutions of the emerging polity and the lack of a true sense of community are resulting in Europeans inventing an identity based almost exclusively on exclusion. Communication plays a central role in this theory of European integration. According to Habermas, a European-wide public sphere has to be created that is embedded in the context of a freedom-valuing political culture supported by the liberal associational structure of a civil society. This view involves public communication that transcends the boundaries of the various nation states. However, Habermas does not foresee the creation of a European public broadcaster. He holds the opinion that a European public sphere should rather emerge from existing national universes opening to one another, yielding to the interpenetration of mutually translated national communications. A first step would be for national media to cover the substance of relevant controversies in the other countries so that the various national public opinions converge on the same set of issues. Such a communicative democracy or identity, or “discursive democracy” as Habermas prefers, is not located in the state or an ethnic or cultural community, but in the discursive spaces of civil society.

Another suggestion by Castells (1998) is based on the idea of the network society. The network society does not have a center, but consists of nodes that may be of different sizes and can be linked by asymmetrical relationships in the network. A network is furthermore an open structure that expands in different directions. It is not a functionally integrated body with a central principle of organization. The distinctive feature is that it is forming through the global diffusion of information. The network society is thus an information society. Unfortunately Castells does not explain how European integration might be conceived as a network society apart from visualizing European polity as multi-levels of power. However, Delanty (1998) holds the opinion that the notion of the “knowledge society” might be a more appropriate model for social integration in Europe as knowledge has also become a medium for social and cultural experience. He uses the concept “knowledge” to refer to the wider cognitive capacity of a society to interpret itself and to imagine alternatives. The question that arises is whether there is an imaginary dimension to European integration. Delanty furthermore asks the question, seeing that Europe lacks the characteristics of a political or cultural community, whether it should not become a virtual society. A virtual society is not constituted as a system of values but as a discursive framework. The emergence of power blocks therefore brings a new fluidity to regional and local societies that will, in the end, not only reshape the nature of political organization in these regions, but have the potential of recasting the nature of collective identities.

The Global Level

Various analysts point out that the globalization of capital and labor markets, production and consumption, communication, information, technological and cultural flows are posing problems that cannot be resolved within the borders of individual nation states or by means of interstate treaties. Partisans of globalization advocate unconditional subordination of the state and other power blocks to the imperatives of the global market. Habermas (1999) voices the opinion that- similar to supranational units- a global political integration requires a political culture shared by all world citizens in order to act effectively in the new global environment. An important question is consequently whether global nationhood or a world identity is at all possible (McCarthy 1999). The forces associated with globalization- among others the global production and marketing of consumption goods; international information flows disseminated through liberalized media and telecommunication networks; the spread of "global English" - have already resulted in far-reaching global changes within the social, cultural and political spheres. Globalization is consequently more than mere cosmopolitanism as it implies a capacity for global self-reflection and thus for identification with world citizenship and/or total mankind (Frederick 1993; Waters 1995).

The cultural terrain, on the other hand, is characterized by homogenization, that is cultural convergence. The growth of consumer capitalism has brought about a convergence in cultural habits and the spread of hegemonic ideas, lifestyles, popular symbols and other mass cultural products which are marketed by means of superior technology, thus creating a demand for them across the globe. Terms such as "cultural imperialism", "Americanization" and/or "Coca-Colonization" are used to refer to the spread of a hegemonic American-Western consumer culture that is believed by many to gradually supplant and even obliterate local cultures (Tehrani 1999).

Fukuyama challenges the view that the cultural flows of globalization are leading to cultural homogeneity. He holds that the cultural changes associated with globalization are mostly superfluous. Conclusions about increasing cultural homogenization are often made on the worldwide appeal of particular consumer goods that Fukuyama regards as a superficial aspect of culture. The deeper cultural levels of cultural and ethnic identities such as language, religion and race are much more important and change at a much slower rate. In fact, these elements of culture are not easily abandoned. Other analysts point out that global influences do not follow the "hypodermic needle" model. Rather than suppressing local cultures from the top down, they give rise to a complex and ongoing interaction between foreign and local cultural elements in which foreign goods might be taken over in toto, but might also be translated into the local idiom (a process typified as localization), mutate, or mix with local elements (also called hybridization or creolisation) (Tehrani 1999). Giddens (1991) speaks in this regard of global-local dialectic, while the term "interpenetrated globalization" is used by Braman (1996).

On the other hand, Fukuyama agrees that people are becoming more homogeneous in terms of large economic and political institutions and value systems. Tehrani (1999) also mentions that globalization has led to world-scale convergence of legal and ethical principles, the universalization of the discourse on human rights and the spread of democracy as a dominant form of political organization. The emergence of a global civil society in the form of various groups that mobilize on the basis of so-called "global issues" such as nature conservation (e.g., the Greenpeace movement), human rights, feminism and consumer issues. Global mobilization with the aid of technology is based on the belief that these issues concern all inhabitants of the world and should thus be addressed on a global level. Urry (2000) furthermore mentions that, similar to the role that national media and public broadcasters have played in the forging of the "imagined" communities of nation states, the global media flow - and especially global television - are also propagating globalism. The signs are consequently everywhere that the principles of a world society and a global identity could already have taken root.

In contrast to these globalizing trends, the worldwide spread of information and communication technologies appears to strengthen ethnic, cultural and other local identities. It has already been mentioned that these technologies are empowering local communities and ethnic groups in mobilizing against the constraints of the governments of nation states. The revitalization of ethnic and other local identities is illustrated by emerging tendencies in the contents of the very symbol of global media, the

Internet. Against general expectations, the contents of the Internet are becoming more and more diverse. Although English language contents still dominate the web, this is rapidly changing. Technology and particularly the Internet, has furthermore opened various other alternatives for identity formation (Suler 1999, 2000). On the individual level, cyberspace becomes for many individuals a type of a global extension of their intra physic world and a transitional space between themselves and others. This space opens the door for all kinds of fantasies. People can use this space for the exploration of their own identities. They can furthermore assume a variety of identities by changing their age, history, personality, physical appearance and even their gender.

The Internet also offers individuals the opportunity to join virtual communities that transcend time and spatial constraints and enables both individuals and groups to interact and mobilize worldwide on the basis of common interests and life experiences (Suler 2000). Most virtual collectivizes furthermore fulfil the requirements for personal freedom of liberal individualism (Bauman 2001a). Individuals can keep their options open. They have a choice about how much, if any, personal information they want to reveal. Sometimes groups encourage or even require that members assume an imaginary persona. There are normally no strings attached to these groups. People can join and leave at will. Membership is mostly completely subordinate to the whims and needs of the individual. However, the instrumental nature of virtual communities does not allow for continuity and secure identity development. Virtual identities could, in the end, heighten the fear and anxiety of individuals in an ever-changing world.

The globalizing world has also given rise to a new type of individual identity, namely that of the "cosmopolitan" (Bauman 2001b). Cosmopolitans are usually members of the business and professional elite that travel extensively all over the world in the course of their work. They are truly world citizens, often with no permanent address except for the e-mail and the mobile telephone number. They are not defined by any locality; they are fully exterritorial. National boundaries and societal ties are increasingly becoming irrelevant to them. Wherever their travels lead them, they prefer to interact with other globalizers. They live in a socio-cultural bubble which insulates them from the harsher realities of the communities in the countries where they reside. Their lifestyle celebrates one of the distinguishing features of globalization, namely the irrelevance of place.

Conclusion

The contemplation of struggles for identity within the age of globalization brings this conclusion that the term "identity" should be replaced by "identification". Identification implies never-ending, open-ended activities that are always incomplete and never finished. Searching for identity in the current age cannot be regarded as a residue of pre-modern and pre-globalization times. It is a side-effect and by-product of the combination of globalizing, localizing and individualizing forces themselves and their concomitant tensions. They are legitimate offspring and natural companions of the multiple and often contradictory processes associated with globalization. They are in reality the oil that lubricates the wheels of globalization.

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