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# Negotiating Identities:

Developing Adaptive Strategies in an Ever Changing Social Reality

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## **Abstract:**

The present work is an interdisciplinary and theoretical study on the topic of identity and the development of collective consciousness; an investigation of the ways in which people feel about and operate with their identities today. Identities are seen as a process circumscribed by the continuous struggle between the individual need for self-fulfillment and the demands of social structure and collective consciousness. Identities are considered as subjected to constant negotiations that are here assessed through an articulation of theories, perspectives, concepts and categories in order to create a comprehensive examination of this practice of identity.

Globalization, social change, and its consequences over the process of identity construction are the background within which this thesis is grounded. Contemporary Western society – the focus of the study – is a place of broken stability; composed by a system so vast it seems difficult to be experienced as one's own place, but too tightly woven for one to escape from it. Established ways of relating, living, and understanding are challenged; and the conclusion favors the idea that the more tactical character of our everyday lives points towards a further gain in control over it by the individual.

## **Keywords:**

Identity, self, negotiation, interaction, globalization.

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## I - Introduction

### Personal Motivations

The idea behind the present dissertation first began to take shape while I was still conducting my bachelor degree in Brazil. As my studies were distributed across the four main disciplines of anthropology, sociology, psychology and political sciences, it consistently promoted a debate across the lines that sometimes divide these disciplines. At times this interdisciplinarity can be counterproductive because of the disagreements and rivalry that exist between researchers, but on the other hand, it promotes critical thinking, and this will hopefully transpire in the following pages. The topic that will be discussed here revolves around the concept of identity, definitely not a new subject to any of the mentioned disciplines, since many of the most notable scholars of the social sciences have discussed it in some way or another. I believe identity to be such an explored idea because thinking about it takes us back to one of the basic questions humans continuously asks themselves, which is: who are we?

A family background divided between individuals with strong connections to local culture and modes of living and immigrants, has motivated me on a personal level to question the so called sense of belonging in relation to culture, place and family from an early age. Having also both my parents working as mental health professionals drawn me to questions about self-consciousness and social interaction, and I believe these to be the reasons inspiring me to study social sciences and identity issues. In my first few months in university I became acquainted with the work of sociologist Georg Simmel, “*The Metropolis and Mental Life*” (1903), for me a compelling analysis of the transformations of the mind caused by the life in large modern cities.

“The deepest problems of modern life flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of the historical heritage and the external culture and technique of life” (Simmel, 1903: 324).

For me as a freshman student, this ‘resistance’ performed by individuals to avoid being leveled down or swallowed by culture and society while still depending entirely on them was the most interesting of questions to look at, and nine years later it still is. Mainly a modern Western cultural phenomenon, this strong duality of the individual in regards to his identity became a

widely discussed topic thanks to a so called separation between that which is individual and that which is shared and social. To divide the individual in such a manner is of course more of a conceptual formulation - as there is no human existence outside of social life - but to think about human life in this way is to me evidence that there is today an ambivalence in the way humans experience their identities and their lives. According to some, this feeling of separation is now growing, and these ‘two sides’ of every person are becoming mutually exclusive.

Another author that inspired the shaping of my ideas was sociologist Norbert Elias. Three years before his death in 1990, he concluded a book of essays that he had started some fifty years before with the topic of individual vs. society. In his last essay, he stated that, “At present the two concepts ‘individual’ and ‘social’ have connotations that suggest they are being used to point not merely to differences but to an antithesis”, (Elias, 1987: 155).

Today, the idea of individuality manifests the autonomy we have as independent entities - an expression of our differences from others - while what we share and have in common with others is understood as the social aspects of our selves. It appears to be a tendency and characteristic of more developed societies to have the differences between these constructs accentuated and to have that which is considered individual hold as more valuable. The conflict resulting from this internal dialog within individuals, sometimes labeled as an identity crisis, is the motivational background for this thesis work, but this seminal idea has evolved into a somewhat different debate within the context of the present dissertation.

## **Topic and Aims**

During my studies in Sweden I once more had an interdisciplinary framework of study, but this time with the topic of globalization as a guiding concept. It is my opinion that the social changes brought by globalization have altered the conditions and capacities for human action and interaction; hence, one of the principal questions sustaining the discussions present here is how to make sense of our own lives, considering that we are standing on new grounds.

This paper is comprised by discussions upon the nature of identity and the dynamics of social interaction within modern Western societies. As sociologist Craig Calhoun argued (1991), we must make sense of our own lives because we are not only aware of ourselves but we matter to ourselves in very basic ways. There is a growing need in the West for individuals to

understand and make sense of their lives, and for that reason large sections of the present paper are dedicated to discussions regarding the knowledge we as individuals have of ourselves and how we manage and operate with this knowledge on our daily lives.

The current Western model of person places individuals in a position of responsibility in regards to achieving and maintaining social order; this order therefore, becomes dependent on our individual capacity to equilibrate personal needs and inclinations with the demands of the social whole. This is nevertheless a misleading conundrum because personal satisfaction and social equilibrium are only possible together. People can only feel satisfied with their personal lives by living in a social structure with low levels of tension and disturbance, and such a communal life would only be possible if individuals experience a fulfilling life. So understanding the relationship between individual and society is not easy, and as a first step it requires the understanding of how individuals structure and manage their identities; this is of course a process that happens continuously across our life spans and as I will soon argue, always in an interactional and negotiated manner.

A few distinct but complementary aims are to be fulfilled along the present paper. First and foremost the aim here is to assemble a comprehensive picture of what is being debated on the topic of identity today. To achieve that I will construct a chronology of the idea of identity and then elaborate more extensively on its current condition and on social change in a variety of levels. Identity is always a construction, and as such, it must be looked at by means of the processes it entails, so another aim is to answer to an examination about the process of identity. Therefore, we must think about culture, social structures, and also individual psychology. The present dissertation is a multidisciplinary exercise on theoretical argumentation and no field work is involved. The reader must see the present paper as a moment of conversation between perspectives in search of a working knowledge, one that is aware of the subjective nature of research as well as of its richness and complexity.

Traditionally, Western social sciences have explained an individual's identity as a consequence of social arrangements, but I will strive here for an argumentation that sets off from the individual, and then move up to networks and social structures. My intention is not to disprove the importance of culture and society but to emphasize the complex manner in which individuals and societies relate to one another. I want to privilege the individual and its

experiences because I believe that the sciences of society have reduced its diversity, singularity and complexity.

Some questions that are going to be considered across this paper are: How is the Western idea of identity and self peculiar? Why do individuals experience internal conflicts in regards to their identities today? What is a negotiated identity? How do we define ourselves in face of others? How does the relationship between I, We and context take place? How can we as individuals increase our chances to be more psychosocially competent? What are the changes taking place in regards to our roles as individuals and members of socio-cultural groups? How do we achieve coherence and personal continuity in our lives today? What are the active psychosocial devices operating when we interact with other individuals?

### **Guidelines and Disposition**

It is not an ambition of this paper to address the distinctions between categories such as identity, self, selfhood, and roles. These are divisions which are difficult to sustain when employing an interdisciplinary perspective and while bringing into play a large number of sources, because these concepts are used without uniformity and at times indiscriminately. I will use these concepts in the same fashion as the authors I discuss – in the moment I discuss them - and therefore they will have an interchangeable use across the whole of the paper. Consequently, I do not conceptualize, define, or articulate these notions further than what is necessary to the understanding of the topic in hand. Instead, the connection between authors and theories present here is done through the overall ideas of globalization, social change and the basic tension all humans carry within, which is; between a need for validation and similarity with others and the opposing necessity for individuation and uniqueness. I used self and identity together in the title of the chapters and along the paper to avoid confusion, as I understand them as almost synonyms.

Along the discussions developed in here there will be a constant sharing of elements from different perspectives of social theory. The contextual framework of anthropology, a discussion about postmodernism, marked influences from symbolic interactionism and social constructionism, but most of all, there will be a focus on socio-psychological theory systems and an inspiration from configurational sociology. This might appear like a confusing manner upon

which to deal with a thesis structure but I believe this to be the most fruitful way to discuss identity issues because assuming a rigid methodological stance or strict theoretical positioning would limit and impoverish the debate. In general terms, I assume as my unit of investigation humans and their networks with the intention of removing the traditional barriers between micro and macro approaches so that actions are not separated from actors and the causal links between individuals and the web of society can therefore be looked at more effectively. Hopefully, at the end of this account I will have achieved a better understanding of identity in practice. If the new forms of practicing our everyday lives in the developed West have created more complex identities, it did so in a conditional association with ideologies and social structures that have a very unstable character; therefore, old approaches to these new problems are not the most adequate way to face them.

This constant movement across the disciplines and theories involved in the debate over identity have made evident to me the lack of interaction between them. Not because the disciplines do not discuss similar topics, but exactly because they do just that, but without a real integration of ideas and concepts. This was a constant challenge I had to deal with; one example was the already mentioned concept anarchy. I will therefore try now to provide a small rationale to be followed by explaining the disposition of the paper and its arguments.

The main body of this thesis dissertation is divided into four chapters. After the introduction, the first chapter begins by describing some important social and historical developments that brought about the current Western notion of self and identity. It then moves into positioning this particular Western phenomenon in perspective, by contextualizing and comparing it to other such constructs and by describing particularly relevant cultural dimensions and characteristics of it. The following chapter engages some particularities of the current nature of self and identity in the West. It does so by both further describing its distinguishing attributes and also setting the stage of present day Western society. This implies the discussion of concepts and notions such as human agency, modernity and post-modernity, globalization, and ethnicity, among others. The fourth chapter deals specifically with the central idea of negotiating identities. At first there is an exposition of the field of intercultural communication, a set of ideas I believe to be of great value because I see our ability to effectively communicate as essential in the debate about identity. The argument then moves into defining the concept of identity negotiation, a

basic premise underpinning most of the discussions performed across this paper. The last chapter of the main body focuses again on present developments of self and identity, but this time with a particular emphasis on the concept of role and role relationships. In there I finalize my account of late modern changes on the topic of self and identity by offering a perspective that merges ideas about the conditions for constructing social interactions today with the consequences of such circumstances for the identities of people.

### **Standpoint**

Scientific disciplines strive towards order, and this order is sustained by pre-assumptions and political aims as much as by anything else. As Michel Foucault stated “The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an ‘ideological’ representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called ‘discipline’”, (Foucault, 1971: 194). I believe it is crucial to realize that science created an aversion to moral discourse that is to blame for inadequate understandings of identity and human agency. “We cannot have an identity without an orientation in moral space”, (Calhoun, 1991: 6), and since the moral order we are subjected to is the direct consequence of social causes, they should be included as a subject of social-scientific research, something I believe to have been done insufficiently in the social sciences. I will not go deep into a discussion about moral order but I will at times assume moral stands because we have to position our values in its proper place; as important motivational forces and a reflection of the social world. That is why I sometimes make my argumentation not only as an element of research but also as part of a field of practice that should encourage awareness and personal development; although I should make it clear that my aim here is not to write a self-help study.

So why is identity relevant today? Because our social environment is going through changes that stimulate people’s self-focused attention to a higher degree, and people think of themselves in terms of identities. I believe that this focus on oneself brings about a gain in self-knowledge and an enhanced emotional capacity, and as a consequence, changes in identity also occur at all levels. All this changes entail, among other things, a higher potential to control and modify our identities and this is indicative of a moment in time when identities gained a more negotiated character. So let us start to see how this practice of identity comes through on our daily lives.

## **II – Pre-contemporary Developments of Self and Identity**

### **The Notion of a Personal Life**

“We know ourselves by observing how we fit into the fabric of social relationships and how others react to us” – George Herbert Mead.

The experience of individuality, understood as the subjective feeling of being in control over one's own choices, is today novel in many ways. People now conduct their lives based on personal choices, rather than having their activities and identities determined out of group necessity. Individuals used to primarily view their existence as conditional to the larger social whole, but today this is changing. The ideas of individual rights, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, only emerged in the West as common ideals in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, and even today the majority of the world continues to be ruled by collective demands, where concepts such as personal life, personal fulfillment, self-development and private life are unaffordable luxuries, and in fact foreign conceptualizations of an individual's existence. But the peculiar and recent idea that an *I* could exist independently from a *We* seems to be gaining strength.

The current notion of a personal life is in part a creation of modern Western society. Pre-modern cultures do not possess a developed sense of a distinct individuality, and people's sense of self and purpose are seen as a manifestation of their commitment and integration to higher powers, mainly, but not limited, to religion. Early modern European history is characterized by many major events that brought multiple changes to people's lives; amongst them was the idea that every person has a unique core self.

This ‘independency’ from others came to be represented in the life one lived, and at first, conferred outstanding importance to an individual's occupation as a source of his identity. Contrastingly, in late modern times people have come to think of their personal lives as something distinct from their work. A person's life is now dedicated to experiencing and to personal development, and this is mostly done on our time off work. One's personal life recently became interconnected with the way we dress, the food we eat, our education, hobbies, and cultural interests. It is common now for individuals to outline schemes and goals for their lives and separate them into distinct categories, such as their career, their family life, intellectual life, spiritual life, etc. Thanks to this strengthen of individuality, people in developed societies live

more complex lives and are more and more defined by the lifestyle they choose to adopt. These lifestyles become a representation of their identity, or we might simply say they become their identity.

The debate about the extent of control an individual has over his own choices is controversial, nevertheless it is generally accepted that human beings enjoy now an ever greater capacity for free will. Many contemporary social scientists such as Zygmunt Bauman, Ulrich Beck, and Anthony Giddens have developed new concepts and terms in the attempt to describe the current state of highly developed present day societies; examples are late modernity, liquid modernity, risk society and reflexive modernization. Giddens (1991) for example, says that in this post-traditional order, self-identity has become a reflexive exercise, not a quality of a moment, but an account of a person's life. Our free will is, notwithstanding, still influenced in significant ways by the social environment. Personal choices still largely rely on moral stands, family and social principles, one's religious beliefs, nationality and, cultural background. Today we can also include in this list, developments in fashion and technology.

Human action in everyday life is not a blind execution of rules, but neither a conscious execution of an individual plan or project. In light of this, how do the personal and the collective selves relate to each other and to the social environment? And how are identities being formed and transformed today?

### **A Short Story upon the Notion of Self as Told in the West**

“The individual achieves selfhood at that point at which he first begins to act towards himself in more or less the same fashion in which he acts towards other people” (McCall and Simmons, 1978: 52).

Before approaching the complex constructs of self and identity in contemporary society it is worthwhile to have a brief look over its historical development. Considered here are only the elements of significance for the purpose of this paper, therefore this account is very selective and cannot be interpreted as an endeavor to describe the entire historical development of such concepts. This as a preamble to a more detailed examination of the understandings of the self and identity in current Western context and it is largely based on anthropologist Charles Lindholm (2001) description.

Saint Augustine (354–430AD) is largely considered the first Western thinker to write about life as an ongoing development on the part of every individual; idea that seems unsurprising today but was nevertheless quite revolutionary at his time. A fundamental figure in the development and establishment of Western Christianity, Saint Augustine ideas can also be considered as an early day's version of notions that came to serve as basis for some fundamental modern principles. The assumption that all individuals are of equal importance and in possession of some natural rights was another contribution to an incipient notion of an essence to every individual, or a peculiar self. Personal liberty and pursue of happiness are examples of 'descendants' of such ideas and can be seen as the basis for our modern states, as well as moral pillars of our societies. These ideas were, at the time of Saint Augustine, obviously of a somewhat different character, since his conception of individual could not be formulated in separation from God and church, and also because the classification of who comes under the category of individual is one that changes through time (some being considered inferior in substance, like, in different historical moments, were the non-Romans, Jews, and Africans), nevertheless, his ideas are by many seen as the starting point for the modern notion of self and individual. In sum, they proclaim that all people are of equal substance and value, and life is an ongoing project emanating, but also controlled, by this essence.

This is not to say that ancient thinkers, such as the Greeks, did not contribute to the development of our modern notion of self. Ideas such as Plato's hierarchical distinction between our reason and our emotions can also be seen as key elements. The precedence of a rationale ruling over the chaos of passions and the uncertainty of fate contributed to Augustine's formulations about our progressive development of individual lives, but only through him the modern self started to take shape. A bit ironic, to say the least, is placing Saint Augustine as an instigator of our modern conception of the self, since he is mostly known as a theological figure in the church that can be considered one of the major inhibitors of the further establishment of a free understanding of self for nearly one thousand years. Modern historian Thomas Cahill has named him the last classical and, first medieval man. He remains to this day a great influence on modern Western philosophy.

Passed the long period of the Middle Ages, during which the self was obliterated by systems of servitude, it was in the Renaissance era that the idea of the development of the self, or

as today's commonly held self-development, became an absolute value in itself, and the individual was envisioned for the first time as a free entity; God was out of the picture. Many philosophers were involved in the debate over the self and there is no need here, as well as no space, to go into details about each specific work. What should be highlighted though is that at the core of their ideas was the dissociation of the notion of self from the entity of God. This is not to say, like Nietzsche did, that God was dead. God is still pretty much alive and a defining force in people's lives. But the implication of removing the sacred external from the perception of the individual enabled people to perceive the self as something at their disposal, serving one's interests, and no longer a toy in the hands of higher forces; the sacredness now came from within. As Max Weber's protestant ethics started to play center stage and conduct our Western societies to a capitalistic spirit, we witness the demise of the primacy of the collective, and the utter domination of individualism in the development of these societies.

These events are concomitant with the development of the scientific method as the main human device to interpret the world and with the rise of exponential technological advances and industrialization. As for the self, philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau very well expressed the new (but not so new after all, as we have seen it in Saint Augustine's writings already) found necessity for free and full expression of one's 'essential nature'. This novel force was followed by such events as the American and French revolutions, and the abolishment of slavery. Simultaneously, thinkers like Jeremy Bentham started to conceptualize men as an entity driven by the desire to gain pleasure and avoid pain; a concept that can be seen as over simplistic but symptomatic of a self ever further conceptualized as particular and separated from others.

Here we reach a crucial moment in time for we witness the development of the sciences of psychology, sociology and anthropology, which will play significant roles in both the development of the idea of self and in its study as a concrete phenomenon. Sigmund Freud is a major influence in the subsequent debate over the self, so we end this brief account with his arrival.

### **The Self in the West and the Self for the Rest**

"By 'self' we mean the fundamental manner in which reality is subjectively experienced" (Lindholm, 2001: 216).

The concept of self raises a great deal of controversy, not only by reason of the multiplicity of different definitions and uses for it in scientific publications but also because the models of self employed in different cultures vary importantly. By models of self I mean the understandings people have of themselves as individuals; and as simply put in the above quotation, there are as many constructions of self as there are manners in which to experience and interpret reality.

In the disciplines concerned with issues about self and identity there is today a popular perception that an identity crisis of some sort is taking place in the West, and due to globalization, in other parts of the world as well. I here assume the position that this notion of identity crisis emerges primarily from an interpretation of the fact that today there is a slow but steady distancing from a singular and circumscribed model of self and the adoption of a more wide-ranging perspective upon its limits. The growing necessity, understanding, and acceptance of a multiplicity of identities ‘cohabiting’ every individual does not however obliterate the experiential reality of the individual as a unique entity, hence the idea of crisis; but regardless of the fact that we are indeed single beings, people are taking on more complex, diverse and, mutable identities on their daily lives. The emotional response interpreted as an identity crisis is in my opinion the result of the first stages of a growing awareness of this complexification that comes off as uncertainty and anxiety, but we will look into it with more details soon.

In spite of the fact that many differences exist within a single culture, for the purpose of achieving a comprehensive and systematic study of the perceptions and behaviors of people on the topic of self and identity there is a necessity for a certain amount of generalization. The Western approach on the topic of self is commonly understood as leaning towards a complete autonomy and internal logic of the individual, called selfhood, but there are other models of self in the realm of human cultures, and recognizing these differences might improve our understanding of current events. The first step is to situate the Western model in perspective to other possible self-constructs humans have devised. In different societies identity is intertwined in varying degrees with the social context and the modern Western formulation of self can be considered the exception rather than the rule when it comes to identity in the realm of human cultures.

“The western conception of the person is a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively both against other such wholes and against a social and natural background is, however incorrigible it may seem to us, a rather peculiar idea within the context of the world cultures” (Geertz, 1985: 59).

Clifford Geertz description has been criticized and I will address those critiques, but I believe his account to be a relevant characterization that gains even further relevance if we compare it with what is most often being said about Western societies today. Late-modernity, post-modernity, or whatever other label used to describe the current state of Western society is, for the most part, described as a direct opposite of Geertz’s interpretation of the Western person; unstable, plural, multiple and, integrationist. So if both analyses are supported by substantial features of our current social existence, how is it possible for them to coexist? As members of cultural and social groups we internalize the world views we are subordinated to and as a consequence repress alternatives to it. Today we live under the influence of powerful forces of change, but during many centuries Western societies repressed the idea of fluid and diverse modes of living by taking rigidity and internal coherence as highest purposes of life. The current period of intense change in social arrangements brought about readjustments in the experience of identity and self; and as Freud’s widely accepted proposition claimed, that which is repressed never vanishes. So the answer to this question is that the coexistence of this opposing analysis reflects one of the many paradoxes of contemporary society.

Individual constructs about identity are always dependent on the underlying organizational systems which form the building blocks of cultures and societies, and the latter needs to change so that changes occur on the former. The idea of a new society in which all individuals are free to formulate their own selves and the simple combination between every individual conception would compose an integrated and functional social structure is an underestimation of the mechanisms that create standards of behavior and thought. To further clarify this point, we can think of the concept of social deviance in similar ways as Michel Foucault (1975). Despite an intrinsic difficulty over problematizing the matter, social deviance does not have its origins in inherent temperamental differences of individuals. Abnormality is a

prerequisite to the definition of what normal is, and both are manufactured by society for reasons of social control. This becomes clear when performing cross-cultural comparison and realizing that the meanings of normality and deviance, as well as the manner in which they are addressed by the group, differ widely both in degree and conception from place to place. What is now labeled as mental illness in the West could easily be interpreted as social deviance somewhere else, and many cultures interpret the same collection of ‘symptoms’ as, for example, a supernatural possession. In the West the deviants are sometimes incarcerated or treated with medication and therapy because their behavior is interpreted as a psychological disorder resulting from a disease of the body. But we could as easily face deviance as a personal expression of a social problem and, therefore, confront it with social interventions instead of personal ones. Why, for example, is the problem of drug addiction dealt with as a personal phenomenon? It could as easily be seen as a social disturbance. This overemphasis on inner emotional states typical of the current Western model predisposes us to underemphasize the relevance of the social world and that is one of the reasons why I included here the debate surrounding the definition of self in relation to the non-western world.

So what can we learn from an anthropology of the self? First, that contemporary perception about the other cannot be organized into a single comprehensive typification because the richness of human creativity in the realm of culture cannot be accounted for within a singular logic. In addition, a cross-cultural analysis concerning people’s conceptions of person and ideas about the self would have to address multiple levels of human life. Culture, society, and personal experiences provide the basic elements of a personality, which may be roughly defined as the more stable components of a person’s psyche, but to perform studies that reach into the perceptions of the other, one needs to embrace relativism in the largest sense of the term. This attitude is nevertheless extremely difficult to attain because in trying to understand the vision of others, the researcher always takes for granted categories that are conditioned by the visions he has of himself. The scientific method adopted in the West is an example of a system of thought particular to Western culture and not accepted or understood by other groups. Therefore, the intention to think in an intercultural manner is always conditioned by our own partial understandings.

In the past, anthropology made attempts to include other cultural groups in their constructed view about a world scheme. That scheme represented the general Western perspective about human development and was considerably more representative of the Western project than of non-western arrangements. One example is the idea that simpler communities are in the early stages of a development path in which the West is the epitome. Today social sciences try to avoid attempts to reduce cultural differences to a universal socio-cultural development; the primary goal now is not to substantiate Western development, but to create understandings of non-westerns in their own originality. Anthropologists began to acknowledge the existence of different logics and stopped seeing them as a sign of inferiority; but we are not fully liberated from the rationale that societies progress in stages of increasing development. This is now accompanied by elements that complicate the appreciation of alternative logics even further because while globalization brings the other closer, this apparent approximation manifest itself as an intensification of the difficulty in grasping their perception and ideas about self and identity. In the past, it was easy to proclaim an understanding of others and be done with it, but now there is a substantial uncertainty because we see the complexity of the task we have ahead of us.

Anthropological studies of others on the topic of self are marked by a number of significant problems. To begin with, there has been an essentialization and totalization of cultures as Western and non-western, regardless of the internal variety they might contain. This has lead to a polarization between the West and the rest that stimulates a vision of them as being opposite extremes in analysis of particular cultural dimensions such as individualism and collectivism. As a consequence, both the West and the rest are regarded as homogeneous and rigid (what they are not), and once more, the global interconnections pushing towards an approximation between cultures complicate the matter even further. Globalization involves complex and tense social processes and cultural dichotomies are oversimplifying by nature and cannot be used carelessly to understand globalization processes. I believe that a more adequate proposition would be to conceptualize cultures as being located along a continuum, where the cultural dimensions represented in these dichotomies coexist within cultures and within individuals in varying degrees. So West and rest are not two sides of a same coin.

But recognizing the partial inadequacy of certain methodological practices does not rule out the use of a classificatory approach to cultural comparison. This is why the West/rest dichotomy is used here. Working with the bearings of such conceptual divisions (no matter how temporary or artificial) has some benefits, and that is why it is still largely adopted by academics; self-views are the product of a collective imagination largely dependent on culture, and we must be able to qualitatively compare some of these different cultural constructs. By doing this, we will make it possible for these classifications to explain some of the reasons why people give more weight and priority to a set of particular values over others, and why they organize their lives in certain ways. On the subject of self-conception, there is a recurrence of certain modes of social thought. An example is the difference between a model of self that sees the individual as strongly connected to the social context and perceived as more rigid and undifferentiated, and another that socialize individuals in ways to promote high levels of autonomy and the notion of freedom of choice. Once again these differences have to be understood as in a continuum but can be seen as a major difference between non-western and Western models.

So the very notion of self in the West is permeated by ideas of introspection and individuality not present in other places. I have already named this particular notion of a person as selfhood and a synonym to it is personhood. The concept of personhood has to be understood as a Western category, both experienced and conceptualized in a particular way in the West; therefore it should always be approached with the proper contextualization. The study of personhood aims at uncovering what defines being a person for the people under examination, but Western academics attempted to do that by applying to others our own Western categories, which are often inadequate. Outside Western culture, the idea of person might exclude something we in the West dub as self and might include a series of categories that are not of any relevance to the Western notion.

### **Collectivistic and Individualistic Cultures**

The survival of people's identities rests not only in their own hands but in the hands of others" (Swann and Bosson, 2006: 1).

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the current processes of identity formation and identity negotiation we need to further understand the conceptual division between collectivistic and individualistic cultures.

As specified by psychology professor and author Heidi Keller (2002), there are typically an independent construal of the self, that emphasize unique personal attributes and independence (commonly identified with the West); and an interdependent construal, where individuals understand themselves as fundamentally connected and dependent on others (linked to the whole of the non-western world). These two groups differ over the extent to which they are based upon predominantly "self-regarding" (individualistic) or "other-regarding" (group-oriented) behaviors. As mentioned before, these are ideal type constructs and concrete cases are never on the extremities of such descriptions, but the implications of these cultural-psychological predispositions do hold significant influence over social behavior.

Individualistic cultures embrace autonomy, individual freedom and personal control; external causes for behavior are popularly regarded as threats to one's identity. For collectivists the opposite is true, their sense of belonging and connection with others is the essential element in their means of identification. One of the things globalization does today is to bring into these reasonably coherent social-cultural structures a multitude of unfamiliar social forces that are incompatible with the pre-established ways of relating of the group. What emerges from this encounter is a great advance of internal conflicts for most individuals. This is due to an inconsistency between their visualization of themselves as members of that group, and the new social expectations connected to the imported forms. And what are some of the values in conflict today? The ideas of liberal individualism disapprove of collectivism because collectivism implies diminution of freedom and suppression of individuality and diversity by insisting upon common social ideals and identities, but the widespread intensification of individualism is altering structures of socialization in ways that people are becoming unsure of their roles and obligations as members of their communities.

This division between frames of mind that essentially refers to our roles as members of our societies is important in this paper because, "understanding the interplay between people's self-views and their expectancies about one another seems to represent a key step in developing a comprehensive theory of the making of minds", (Swann, 2005: 11). The purpose of this paper is not as grand as to formulate such a theory but to only make a point about the relevance of the processes of self-defining, other-defining, and the interplay of identities on our current post-traditional societies.

## **Psychological Anthropology and the Search for a True Self**

“Culture is nothing but a way to describe human behavior” (Barth, 1969: 9).

The field of psychological anthropology theorizes about the influence culture has on human character; or in other words, the relative power of nurture versus nature. Many schools of thought exist in this interdisciplinary subfield of anthropology and they all have slightly different approaches on how to combine psychology and anthropology in order to study the interactions between mental and cultural processes. The argument supporting the combination of methods such as psychoanalysis with the larger theory system of anthropology is that the first can provide us with ways of understanding the more profound tensions of our society, while the latter give us the required contextual framework we need as foundation (Lindholm, 2001: 118). This paper is comprised by a discussion upon the nature of identity and the dynamics of social interaction, and has therefore, much to profit from a logic arrangement that combine these disciplines.

An important figure in this field, Lindholm (2001) considers psychological anthropology accountable for the analyses of three levels of human experience: first the individual psyche; second the social organization, or institutional structures and authority systems under which we live in; and third the meaning construction, or the symbolic systems and ritual performances that facilitate the connections between the personal and the social levels of experience. We will soon see that these are intrinsic elements on the organization of identity that need to be addressed.

When considering the Western conception of self, Lindholm (2001) placed authenticity as the highest value today in our societies. This search for authenticity within ourselves raises the question of what it means to be truly ourselves. The underlying idea beneath this search for an (alleged) authentic and real self, is that something other than a personal self based on social relations and the confirmation of others exist and should be everyone’s most desired goal; something typical in Western modernity. This search for a ‘true self’ implies that individuals gradually lose connection to the frameworks within which to locate the self and this obviously has psychic costs. In the time Freud treated his patients the most recurrent psychological disorders were by him interpreted as consequences of sexual repression, a cultural phenomena. Psychotherapy today has as one of its primary concerns the treatment of depression, which in some ways may be related to the idea of fragmentation of the self. The shift that took place in the

field of psychology in reference to its subject's afflictions and to some extent in the nature of its interpretation of the human mind can be considered a reflection of a larger change in the social circumstances of modern life. Now that individuals believe to be in charge of creating their identities their main source of anxiety is the feeling of not being able to do that to the full extent of their desires; they cannot find their 'true self'.

The unprecedented potential for human agency and freedom we now have, present as one of its consequences the erosion of previous control systems of understanding and relating. I believe that the current condition of modern Western society is one of isolation and alienation, populated by people that do not feel enough control over their lives, even though this is one of their main objectives. This condition emerges exactly because we now possess an unprecedented malleability in regards to our lives but lack strong social and cultural guidelines. The lack of a strong framework generates a view of society as dependent on the individuals, but not of individuals as also dependent on society. The self becomes the measure to all things, but the absence of a meaningful orientation towards neither the past nor the future creates the experience of a fragmentation of identities. People either experience an uncomfortable sentiment of multiple personalities or, of no personality at all. Ultimately, one preliminary conclusion we might infer at this moment is that social change brings with it the idea and feelings of identity under threat.

The construction of identities is an obsessive problem of modernity; especially the latter period, or last one hundred and fifty years. The notion of a personal life we are entitled and responsible to develop and the opportunity to explore alternatives to selves with diverse lifestyles creates a perpetual self-constructionist dialog and a necessity to legitimize our actions by convincing ourselves as well as others about the assertiveness of our self-made identities. George H. Mead, one of the founding figures of social psychology and a major influence on most of the following authors in the field of identity, postulated that we become individuals when we experience in ourselves the feelings of those who surround us and respond to our actions; hence, self-awareness is what makes self-appraisal possible. Mead interpreted that self-consciousness is a result of identification with others, and concluded that the self develops from a mimetic and dialectical relationship with the outside world. As Lindholm metaphorically set forth, the human soul is a battleground, "Self-consciousness builds upon that existential duality of 'me' and 'not me', and it is the unfolding of this self that ought to be the focus of study", (Lindholm, 2001: 209).

### **III – Contemporary Developments of Self and Identity**

#### **Human Agency and Improvising the Social World**

Social and cultural boundaries are to be considered and respected, but there is also a necessity to consider subjective positions along with culture. This is where human agency comes into the picture. As this paper strives for a theory of identity in practice, the personalized quality rendering identities its element of subjectivity also has to be considered.

Human agency is here understood in the terms defined by historian Ronald Inden as:

“The realized capacity of people to act upon their worlds and not only to know about and give personal or intersubjective significance to it. That capacity is the power of people to act purposively and reflectively, in more or less complex interrelationships with one another, to reiterate and remake the world in which they live, in circumstances where they may consider different courses of action possible and desirable, though not necessarily from the same point of view”  
(Inden, 1990: 23).

Human agency must be a constitutional element on the present perspective upon self and identity because it helps to promote my understanding of them as “outcomes of participation in communities of practice” a notion analogous to identities as “formed in the process of participating in activities organized by figured worlds”, (Holland, Lachicotte Jr, Skinner and Cain, 2001: 57). The process of forming and reforming groups and individuals is for the most part sustained by the cultural materials we have access to, but they are subjectively taken up and reframed by persons and collectives. Agency and improvisation in a socio/cultural perspective is by no means free from limitations, but the idea nevertheless, is that one can improvise upon the cultural resources available in ways that reform subjectivity itself, and consequently change the cultural and social grounding as well. Hence, in the times we live today improvisation is fundamental.

“Improvisations are the sort of impromptu actions that occur when our past, brought to the present as habitus, meets with a particular combination of circumstances and conditions for which we have no set response. Such

improvisations are the openings by which change comes about from generation to generation” (Holland, Lachicotte Jr, Skinner and Cain, 2001: 18).

Allowing agency and improvisation to take a part on the construction of the notion of self and identity further promotes the idea of individuals as ‘authors’ of our cultural and social environment. This is important because individuals are often seen as insignificant in the constitution of the world around them and that is definitely not the case. This ‘authoring’ also includes one’s identities as well as the identities of others around. If we treat identities as a ‘position from which meaning is made’, we can state that this position can be held forth for all of the person’s interactions with other such positions. This dialogism that is in constant operation impels our focus on to the present situation and reassures us of the significance of authoring. The interpersonal relationships we engaged ourselves into on a daily basis are indeed dependent on this constant meaning creation and that is why a continual focus on the present is important in order to achieve stability and coherence in regards to our identities.

Nevertheless, this constant ‘answers’ we give to the world and to others are evidences of the dependency of our identities upon the social relations and material conditions surrounding us, because when changes take place in these conditions and relations new ‘answers’ have to be formulated. The independency permitted to individuals cannot be perceived just as an individual capacity to ‘direct one’s behavior intimately’, but as a potential to ‘produce the means that organize one’s activity’, or the production of the means of personal signification (Holland, Lachicotte Jr, Skinner and Cain, 2001: 57, 189). So agency obviously has its limits because the process of authoring takes place in a social field not controlled by one individual, but by all. This space of authoring is formed outside of us as well as inside. One’s personal agency exists in this space of authoring, and it is the creative force arranging the discourses and practices available to us; but in a time and space defined by others. “Human agency comes through this art of improvisation”, (Holland, Lachicotte Jr, Skinner and Cain, 2001: 210-211, 272).

### **Identity and Individuation**

“Identity is an ongoing dynamic process whereby individuals establish, evaluate, reevaluate and reestablish who they are and are not relative to others in their environments” – Erik Erikson.

While sociologists often use the term identity to describe a social identity (or group membership that defines the individual), psychologists apply it for the description of a personal identity (or the distinctive things that make someone unique). The *I*, or individual, is in essence a process, not a state; this is a process of psychic individuation, or the tendency to become oneself, and it is comprised by both collective and personal elements. While further discussion over social identity will take place latter on this paper, we now give attention to the individual psychological aspects of identity, which relates to self-image, self-esteem, and individuality; concepts that are on the agenda today for being considered the per excellence mode of measuring people's fulfillment and contentment with life.

A common used concept developed in many disciplines as an attempt to grasp the process of formation of a psychological identity is *Individuation*. Individuation might be summarized as the stabilizing of the individual's personality as a being distinct from the general, collective consciousness, even though it must be clearly stated here that this process does not ever reach an end but is active throughout the whole life-span of every person. Obviously this *I*, as a psychological entity, can only be thought in relationship to a *We*, but to some social scientists our current post-traditional societies have reached a stage where these two components of every person appear to be more and more dissociated from one another; could the *I* and the *We* be evolving into conflicting constructs? We will soon go back to this discussion.

What now needs to be described is the context within which this process might be taking place.

### **Modernity, Post-Modernity, and Globalization**

"It might be better to start from outside the individual and work inward than to start inside the individual and work out" (Goffman, 1959: 81).

Two important concepts on the current debate over identity are modernity and post modernity, albeit there are disputes over precise definitions. While 'modern era' describes the historical period succeeding the Middle Ages, 'modernity' refers to social relations associated with the rise of capitalism and the incorporation of principles of rationality into everyday life, as well as a cultural condition characterized by constant change. Anthony Giddens enumerates some characteristics of modernity: "A certain set of attitudes towards the world, the idea of the

world as open to transformation by human intervention; a complex of economic institutions, especially industrial production and a market economy; a certain range of political institutions, including the nation-state and mass democracy”, (Giddens, 1998, pg. 94).

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2000) interprets the development of modernity in Europe in a parallel with the social contract theory: a tradeoff between a level of freedom in order to receive the benefits of increased individual security. Bauman’s theory on modernity emphasizes the removing of unknowns and uncertainties, control over nature, hierarchical bureaucracy, rules, regulations, and categorization, all in the name of security and stability. This scenario can be seen as the birth place of the modern individual and where the process of individuation takes place. However, the pace of change is today faster than ever and many scholars argue upon the development of a new paradigm for our societies where modernity has given place to a post-modern world.

There are today three principal conceptualizations upon the nature of contemporary society. First, there are those who downplay the importance of the changes taking place and emphasize continuity, according to them we would still be living under the influence of modernity and its principles. Second are the one’s arguing in the lines of a distinct phase that, notwithstanding, would still be a part of modernity but with some important differences. And third are the theorists assuming the position that society has moved into a novel and distinct phase; a post-modern stage. The arguments upon which this paper is grounded emerge from the assumption that enough changes are taking place in our social environment as to influence our identities. We go into the nature of these changes insofar as they are relevant for the topic addressed here and, therefore, there is no need for further positioning in regards to the character of the current phase of contemporary society. It is enough to say that what is addressed here refers to events taking place in highly developed current societies that are undergoing significant reshaping.

In his book “*Liquid Modernity*”, Bauman assumed the position that a shift had taken place in the latter half of the 20th century, although he does not believe we have come to live in post-modern times. In a reverse move of the traditional understanding of the contract theory he argues that now security was given up in favor of an increase in freedom; to purchase, to consume, and to enjoy life; creating unprecedented opportunities for individual life pursuits and

culminating in a series of challenges never before encountered. He also argued that social forms and institutions no longer have enough time to solidify and cannot serve as frames of reference for human action and long-term life plans, so individuals have to find other ways to organize their lives. Such fragmented lives require individuals to be flexible and adaptable; there is a necessity to be constantly ready and willing to change tactics at short notice, to abandon commitments and loyalties without regret, and to pursue new opportunities according to their current availability. This can be described as a condition of endemic uncertainty. Bauman calls this liquid modernity, as opposed to the previous more solid or rigid, modernity, and maintains that globalization is disseminating these tendencies around the world as values to be adopted. I also believe this to be the case.

Hence, identity is also in a moment of readjustment; more fluid and unstable. We are increasingly free to choose what we want to do and who we want to be, but these increased freedom of choice can be both liberating and troubling. Liberating in the sense of increasing the chances of one's self-realization, and troubling because of increased emotional distress, insecurity, and time needed to analyze the available choices and minimize risk of which we are increasingly aware. While in earlier and more traditional societies we would be provided with examples to follow, in the post-traditional society we do not have them so clearly given. Anthony Giddens (1991) argues that in the post-traditional order, self-identity is not inherited or static; it rather became a reflexive project – an endeavor that we continuously work and reflect on. Identity is not a set of observable characteristics of a moment, but becomes an account of a person's life that everyone is responsible to write. Processes of identity formation are no longer clear and neither are our roles as individuals in society; these appear to be fundamental features of contemporary life. Dutch author Nico Vink defines life today as “a project of self-realization”, (Vink, 2001:13).

Due to these novel cultural and social conditions we live under, processes of negotiation between individuals have gained an ever greater significance. Our identities also gain a negotiated element, so let us look further into the environment in which we negotiate our identities today.

## **Mass Media and Popular Culture**

“Postmodernism describes the emergence of a society in which the mass media and popular culture are the most important and powerful institutions, and control and shape all other types of social relationships. They dominate our sense of reality, defining the world and us” (Strinati, 2004: 211).

The notion embraced in the above quotation that postmodernism obliterates the traditional producers of identity and that popular culture and mass media are now the main sources for the formation of collective and personal identities can be seen as somewhat radical. Identities have always been changing, in current times these changes are (just) more intense and constant. Nevertheless, there is no denying that the new trans-national communities that we take part in are largely defined by a mass mediated experience and by the spread of a so called worldwide popular culture, therefore they do indeed become relevant to understand changes in identity.

Professor of Global Media and Communications Terhi Rantanen argues that, “Our world is becoming senseless to many because, for the first time in modern history, we are relatively without place: we are part of a global world. Many scholars have referred to this as an identity crisis”, (Rantanen, 2005: 54). The connection between identity and place is definitely becoming weaker, and maybe people are indeed becoming ‘placeless’, as defined by Canadian geographer Edward Relph (1976). The emotional feeling of having roots cannot exist without a connection to a specific place, or a sense of belonging, and identity is by many equated with this idea of roots, or background. As expressed by Vink (2001) our identities are not organized anymore by our participation in specific territories, but by our membership in trans-national communities of consumers.

Bauman’s use of the definition of an “era of time/space compression” cannot be more appropriate. Time-space compression refers to movement and communication across space and our experience of it. Today, social relations are being geographically extended and there is a speeding up of such movements. This is commonly viewed as a result of technological developments and the increasing internationalization of capital, so as Bauman (1998) contended,

the well off now lives in time, since distances are travelled virtually instantaneously, while the not so fortunate are still living in space, and bounded by it.

I do not uphold here the argument that place and community are intrinsically connected since this would be an idealization of simpler communities where homogeneity and coherence were supposedly predominant and always contained by boundaries, and it would be also an exaggeration of today's fragmentation and disruption. But the widespread perception of a lack in coherence we witness today is nevertheless a sign of an increase of this spatial disruption. Places and connections between them are an important aspect in understanding why some people now feel that they are losing their identities. Two of the greatest 'villains' our societies are facing today are the processes of Westernization (sometimes called Americanization), and the commodification of cultural products. These two events are impinging on people an impression of loss in the sense of belonging. It is not unusual now to hear people saying they do not feel they belong where they are, or to the place they come from, and the 'purchase' of foreign cultural products becomes their way to acquire an identity from a distant but maybe more fulfilling place. This is an example of globalization increasing differentiation among individuals of a same community.

So when it comes to mass media and popular culture globalization is seen through negative lenses; leading to the development of a global mass culture devoted to consumerism and identified as responsible for a widespread identity crisis. In the era of time/space compression, communication technologies and mass mediation (the two defining elements of globalization) are to be blamed for: dictated standardized values, dictated mass culture, and the "loss of close, intimate and thus genuine relationships, replaced by new mass-mediated experiences", (Rantanen, 2005: 11). As the more stable and confident identities of past times give place to the problems and confusions of the contemporary postmodern world, competing identities and cultural fragmentation are opening the doors for advertising merchants and American television to take-over large parts of the public space and the foundations of cultural and personal identities. It appears we have in fact created a vicious cycle in which media feeds and is fed by our identity conflicts. The new giant transnational corporations and the political institutions of neo-liberalism could also be - and are by some - blamed for all this as well, but the relevance of the media in relation to identity issues make it more pertinent for us at this moment.

But not all is obliterated by this massification process. As stated by sociologist Wendy Griswold, people still share meanings with one another along the networks that exist in the multiple communities we now inhabit. “Communities, whether relational or spatial, still collectively represent themselves through patterns of meanings embodied in symbols, meanings that shape attitudes and actions”, (Griswold, 2008: 180). According to her, cultures are asserted through collective identities, a collective production of culture, and therefore we are not at the complete and total mercy of the media conglomerates that feed us American pop culture.

At the same time that our sense of self emerges from the interaction with others so does culture, and the culture of mass mediated experience is constantly reinterpreted in diverse ways. But challenges to identity are not only brought by recent events, they may also be caused by things that have always been significant.

### **Ethnic Boundaries and Social Identities**

“Intercultural persons are extensions of cultural-selves whose qualities lie in their openness to cultural others, their willingness to negotiate differences, the ability to reach intercultural agreements, the ability to integrate diverse cultural elements, as well as the potential to achieve identity extension and mutual growth” (Xiao-Dong Dai, 2009: 3).

While addressing issues of identity, ethnicity has always been a point of high relevancy, but the impact of globalization in configuring a global system of sorts, prompt us to reconsider this once crucial parameter. Anthropologist Fredrik Barth has argued that ethnic boundaries persist despite a significant fluidity and interdependency between ethnic groups. His work focused primarily on the on-going negotiations of boundaries between groups and, therefore, saw ethnic identity as a process of becoming that is maintained through the interaction practice of inclusion and exclusion (Barth, 1969). Barth’s main contribution for the purpose of this paper is his central idea that “Ethnic groups are categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves... The features that are taken into account are not the sum of ‘objective’ differences but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant”, (Barth, 1969: 10, 14).

This is a perspective upon identities that interprets them as a negotiated understanding of one’s place in the world. ‘The human potential for selfhood is initially realized vis-à-vis others

and the human developmental process is a social process and cannot be anything other'. This involves the presentation of the identities to others, their acceptance or rejection, and consequent incorporation by the person and others. This is a feedback process that alters presentation of identities and incorporation of accepted characteristics as well as rejection of denied ones. So we could say that it is not enough just to portray a certain identity, because the message contained in it needs to first be recognized by others before it can be incorporated; this is why Barth recognized the importance of negotiating identities at the boundaries, the place where the internal and external coexist. This operation is one of adjustment of the individual to others and to the context, and it is obviously very important in Western societies.

We therefore can say that identity is never unilateral; it emerges from the relationship between self-image and public-image, and is not only perceived by others but actively constituted by them. "Individuals negotiate their identities within the interaction order", this requires the mobilization of interaction competencies within situational routines (Jenkins, 2008: 93). Sociologist Richard Jenkins brought Barth's work on ethnic boundaries up to date, and presented it in the following manner:

"First, societal identities are processual aspects of the ongoing organization of interaction and everyday life. They are not to be understood as part of a superstructure of 'culture'. Second, the analytical emphasis falls on the social construction of identity in interaction at and across the boundaries which they share with other identities, and upon process of recruitment. Third, collective identities are thus generated in transaction and interaction and are, at least potentially, flexible, situational and negotiable. Fourth, identity is a matter of ascription: by individuals of themselves, and of individuals by others. Finally, collective identification is inherently political" (Jenkins, 1996: 102).

Jenkins might be criticized for being too reliant on the external social interactions and not taking into account the individual's internal dimensions, but his contributions are fundamental because today there is such an over-emphasis on that which is particular, that social identity begins to have an aura of something approaching extinction.

I will now describe another phenomena related to boundaries.

## **Socialization Practices, Migration, and Dealing with the Problems**

“Throughout their lives, individuals are continually faced with new experiences and situations that, somehow, must be integrated with existing aspects of the self... these events and experiences can challenge individuals to reevaluate aspects of the self and subsequently engage in various negotiations strategies in order to maintain a sense of continuity in the self while adapting to changing circumstances” (Chatman, Eccles and Malanchuk, 2005: 1).

At the same time that today we see globalization of culture and values, there is also a tendency for intensification of particularisms and creation of local forms of imported structures. As anthropologist Jonathan Friedman (1994) recognized, global similarities are becoming as marked as local differences. In the midst of all this, as expressed on the excerpt reproduced above, the maintenance of a fundamental sense of continuity in respect to our identities is constantly challenged. The identity of individuals is now subject to a struggle of affiliation by conflicting realities and an incompatibility of goals between personal and social ambitions.

I have already argued that the internal conflicts related to identity exhibited by some individuals at present times are a result of the disorderly amalgamation of different cultural guiding principles into their daily lives. The driving forces of globalization expand horizons and freedom of choice, but they also seem to create a clash between elements of our identities; the old and the new tend to operate antithetically. Immigrants many times personify this process and serve as an excellent example here. The experience of moving from a society with one outlook on life to another with a different kind can be disturbing. “If we have incorporated many aspects of host country behaviors, values and ways of thinking into our own repertoire, our ideas about ourselves may also have changed. Social psychologists call this self-concept disturbance. Who we are and how we think about ourselves may not be as clear to us as it was before the sojourn began”, (Sussman, 2002: 5). The problem becomes even worse when after living abroad for some time an individual makes a journey back home and realizes that he no longer belongs there either. An optimistic outlook over these phenomena is the idea that these migrants are now cosmopolitan citizens, although that is not usually the feeling they have. It is more likely that people will feel unsafe and frustrated because they have the experience of being foreigners everywhere, and in many cases this loneliness and inadequacy feelings bring about dysfunctional

individuals. This means that they become a source of social problems. We can today confidently apply the emotions of immigrants to many non-migrant individuals, the only difference being that non-migrants stay in the same place while the world around them changes. I believe that a great deal of personal effort is needed to revert or avoid this scenario.

Nevertheless, the experience of living abroad can produce something else; “before we move to another country we are not aware of our cultural identity or which of our everyday behaviors and ways of thinking have a cultural origin... Sojourners begin to understand their home country patterns and identity”, (Sussman, 2002: 3). To have an external perspective on ourselves and our culture and to be able to use others point of view is a basic step towards personal development and towards competence in communicating and relating to others in an intercultural environment. This ability to communicate effectively across cultural differences is part of the answer to the question raised by psychologist Forrest Tyler (2002): How to be a psychosocially competent person? A question that essentially enquires about overcoming conflicts over affiliation when sociabilization has been affected by globalization. This is a central question across the present paper.

In a globalized world it is not possible anymore to guide ourselves solely by our embedded perspectives. To be psychosocially competent means to be attuned with reality and to be equipped with the social and psychological tools to thrive as individuals as well as contribute to society as a whole. There is clearly a need for redefinition of values and priorities in a post-modern society and cooperation rather than competitiveness should be the guideline for social life - taking into consideration that there is no other way of living than the social one.

In normal circumstances people tend not to question their own values and think little of the values of others. Tyler argues that an increase of self-awareness would contribute to the development of new forms of relating and identifying that combine elements from diverse cultures and discard harmful frames of mind. Yet this will not happen spontaneously; a proactive attitude is necessary. “Transcultural perspective as a basis for understanding individual and collective psychological issues in people’s lives, both intraculturally and interculturally, provides a more adequate foundation”, (Tyler, 2002: 11). With the risk of sounding too much like a self-help guru (but nevertheless confident about this statement) I might add that one cannot worry about one’s individual life regardless of others or the world around because no matter what one

might think or desire, in a globalized world there will be dire consequences to everyone's personal lives; if we do not become more aware and in control of the processes involving globalization and identity, social and psychological disturbances will continue to proliferate.

But creating a healthy balance between one's autonomy while respecting the other is not a simple task in the current state of development of Western societies. Nico Vink argues that in the globalized world we live in, a social understanding of reality is only possible from a global perspective; nevertheless, he also proclaimed that "the only knowledge I consider essential for intercultural communication is self-knowledge; insight into your personal ways of communicating", (Vink, 2001: 25). His contention is that we, as social beings, become ourselves in communicating with others, and even though our tact and presentation of self are culturally determined, and therefore differ from person to person, our abilities to negotiate positions and relations can be further developed with the increase of self-awareness. Along the same lines, Fred Jandt (2009) states that the main personal traits that affect intercultural communication are our self-concept, self-disclosure, self-monitoring and self-relaxation. All this implies the development of an ability to consciously manage our identities. Therefore, according to scholars who deal with the elements affecting our communication process across different cultures, there is a set of skills one can possess in order to create a positive impact over our lives and societies as a whole. This is the moment when intercultural communication comes into place.

## **IV - Negotiation**

### **Intercultural Communication and Identity Negotiation**

“The core processes of individuals’ reflexive self-conceptions are formed via symbolic communication with others” (McCall & Simmons, 1978).

By now the above idea put forward by McCall and Simmons is supposed to be clear in the mind of the reader. Interacting and communicating with others is the way we form our views and particular ways of thinking about both others and ourselves in different situations. The processes of communication have tremendous importance in issues of identity, and taking globalization into consideration as well, we now focus our attention on a particular analytical exploration of identity negotiation in association with intercultural communication. This is a perspective chiefly proposed by communication professor Stella Ting-Toomey, and she expresses her ideas in the following manner:

“The general goal of effective intercultural communication is to create shared meanings between dissimilar individuals in an interactive situation. In addition to creating shared content meanings between two cultural communicators, we need to be mindful of the identity and relational meanings that are being expressed in an intercultural situation” (Ting-Toomey, 1999: 21).

The basic assumption Ting-Toomey proposes when applying identity negotiation to the field of intercultural communication is that understanding the value content of our identities is pivotal to the development of mindful cross cultural communication. That is the reason why I also discussed the differences between individualistic and collectivistic societies; despite its limitations, this general distinction implies different communication styles, and understanding such cultural values is important to start understanding our behaviors towards identity. Here is Ting-Toomey’s particular definition: “The concept of negotiation is defined as a transactional interaction process whereby individuals in a intercultural situation attempt to assert, define, modify, challenge, and/or support their own and others’ desired self-images”, (Ting-Toomey, 1999: 40). She also makes use of the concept of ‘mindful communication’. According to her, mindfulness translates as the ‘readiness to shift one’s frame of reference’, or the preparedness of a person to make use of new and distinct categories to understand cultural differences and to find

original ways of problem solving. Mindful communication implies learning different value systems and being open to new modes of identity construction. This can be basically summarized as gaining awareness of the existence of multiple and distinct perspectives and the ability to assume different standpoints (Ting-Toomey, 1999: 46).

What makes Ting-Toomey's theoretical formulation on the subfield of identity negotiation valuable for the present paper is the fact that it places prominence in the contextual environment where interactions occur. This reminds us of the importance of managing shared meanings to the development of 'accurate knowledge of the identity domains of the self and others', and also to the achievement of our personal and interactional goals (Ting-Toomey, 1999: 48). The management of shared meanings can be described as the understanding of the context of a given situation, this context being the framework for interpreting specific events and situations, followed by the application of certain behaviors that are adequate to this specific contextual environment.

Globalization and the soon to be discussed loosening of social structures are enabling processes of identity negotiation with a much wider variety of choices because individuals are allowed to explore a wider scope of different identity conceptions and different interaction partners. Notwithstanding, there are drawbacks attached to this gain in freedom since together with the relaxation of certain social norms and the growth of individual options there is a greater chance for miscommunication and misattribution, and these are the basis for many social and personal conflicts. Ting-Toomey states that satisfactory outcomes of intercultural identity negotiation are: "the feeling of being understood, the feeling of being respected, and the feeling of being supported", (Ting-Toomey, 1999: 46). These feelings will more likely occur if a person interacts and negotiate with similar others, but today we are more than ever before interacting with dissimilar others. So, even though everyday culture can be adapted, we cannot demand that a person denies his or her personal history, and this history is determinant for the outcomes of our interpersonal relationships.

At this point, it is important to question ourselves about how well can people with highly different conceptions of self really communicate in effective ways. Is Ting-Toomey being too optimistic? Or overestimating the scope, depth and complexity of differences between cultures and people? It is conceivable that her answer would be that the process she talks about takes

place between individuals already confronted by new intercultural environments and situations when differences are leading them to a feeling of loss of security in regards to their identity. They are no longer protected by familiar cultural scripts because those are no longer valid. The fact that globalization has at times made our own back yards an unfamiliar place brings these challenges to us even if we do not move anywhere and make individuals more willing and prepared to shift frame of reference or make use distinct categories.

The adaptation that these individuals confronted by new intercultural environments go through implies important changes in identity as well. The challenges Ting-Toomey enumerates as a result from such adaptation process are: “1) differences in core beliefs, values, and situational norms between the home and host cultures; 2) loss of the valued images of the home culture; and 3) the newcomer’s sense of social incompetence in responding to the new setting appropriately and effectively”, (Ting-Toomey, 1999: 245). These are all process pushing individuals towards mindful communication and conscious identity negotiation.

At this point, Ting-Toomey’s argument move to a discussion over the concept of culture shock which can be an extremely valuable analogy with some of the current hypothesis put forward in relation to identity crisis.

The processes behind culture shock are: a sense of identity loss and identity deprivation; identity strain resulting from the psychological adaptations we go through; identity rejection by others; identity confusion translated as role ambiguity and unpredictability; and identity impotence as a symptom of inability to cope with new scenarios (Ting-Toomey, 1999: 245). Ting-Toomey’s model of identity change incorporates the perceived threats to the individual’s well-being caused by a transactional phase experienced as a consequence of a new intercultural environment, and there is no clearer example of these processes than the experiences lived by immigrants. I will not go further in expounding acculturation processes or adjustment models that are, notwithstanding, relevant forms of identity negotiation, simply because there is not enough time or space for it in the present paper. The huge discussions that exist around immigrants and adjustment models for cultural diversity cannot be entirely incorporated in here and I will focus only in the aspects more relevant to the context of the present paper.

The theoretical assumptions of the intercultural identity negotiation model developed by Stella Ting-Toomey are:

- “People in all cultures form their reflective self-images such as cultural identity and ethnic identity via their enculturation process (socialization). These identities shape their thinking, emotions, and communication patterns”, so in order to understand a person and communicate with him/her we need to understand this background.
- “Individuals in all cultures and ethnic groups have the basic motivation needs for identity security, trust, inclusion, connection, and stability on both group-based and person-based identity levels”, so identity negotiation can be applied outside Western societies given some necessary adjustments even when other conceptions of self and identity are considered.
- “Individuals tend to experience identity security in a culturally familiar environment and experience identity vulnerability in a culturally unfamiliar environment”
- “Individuals tend to experience identity trust when communicating with culturally similar others and identity distrust when communicating with culturally dissimilar others”
- “Individuals tend to feel included when their desired group membership identities are positively endorsed and experience differentiation when their desired group membership identities are stigmatized”
- “Individuals tend to desire interpersonal connection via meaningful close relationships and experience identity autonomy when they experience relationship separations”
- “Individuals perceive identity stability in predictable cultural situations and detect identity change or chaos in unpredictable cultural situations”
- “Cultural, personal, and situational variability dimensions influence the meanings, interpretations, and evaluations of these identity-related themes”
- “Satisfactory identity negotiation outcomes include the feeling of being understood, respected, and supported”

- “Mindful intercultural communication emphasizes the importance of integrating the necessary intercultural knowledge, motivations, and skills to communicate satisfactorily, appropriately, and effectively”

(Ting-Toomey, 1999: 40-41)

Summing up Ting-Toomey’s combination of intercultural communication with identity negotiation I can quote Nico Vink, who stated that “As social beings we become ourselves in communicating with others”, (Vink, 2001: 38), not a new idea but a very important one.

### **Identity Negotiation Theory**

William B. Swann, a professor of social and personality psychology, can be regarded as the first scholar to use the designation Identity Negotiation Theory in the manner in which it is addressed here. He first did so in the late 1980’s. Nevertheless, the idea of negotiated identities is a few decades older, and a number of authors in social sciences have discussed the notion. One example is Ervin Goffman. Swann proposes two principal patterns of behavior as influential to identity negotiation theory research. The first one is the self-verification model, a theory that focuses on the influence every individual has over the perception others have of him. The basis of this model is the idea that individuals aspire for others to understand them in the same way they understand themselves, and they purposely act to obtain this goal. The second one is the reverse process of self-categorization, which emphasizes the ways individuals categorize themselves into existing groups according to the influence of others in their self perception. Both processes happen simultaneously and are interconnected, but researchers have traditionally analyzed these two moments as separated events. A comprehensive description of these processes will be conducted further on as they can serve as examples of interpersonal negotiation.

In this context, identity can be defined as the result of a negotiation process involving culture/context, individualized self-conception and interaction/communication. One underlying assumption of Swann’s identity negotiation theory is the idea that what stimulates people to pursue the behaviors described in the models above is not a conscious individual ambition to feel good but an unconscious aspiration for psychological and interactional coherence. This emerges from the assumption that people dislike the unpredictable, or in other words, they have a basic

desire to know what to expect from the world around them and so, engage in social interaction with the anticipation of confirming the expectations they have about themselves, others, and the social world around.

People negotiate their identities in order to establish them in ways that will increase the probability of coherence. Taking into consideration the fact that negotiating identities is the first thing done while in interaction, we can consider it responsible for how interpersonal relationships develop; it is therefore a convenient framework to analyze identity, relationships, and emotions. A person's perception of his individual self - one's self-identity or as defined in Freudian psychology the ego - is inseparable from social relationships, and identity negotiation theory acknowledges this fact as a guiding principle; "Just as identities define people and make them viable as humans, identity negotiation processes define relationships and make them viable as a foundation for organized social activity", (Swann and Bosson, 2009: 27).

The definition of the process of identity negotiation is more complicated than what the colloquial understanding of the term might imply. A casual use of the expression 'negotiating identities' can mislead us to think that all of our daily activities include an element of negotiation; so even when we brush our teeth we make some sort of affirmation about ourselves and would therefore be negotiating an identity. The formulation proposed here applies to a specific scenario of negotiation. It is true that we constantly affirm, adapt, and disconfirm aspects of our identities, and identity negotiation is indeed a concept addressing an implicit, informal, open-ended, over learned, automatic and unconscious phenomenon (Swann and Bosson, 2006, 6), but when used as a conceptual tool postulated and framed in a particular way, the term gains a different significance.

For the purposes of the present paper identity negotiation is seen as taking place exclusively in social interactions. It is the first thing done by two individuals that interact for the first time and usually slips into the background once a consensus about the people involved and their intentions is achieved. This is how Swann conceptualized it. I personally believe that the process of identity negotiation is important because it places significant emphasis on the connections between three fundamental elements: first is the formation on an individualized conception of oneself, second is the cultural values one is influenced by, and third is the moment of social interaction. Understanding the processes of negotiation contribute to the explanation of

how a person's conception of himself influences his modes of interaction, cognition, and emotional response, an idea that despite its truism is not given its proper weight in many sociological theorizations.

According to Swann, identity negotiations' first premise is that individuals possess a powerful aspiration for stability of the self. We all desire stable self-views because they provide us with the feelings of continuity and coherence about our lives that are essential both for our self-esteem and for our relationships. If identity negotiation is first about establishing a working consensus with our interaction partners, it is through it that people acquire confidence over their self-views, and once this confidence is secured individuals devote considerable efforts to preserve it.

"Once people form self-views, they usually make deliberate efforts to 'act the part'. Their actions, in turn, will influence how others respond to them, which will then influence their own responses, and so forth. This process of mutual give-and-take is called identity negotiation" (Swann, 1996: 29).

Therefore, the subordination of our identities to social-cultural systems and to our belief systems is juxtaposed with the dependency of these systems on our self-views. An uncertainty about identities brings insecurity about our knowledge systems and our ways of knowing the world because it is through our self-knowledge that we create, interpret and experience the world around us. To avoid this uncertainty we cling to our established self-views even if they are not the most adequate or positive. So identity negotiation correlates in important ways with social institutions and networks and can be a useful tool for an analysis of social change, and in some cases of social deviance as well.

"When people sense that events in the external world are occurring unexpectedly and capriciously, they take steps to ensure that the chaos on the outside does not create chaos on the inside; they do something, anything, that seems likely to restore their sense of control over the situation" (Swann, 1996: 47).

Hence, at the same time that stability in interpersonal relationships foster stability in identities, instability of social structures causes instability in relationships and identities.

Negotiation of identities is a relevant process, and therefore a good framework, in all the scenarios mentioned above.

It is indisputable that throughout our lives we constantly face new experiences and situations; therefore, the (apparent) stability we strive for is short-lived at best, even though we constantly work in its direction. The continuous work towards this stability and coherence has to integrate the new experiences we face with the already existing aspects of our identities, and this cannot take place without some degree of confrontation and reevaluation. This is the case today in Western societies. To preserve a sense of continuity we employ a series of negotiation strategies that are in the core of the process of identity formation. Identity formation is therefore a continuous process of adaptation and negotiation and its outcomes, when effective, are quality of relationships and psychological well-being, described in general terms as coherence.

### **Identity Negotiation Strategies and Principles**

When pursuing self-verification a number of interaction patterns emerge. We are constantly, “seeking self-verifying partners; bringing others to see us as we see ourselves; and fleeing context in which self-verification is not forthcoming”, (Swann, 2005: 2). When self-categorizing we normally search for membership in groups that provide us with the expected feedback and lay down patterns of group differentiation that help us situate ourselves in relation to other such groups. These two main patterns of behavior and group differentiation make boundaries and structures appear more secure, but can only last insofar as the social categories in case fit the current social context. Swann’s theorization seems to over-emphasize the human tendencies towards security and stability and my own position in this matter is that although we are not security-prone robots we do pursue coherence as the most efficient mechanism to obtain fulfilling relationships.

Swann’s theory of identity negotiation sometimes looks as a simple set of guiding principles that might appear very much like instructions; but maybe that was indeed his intention. His principles of effective interpersonal identity negotiation are:

- Clarity in interactions
- Cooperation with interaction partners

- Continuity about negotiated identities while the context remains the same
- Compatibility between negotiated identities while with the same interaction partner

(Swann, 2006: 6-8)

One can see that within this context identities gain a much more intentional and calculated form. This intentionality must be highlighted because the strategies for negotiating identities have to be taken up in a conscious manner and identities here develop into something liable to personal management. What can still be seen as unconscious, but are nevertheless suitable for analysis, are the intrapsychic mechanisms that help sustain identities:

- Selective attention: “People pay more attention to feedback when they expect it to confirm their identity”
- Discounting: “When confronted with feedback that is inconsistent with their self-views, people tend to discount the feedback and the evaluator”
- Biased interpretation: “People’s need for coherence and regularity may compel them to ‘see’ more identity-consistent feedback than they actually receive”
- Anxiety as information: “Anxiety can signal to individuals that a given interaction partner poses a threat to their enduring beliefs about themselves”
- Biased recall: “People show better recall for identity-consistent feedback”
- Thematic coherence “by linking all of his or her identities to underlying concerns about competence and connectedness, or by imbuing the different identities with a similar affective tone”
- Compartmentalization: “Those with more complex self-structures should be less troubled by feelings of incompatibility”

(Swann, 2006: 8-10)

## **Changes in Identity and Identity Negotiation**

“Emotional vulnerability is part of an inevitable identity change process” (Ting-Toomey, 1999: VII).

Although we have established that the process of identity negotiation works mainly towards securing coherence and stability of identity and relationships, it can also serve as an instrument of analysis in situations of identity change. According to Swann, when a researcher considers the identity negotiation process taking place among individuals there are five interactional conditions that increase the probability of change. These five enabling conditions exemplify scenarios in which there is a substantial amount of encouragement for an individual to bring new identities into being. They are: 1) “The aspect of identity being negotiated is relatively unimportant or uncertain to the person; 2) Interpersonal feedback or experiences fall outside the negotiator’s or partner’s latitude of acceptance (and thus cannot easily be assimilated into preexisting identity); 3) Feedback or experiences are difficult or impossible to dismiss (feedback from a highly credible source or is patently obvious); 4) Feedback experiences that are inconsistent with the person’s initial identity nonetheless produce outcomes that are perceived as highly desirable and; 5) The social environment lacks opportunity structures (social networks, physical and psychological resources) that are necessary to sustain a given identity”, (Swann, 2006: 16).

Swann also specified a number of social settings in which changes in identity can be directly linked with identity negotiation processes: *Sociocultural and idiosyncratic contextual change*: Normative expectations of the larger groups we align ourselves with exert great influence on the manner in which people structure their identities; one example is the drastic change in the way women identify themselves in the West since changes in gender expectations began to take place approximately 100 years ago. *Environmental changes*: The social networks in which we circulate are accountable for several behavioral norms and outlooks on life; assuming a new job position or moving to a new home might produce changes in identity. *Development growth and role changes*: Identity change might be motivated by significant moments of passage or by assuming new positions; examples are becoming an adult or assuming a professorship job. *Acquisition/loss of abilities*: These are moments usually concentrated in the early and later periods of a person’s life and significantly affect identity. *Strategic self-*

*verification*: At times, people will negotiate a momentarily identity to achieve a particular goal, if this process takes place for an extended amount of time, the situated identity produces permanent identity change. *Self-initiated changes*: Individuals might deliberately desire and purposely act to change their identities. This change however does not occur easily because altering profound aspects of our identities depends on something more than just the will to change; a series of other changes must occur as well, such as new interaction partners and social contexts. *Gateway identities*: There are situations when a person display behaviors that are representative of an identity but refuses to accept the identity itself. If the behavior continues for a prolonged time it becomes inevitable to assume the consequences of the identity in question which is then incorporated. Examples are criminals and addicts. (Swann, 2006: 16-18).

When any of these interpersonal incentives or settings comes into operation, the social and cultural groups to which the person belongs will modify the ways that the person is treated and these new form of conduct towards the individual actually signify a new identity for him. Looking at these mechanisms we can observe that they all share the quality of either being triggered by changes in the social environment or being the cause of such changes. Nevertheless, identity negotiation theories do not assume that a sense of identity emerges exclusively from inputs from the social environment. What it does instead is to say that people' sense of self and identity depends as well on recurrently activated beliefs about identities, and these beliefs influence at the same time that reflect social inputs.

## **V – Self and Identity in an Ever Changing World**

### **Role Theory and Identity Negotiation Theory**

“Once people establish a ‘working consensus’ that is agreeable to both parties, their mutually agreed on expectations transform disconnected individuals into collaborators who have common obligations, goals, and often a modicum of commitment to each other. In this way, identity negotiation processes provide the ‘interpersonal glue’ that allies people with one another. More generally, just as identities define people and make them viable as humans, identity negotiation processes define relationships and make them viable as a foundation for organized social activity” (Swann Jr. and Bosson, 2009: 27).

Social anthropologist Anthony Cohen defined self as ‘an essential and continuous core experience’, but even so, he does not deny the applicability of the concept of role to it, and stated that “roles are accretions of the self, rather than its divisions”, (Cohen, 1994:171). From now on I will make use of the concept of role and of role theory despite its vulnerabilities and critiques. The idea of roles serves as a good conceptual tool when a person is not interpreted as ‘a collection of disconnected events’, and using role theory sheds light on processes that would otherwise remain too abstract and therefore unavailable to a more pragmatic social interpretation.

A fundamental author upon whom I largely base my theoretical assumptions is sociologist Ervin Goffman. His writings on the topics of presentation of the self, role-playing, and face-to-face behavior, among others, permeate the ideas present here, and symbolic interactionism is therefore a major influential perspective along this paper, although it is not adopted as an imperative principle. Goffman interpreted the social world as a dynamic and dialectical network in which people are constantly defining meanings and situations and acting in accordance with these definitions. One of his basic assumptions followed here is that when a person stands before others, he consciously and unconsciously contributes to the definition of the social situation in place, and a conception of himself is also defined - he therefore negotiates his place in the world. These socially conducted performances are the source of the identities attributed to every individual by his peers and the logical consequence of this premise is that

identity is a product of social interactions - or scenes performed - and therefore not an organic thing.

An important concept in this perspective is social role. For sociology and social psychology the concept of role-behavior has considerable importance, despite a profusion of definitions that might give rise to a theoretical confusion. Some of the main perspectives that exist within the social sciences are the functional role theory, the symbolic interactionist role theory, and the structural role theory, which respectively adopt these definitions for the term role: a social position, a part to be played, and a script for social conduct (Flynn and Lemay, 1999). I believe that the different definitions of the concept serve the different purposes of each perspective and can all be useful when properly adopted. I will, at moments, make use of it in slightly different ways, not being therefore a dogmatist when it comes to theoretical rigidity.

In broad terms, role theory considers most of everyday activities to be the acting out of socially defined categories, each of these categories, or roles, are composed by rights, duties, norms and expectations. This is based on the observation that people behave in predictable ways that are context specific; nevertheless, a role can also be interpreted as something not invariably fixed and prescribed but in constant negotiation between individuals in tentative and creative ways. I would personally say that all roles are partly prescribed as well as loose and negotiated since we can observe plenty of behavior regularities and stability of social structures as well as variability between people playing the same roles.

In simple terms, identity negotiation can be defined as the process by which individuals negotiate with each other and with society at large the meanings of their identities; and it can be considered a process through which people come to agreements regarding “who is who” in their relationships, as well as what implications these identities contain. Establishing agreements in regards to the roles each person will assume, and also the implications each role encompasses, is therefore a necessary condition for interactions to occur.

In the dramaturgical perspective developed by Goffman (1959), the individual's identity is performed through roles and a consensus between the actor and the audience. Role theory has somewhat changed since Goffman's exposition and we will soon return to its current developments, but this constant interactional fashioning of one's identity through roles is the

basis for the perception that people are in a continuous negotiation with one another in regards to their identities. His own ideas on what later came under the label of identity negotiation were the ‘establishing of a working consensus regarding the roles each person will assume in the interaction’. For Goffman, identity negotiation emerges from the principle stating that individuals are interested in controlling the conduct of others, most of all in regards to responses to themselves. This control is obtained by exerting influence on the formulation of the social situations, and one can do that by “expressing himself in such a way as to give (the other) the kind of impression that will lead (the other) to act voluntarily in accordance with one’s own plan”, (Goffman, 1959: 4). We will come back to the analysis of these mechanisms further on.

Remembering Ting-Toomey’s (1999) arguments, effective identity negotiation is the precondition for successful intra and intercultural communication, so understanding these processes of identity negotiation is a fundamental step on the path to better deal with all the present-day challenges that we as individuals face in our everyday life. Studying these processes can reveal significant identification discrepancies that are important because they are indicative of societal tensions as well as personal struggles. Identity negotiation is composed by mechanisms that facilitate interpersonal interactions and promote intrapersonal harmony, and it is therefore, here taken on as a crucial tool to both understand and deal with the condition identities are faced with today. The application of some elements of role theory to such understanding of interpersonal relationships will bring its propositions to a more concrete level.

### **Post-Industrial Living and Role Relationships**

The contributions of sociologists Jerald Hage and Charles H. Powers to sociological theory are beneficial to the debate over social change. They have incorporated organizational theory to their perspective upon roles and proposed a functional understanding of identities by combining a micro approach on role relationships and a macro vision of social institutions. They focus their attention on the larger picture of the current social changes and apply their understanding of these processes into a micro approach towards relationships. Their basic assumption is that developments in technology have deeply affected the nature of face-to-face social relationships and the character of the social self (Hage and Powers, 1992: 3-5). This perspective is today, as we have already seen, shared by the majority of academics in social sciences given the undeniable effects of globalization in social forms of interaction.

Post-Industrial society is the term used by them to designate the current condition of Western societies and is understood here as analogue to other labels such as risk society and liquid modernity. Their argumentation supports that one of the main attributes of this post-industrial moment is its more fluid character when considering its institutions. They argue that there is also a greater variety of institutionalized forms, something not widely advocated by others. To these changes in the organizational design of society there is a correspondent change in the character of role relationships that link people together, and it is this centrality of role relationships in their argument that we can profit from. Identity negotiation is not explicitly discussed by Hage and Powers and thus was here partially merged with their system of ideas as it can be profitable to correlate them.

In order to have a clear picture of what is proposed in their ideas it is better to reproduce their definitions of the terms used and to keep them in mind throughout the following analysis.

**Role** – package of broadly recognized rights and obligations that define what would be expected of anyone occupying a given position embedded within a system of social relations.

**Institutions** – a system of roles that is being replicated across the entire society.

**Network** – concatenated chains of positions that are directly or indirectly linked through exchange.

**Interpersonal relationships** (or role style) – those aspects of role performance that are unique to particular combinations of people.

**Role conflict** – disagreement over the nature of a person's obligations by virtue of his or her occupying a specified role.

**Role failure** – the abrogation of some or all the obligations defined as being part of a role.

(Hage and Powers, 1992: 9)

According to Hage and Powers the roles we take on throughout our lives largely define who we are since it is through them that we present ourselves to others and experience social reality. Role definition is therefore a fundamental process in the organization of social life because in the absence of clear role prescriptions people experience the same effects resulting from instability of identity: social and personal distress as well as personal and interactional conflicts. Within Hage and Powers framework, the current condition of free and individual creation of selves (discussed in chapter III) is juxtaposed with an incompatibility between these new individuals and the traditional roles prescribed in the past. This happens because present social changes force these new individuals to confront old roles. What further complicates this current picture is that the roles themselves are also going through a process of change, but in a slower pace.

Free creation of selves became possible due to changes in social organization, but the three organizational elements of most importance for identities (social networks, roles, and individual character) undergo changes with distinct speeds and intensity. There is a tendency for traditional roles to remain unaltered for longer, despite changes in the character of individuals and in the social networks they inhabit. This is the reflex of a socially developed tendency of people to position themselves in alignment with what was previously known as the standard way of relating even though they might no longer be appropriate to cope with individual needs and institutional arrangements. In order to adapt to the new quantity and velocity of the changes associated with our current state of development it is required from people a novel attitude towards role (re)definition. There is today an unprecedented need to adapt and learn how to better cope with change due to that change has become more than ever, an inherent quality of life. The premise proposed by Hage and Powers is the same as Ting-Toomey's and William Swann's: that the challenge of letting go old frames and create new ones has to be confronted in a conscious manner by every individual.

### **Institutional Change and Complexity of the Self**

The unquestionable shift we have been referring to in the nature of societies have many forms, but maybe its most explicit evidence is the ample institutional reformulation we witness today. Globalization brought a worldwide economic structure that is systematically threatened by financial crisis and family structures cannot be seen anymore as the stabilizing forces they once

were in people's lives. There is a general lack of stability in social institutions that not too long ago provided people with a sense of security, perpetuity, and control. No matter how unreal those feelings were, they existed with a greater force than they do today. However, this general institutional disintegration does not immediately announce the coming of social chaos; new institutional forms are constantly being generated. The difference is that they are now short lived and more context specific. The pattern we now have is one of constant change and growing complexity, and there is an increasing necessity for new adaptative strategies if one wishes to thrive in this new order of things. If the society described by Karl Marx and Max Weber was in a moment of growing rationalization, prompted by science and capitalism, we now live a moment of complexification, when social changes have to keep pace with the daily technological advancements we witness and, with the greater diversity of social forms and interaction practices available to all.

What is meant here by complexification in regards to the subject of roles and identities? The addition of activities and responsibilities to the roles we occupy, as well as the emergence of new positions in the social structure, that is, the creation of new roles. Growing complexity means: accumulation of knowledge, development of new patterns and institutions that nevertheless are only temporary, and the ramification of social networks.

Hage and Powers advocate that the growing complexity of social institutions and social roles requires an equal growth in the complexity of the selves we posses and display, as well as creative minds more capable to deal with adversity. It is my opinion that no matter the choices individuals might take in the development of their identities, today it is inevitable to adapt to a life composed by a greater variety of identities and roles and learn to effectively negotiate through them while dealing, at the same time, with an ever changing network of institutions. In order to do that we need to develop strategies to successfully negotiate through the new demands of our societies and the demands of more diverse interaction partners. This is the logic behind these authors' conclusion of a growth in the complexity of selves. These adjustments will have to emerge from becoming accustomed to constant social pressure and from getting more in touch with one's own feelings, marking a move towards individuals better equipped to deal with problem solving in creative ways.

The ideas contained in the last paragraph might appear to some people too much like the description of a mission of sorts, but my intention here is instead to first clarify current processes, and second to point out that the negotiation of identities and other mechanisms active in social interaction have to be taken up in a more conscious manner.

“The ability to engage in fluid relationships, creatively recast social roles, and invent new forms of social institutions will be the defining sociological characteristic of the post-industrial era” (Hage and Powers, 1992: 68).

What needs to be stressed here is that within a role theory approach, researchers need to take institutional arrangements into consideration because they affect the quality of role performance. In the industrialization period of Western society standardization of social situations was the prevailing norm and ambiguity was at a minimum. During that time, the learning of social rules was the fundamental principle for the development of the individual and their identity. Today, prominence is placed in the ability to adapt the rules in order to make them adequate to every individual situation. In order to illustrate this point we can consider the prize placed on intelligence versus the prize placed on creativity during these two moments in history. In the not so distant past, intelligence was valued as the greatest asset of a person, this meant someone competent in learning and applying to rules faster than others - good mathematical skills is an example of such intelligence - while creativity and spontaneity were qualities of eccentric individuals with dubious or revolutionary (in the negative sense of the word) ideas. Today, the ability to invent and modify the old, coming up with original solutions, is the ultimate quality of a person, while the ability to conform and assimilate rules is of secondary importance. This shows us that there has been a shift from a society of rationality and order to one of adaptation and creativity; overly fixed cultural and social arrangements prevent the free expression of creativity and are being supplanted by more flexible ones.

The social structure Western societies are coming from was for the most part composed by individuals with selves that were socialized within a more rigid social structure than the one we have now and this promoted a sense of stability and security. The institutional rigidity made it clear to all individuals where they were positioned in regards to others; and the interpersonal relationships that took place mainly provided people with feedbacks that were consistent with their beliefs and understandings. Conformity was the norm in all instances of life and became an

ideal in itself. The recent changes in social arrangements create an insecurity that can trace its origins to this previous conception of life, since as previously mentioned; roles undergo change at a slower pace than social structures and individual personalities. Nevertheless, the argument here is that this higher complexity of the self does not entail inconsistency or schizophrenia.

In his work, Goffman placed value on the presentation of one's identities to others but not much was said about the construction of these identities. Today we witness individuals spending a greater amount of time in 'structuring their identities' rather than on the actual presentation of it to others. This happens because there is a growing need for personalized identities that are fit for every particular situation. This growth in malleability requires an equivalent increase in the level of negotiations between individuals, since agreements are not anymore reached out of pre-defined social situations; and only when agreements are reached can identity be defined. We now have to effectively deal with the definition of our familiar, religious, ethnical, national, working, friendship, and life-style roles. Greater significance is now placed on the capacity to effectively define them while in the past people only needed to learn and then represent them to others. High self-esteem today comes out of the ability to deal with changes in these roles, as opposed to the previous esteem emerging from efficiently performing script-like roles.

The fact that there is today a great deal of changes taking place at multiple levels of human life is indisputable and I believe that these changes are bringing looser and more complex character to our social and personal relationships. With growing complexity and increased self-reliance there is a greater potential for an equivalent increase in the quality of face-to-face interactions and, as a consequence, an increase in social harmony. But these are speculations and without the proper response from individuals the opposite scenario could also occur, with a consequential increase in social conflicts. I have already shown here that there are thinkers arguing to both scenarios, and the most logical thing to say is that today both things are happening simultaneously.

### **Commitment to Interpersonal Relationships and the Self-Concept**

"One builds ones identity out of claims which if denied, give one the right to feel righteously indignant" (Goffman, 1967: 111).

A central point to be made here is that the social reorganization taking place today creates greater dependency and commitment to interpersonal relationships on account of a higher integration, interdependence and intensity of social relations. The adaptation of individuals to these new standards of relationships is mistakenly seen by some as evidence of identity disintegration. But the partial loss of social control previously exercised by ‘script-like roles and identities’ only signals a transfer of responsibility from the macro level of social institutions to the micro level of interpersonal relationships. “The locus of social control is moving from conformity to interpersonal commitment”, (Hage and Powers, 1992: 162).

This increase in relationship commitment is therefore followed by a pre-eminency of self-conceptualized identities. But the widespread notion that individualism is advancing is neither confirmed nor disproved by the perception that we are now more than ever dependent on each other and on our social relationships. The manner in which an individual’s outlook on life, or his moral stance, is combined with his interaction practices and his social commitments does not function as one might at first expect; we could indeed become more individualistic and at the same time more dependent on each other.

We have already established that the social structure is gaining new contours as we witness transformations in social roles, interpersonal interactions and, social networks. We can also now state that as life becomes less routinized and more personalized, it also becomes more conflict-ridden because there are disagreements about what to expect from our highly complex interactional partners. But I believe these conflicts are quickly to overcome because there is today a willingness from people to adjust to the needs of others as well as a will for others to adjust to our needs. As mentioned before, coherence is a goal we all strive for, and without the ‘approval’ of others we cannot achieve it. Therefore, we expect others to conform (and confirm) to our ideas and identities and we are more prepared to do the same for them.

“In the past, agency has been viewed as individual choice. The choices post-industrial people exercise most often are those requiring negotiation and co-determined agreement among people who must cooperate, but can no longer look to traditional scripts to guide behavior” (Hage and Powers, 1992: 210).

I believe it is a bold statement to say that post-industrial societies have achieved this balance and have overcome the inner conflicts of a transitional time. We are not quite there yet, but still on the way. I have argued along this paper that a theory of the motivational processes of individuals has to be centered in the efforts people go through in order to get rid of sources of disequilibrium and incoherence in their interactions. But man's search for patterns and tendency to repeat models of behavior is not contributing to a smooth adaptation to the current condition of our societies. As expressed by Sociologist Jonathan Turner, "Interactions are organized around expectations that constrain how individuals respond to each other", (Turner, 2002: 209). People have to establish normative expectation in order to maintain stable interactions and a great deal of effort is required today in order to achieve this normalization. This however does not mean that the preindustrial societies of the Western world were more successful, harmonious, or stable than current day societies, but comparatively, the velocity and character of the changes we are confronted with now, give us indeed the impression of a solid and constant past.

"Like early modernists theory during the classical period in sociology, present-day postmodernists compare contemporary trends against the backdrop of a rather romanticized view of community in preindustrial societies" (Turner, 2002:3).

### **Final Remarks**

"To put a new self on public display and admire it in a mirror and in the eyes of others, one needs to remove the old self from one's own and other people's sight, and possibly also from one's own and their memory. When engaged in 'self-defining' and 'self-asserting', we practice *creative destruction*. Daily" (Bauman, 2008: 73).

Going back to Anthony Giddens issue upon the insecurity of our identities, we can say that there is indeed a discontinuity and instability about identities today. According to most of the authors discussed along this paper, identities are a complex combination of elements that are for the most part non-natural, provisional, and even conflicting, but nevertheless are somehow able to coexist within every person. I personally believe that we can indeed change and manage our identities in order to achieve higher levels of shared meanings with our interaction partners.

Gaining awareness and knowledge of how to control these meanings will bring about an increase in identity-security and identity-coherence for all.

There is today an increasing flexibility and complexification of our identities in the West. Our interpersonal interactions also follow this trend and consequently the transmission of meanings between people is becoming less and less obvious since they have to be constantly recreated. The multiple identities inhabiting each single person have less in common with one another, and because of that we also have to constantly deal with an incompatibility of shared meanings within ourselves despite the natural tendency for individuals to assume compatible identities in life. These are the detrimental consequences of the current social changes. But these changes also imply that there are a greater number of alternatives to pursue positive outcomes as well, and also a stronger potential for understanding and controlling our own lives.

The complexities of our identities and of our interpersonal interactions do reflect the complexity of our societies. We share less and less things with one another because there are a greater number of options for all to choose from. Meanings, life-styles, roles, interaction partners, etc, etc, can all be chosen and individually performed today. If our ambition to achieve some order, coherence, and personal satisfaction are to be fulfilled we need to learn how to deal with these constant moments of negotiation our lives became made of, and the first step toward this objective is realization.

So when considering the topic of identity in a globalized world there is a necessity for a theory that increases our understanding of three main points: First, group identity competence: that which produces feelings of self-worth and acceptance. Second, role identity competence: that which provides us with feelings of competence and effectiveness. And third, person identity competence: that which is the sustenance of authenticity. I have throughout this paper discussed several theories and perspectives dealing with such dilemmas but the lack of integration between them is indicative of the work we still have ahead of us.

## **VI - Conclusion**

### **Articulation**

We have now reached the end of this thesis dissertation but we are obviously nowhere near a finished discussion about identity. Many different approaches than the one presented here could have been taken to address such a rich topic, and within this paper some issues were addressed at length, some were briefly explored, while others left untouched. When conducting a study about such an ample subject one needs to make important decisions about the scope and limits of the analysis. These are individual choices about what to include and how to address them, but choices that have to be supported by a logical standpoint, and grounded on previous researches done on the topic and on methodological decisions. However, no matter how encompassing one is, there will always be something left unsaid. All the decisions I have made regarding the present paper follow a rationale I have tried to be truthful to all along the way, but these decisions were obviously influenced by my personal interests and therefore reflect a subjective standpoint. Whence, as an example, to leave out a debate about the relationship between identities and nation states as well as gender issues in relation to identity was a choice that reflected my personal interests but also my previous knowledge and my conceptual intentions.

The overall objective of this paper was to present an overview of multiple attempts to produce a working knowledge of an identity in practice. I intended this paper as a multidisciplinary critical exercise centered on the issues of interaction, negotiation and social change in present day Western societies, and as mentioned in the introduction, the authors and theories presented here all shared the notion of globalization as a cause of change in identity. This did not necessarily exclude my examples of gender and nationality, but at this moment they had to be left out. This obviously does not mean that they could (and should) be taken up in an eventual extension of the ideas contained here.

Looking back at my aims for this thesis I see that my ambitions might have outweighed my abilities. As simple as it might seem at first, to assemble a systemic picture of the current debates on the topic of identity proved to be no simple matter, and no time frame or number of pages could ever be enough to perform such a work. Having that in mind, I can also say that I

consider this effort as an incredible learning experience as well as one of relative success (at least on a personal level).

My choice not to keep a strict methodological stance, and approach identity from a number of distinct theoretical frameworks, seemed attractive at the beginning but it was a great challenge along the writing process. Nevertheless, I would not do it differently. In order to form an understanding regarding the changes happening in people's minds, people's behaviors, and also in the social organization upon which we live, a broad spectrum of topics has to be looked at, an amount of generalization has to be performed, and many questions asked and answered. Consequently, a multidisciplinary approach is an alternative.

Since I was looking for the peculiarities of present day life on the process of identity I should explain some of the inferences and interpretations that can be made from my efforts.

The basis for my argumentation along this paper was my agreement with Norbert Elias statement that there is today a “mismatch between the social orientation of individual striving and the social possibilities of fulfilling it”, (Elias, 1987:145). I have tried along the way to explicate this point; current issues related to identity are in fact social discrepancies that take up an individualized form as an inner tension for the individual, but are mistakenly interpreted as a chasm between outer and inner worlds. Therefore, my attention along the writing process was not directed to an inconsistency between a non-social side of people and a society that nullifies the aspirations of this ‘innate’ aspect of oneself. Rather, I intended to present the picture of the individual with personal strivings that are produced and learned within the confines of culture and society but then experienced in an individualized form that cannot be completely fulfilled within the present social arrangement. This is an important interpretative difference because, interpreting it as I did, the dichotomized mental structure characteristic of the modern West that separates a unique individuality from an external society is seen as an inconsistency within the societies and not as a real division within the individuals. The question that should be taken up when considering this dichotomization is how to harmonize individual and social demands bearing in mind that the social arrangement in itself is the source of the discrepancy.

All of the discussions presented along this paper were planned as contributions to this central question and the reason why I emphatically considered issues of social coherence and

individual psychological balance in combination. Looking at both these elements have led me to observe a high degree of disharmony between the individual level and the social order, emerging first from a lack of social structures sufficiently adapted to better fit personal needs, but most of all from an insufficient adjustment of the individual to the demands of society. But how can the social arrangement be the source of this lack of adjustment? I have tried to answer this by showing that Western culture is socializing individuals to have ambitions that do not fit the present social organization.

Personal identity is not an independent construct but a negotiated outcome of social interactions. The new loosen character of Western societies create novel problems for the individual and to confront these problems we need to better understand them. That is why I strongly believe that today we need to coordinate the individual and the social levels of human life in a more conscious manner, because the accommodation of the individual to the impositions of the social institutions and networks, and the reconciliation of the social order to the goals and needs of the individual follow patterns that are taken for granted and continuously left to chance.

I hope to have argued satisfactorily to the idea that conceptual models that represent more faithfully the actual relationship between individual and society would be a first step towards addressing this situation, and we achieve them by interpreting the conflict as an antinomy between individual and social structures, and not as an internal incoherence of identities. Social sciences are making their contribution by adapting models, theories, and concepts, but I believe that there is still a lack of knowledge in regards to the relationships between social structures and personality structures. As longs as we do not become more cognizant and able to articulate this relationship, as well as stop leaving it to chance, it is most likely that our social environment will continue to be highly conflict ridden.

Complexification of social structures and social networks – personified by the Western case - increases the likelihood of contradictions between the basic structure of personality and the basic structure of the society due to increased ambiguity, as anthropological studies performed around the world have shown. Other societies have a more straightforward organization when compared to the modern West. This means that individuals living within these simpler arrangements have a clear awareness of their established place in it and a discernment of

the implications of such a place. It also means that these individuals' posses high levels of conformity with the larger social order.

But even in the complex, diverse, fast changing, and globalized West it is still possible to recognize patterns of behavior because people are socialized in similar manners. This is mostly evident when we interact with members of different social or cultural groups and are confronted by our similarities with our peers. These common configurations are for me evidence that it is possible to understand and exert some influence over the mechanisms of integration and interaction since whenever regularities can be found they can be worked with. As expressed by sociologist Craig Calhoun "Articulation is not simply a philosopher's quest but an important part of personal and social life", (Calhoun, 1991:7). Articulation is also problematic and a source of tension because it encourages self-critical inquiry and therefore produces tension and changes in beliefs and social order, but this does not make up for the fact that awareness and ability to articulate and deal with conflicts is not only necessary but inevitable.

The issue discussed here was one of social organization and social cohesion, and I have approached it through personal identity and self-consciousness, two forces that apparently drive individuals to the opposite direction of cohesion and harmony. I did so because I have no doubts that any conceptualization of society that excludes individuals and their relationships is incomplete; society is what we perceive it to be, and our actions are entirely motivated by these perceptions. Social institutions and structural configurations can only be fully understood with a conjoint understanding of the individuals that gives them life. As stated by Anthony Cohen, "For all its institutional power, its capacity to generate and impose social forms, society is constituted by self consciousness and substantiated by the meanings which conscious selves impute to these received forms", (Cohen, 1994:146).

### **Consistency and Coherence**

Across this paper I have discussed the reasons why consistency and coherence are important today. The answer emerged from the perception that our lives are now founded on looser social structures and from the growing dependency on every individual as creators of this consistency and coherence. Nevertheless, a fundamental question we should also contemplate is on what grounds we can expect the multiple aspects of our lives and identities to be consistent

with one another. One can easily say that coherency and consistency gain relevancy at the moment people feel that they lost them, but I think this is no adequate explanation. As I have tried to put forward, we now experience a change in our conscience of self and identity, as well as a new set of social conditions governing our lives. I think that an important aspect of this new arrangement is the belief that our lives should follow an internal logic and therefore be coherent; this happens because we are now more self-aware and inquisitive and not because inconsistencies did not existed before. An important point to consider is that this obsession with coherence can in fact be an obstacle for an individual to obtain the feelings of continuity and satisfaction that are looked for in regards to life, but individuals now have as a starting point the idea that a conflict between two contrasting elements of their identities necessarily implies that one side is valid while the other should be rendered as illegitimate, and this is not true at all times.

As I have argued in the beginning of this paper, the changes that started to take place in the early modern period of European history, and grew in intensity until our days, have resulted in particular social modes of life and mental structures that compel individuals to reflect upon their lives and actions more than in the past. This has impelled individuals to develop their self-consciousness and see themselves as highly independent and self-sufficient entities, but at the same time we continuously became more dependent on each other because of higher complexification and specialization. Therefore, the increasing complexity and size of our social networks meant more dependency, but also meant that individuals became more different from one another. In order to have these networks of interdependency functioning well and at the same time have our need for distinctiveness satisfied we - as increasingly self-conscious individuals - began a struggle to achieve harmony and coherence between elements of our lives that are at odds with each other. So when considering social structures, Western society is now formed by larger, more centralized and specialized groups, but when observing the micro level of social interactions, human relationships became more segmented, case-specific and subject to negotiation. That is why along this dissertation I have also argued in favor of the idea of a modern individual highly preoccupied with their inner self, with their feelings, and with the minutia of everyday life.

Hence, the list of factors changing today is great, but stability in social patterns over long periods of time would require as much explanation as social changes do. This means that there is always a struggle between social processes of change and established social forms, and today we witness many changes in regards to identity and forms of interaction, but this does not imply the complete substitution of old perspectives by new ones; old habitus and forms continue to coexist with new ones because people usually resist change by holding on to their established social habitus and their ‘inner image of themselves’. Therefore, there is a constant struggle to create some sense out of the external challenges to our moral frameworks and the internal dimensions affected by the changes these moral sources go through.

### **Communication and Adaptation**

Another of my arguments here was about communication and how ideas change or gain stability because of it. I have tried to demonstrate how the process of communication is important to identity, and I have also discussed the importance of effective intercultural communication today.

Globalization has made it possible to import evaluative criteria's from different cultural settings into our lives. This however does not mean that cultural relativism is not respected anymore. It would be naïve to expect that the mere contact between cultures would prompt a friendly association or a merging of cultural elements. That is why I believe Barth's conceptualization on boundaries to be insufficient to explain the complexity of reality today. His views on ethnicity as something generalizable to all members of a particular group and almost as a tactical posture in regards to others, call our attention to a debate about distances between cultures when in fact we should be focusing on differences between minds. I believe that thinking about whom we are should not be limited by an idea about who we are not, and fixing the discussion on boundaries might lead us to do just that. I am a Brazilian man not only because I am not an Argentinean man, and I am also a particular Brazilian man, different from other Brazilians. Social and ethnic groups should be considered as an aggregation of complex selves - since we are indeed multi-dimensional - and not as a fixed ethnic/cultural identity or just a combination of roles.

I should finally make it clear that I do not see multiculturalism as a solution to present social tensions because the argument upon which multiculturalism is based often depends on this same idea of integral singularity of groups that I do not adopt as a premise. I am also well aware that mankind as a frame of reference for group identification is nonexistent for most people in the world. Yet, it is undeniable that the manner upon which we live our lives and experience our identities has changed and continues to do so. Returning to one of the questions made in the introduction: Can we have a social order in which personal needs and social demands are harmonized? As I have said before, they are only possible together, and now falls on us as individuals the responsibility of managing our personal relationships as there is a reduced permanence and greater interchangeability about them. Coherence, security and constancy are dependent on us to a high degree.

After investigating some of the current conditions in the relation between individual and society, as well as the concepts and notions associated with it in various fields of knowledge involved in this debate, one of my first premises can stand as an ultimate conclusion: the conceptual models and categories, as well as the manner in which we as individuals think of our identities, need to go through a process of cross fertilization and mutual enrichment to meet the requirements of the practice of identity today. New social structures, new modes of interaction and the need for identities to meet the demands of this ever changing world call for a reformulation of concepts, theories and behaviors. A social theory is only good as long as it handles the field it intends to, and it ceases to work when new knowledge outweighs its explanatory capacity. Today more than ever before, the key word is adaptation.

## **VII - Epilogue**

And now so what? After reading the whole of this paper with all of its subject matters many readers might be asking themselves what is the message they should leave with. Anthropologists in particular might also be interested in hearing what can their area of knowledge profit from such discussions. The inferences outlined in the conclusion section addressed the principal ideas explored along the paper but now it might be advantageous to make a few last comments about this thesis and its ideas taken as a whole. This is the last aspiration and proposition of this paper.

Succinctly considering classical science and its fundamental explanatory principals three points come to mind: First is the idea of universal determinism, and this implies that scientists must strive for awareness of all past events and for the ability to predict events in the future. Second is the notion of reduction; which consists of an imposition on scientists to know any element under analysis by its basic constituting elements. Third and last is the principle of disjunction, a device used by researches to separate and isolate perceived questions and problems from one another in order to simplify and clarify them - this last element in particular might be considered the starting point of our distinct scientific disciplines. It is thanks to these three main principles that science advanced as it did and created so much knowledge, but I believe that at certain moments these notions and its inherent limitations become more important than the final objective of science, which is elucidation.

Within this classical conception of science the complexity of the objects analyzed is often overlooked and even transfigured. It is undoubtedly difficult to explain complex constructs and the strategies outlines above serve the purpose of bringing these constructs to a level in which discernment becomes graspable, but dismissing complexity is not always a viable way to create understandings. I have personally experienced as a student the feeling of looking at a phenomenon, seeing it as extremely complex and unclear, and then thinking that as a future researcher my mission was to find its hidden order and formulate it under simple concepts and laws. The underlying message of this understanding of science is that complexity is merely superficial and fictitious. In reality these scientific principles are a formula to avoid the problem of complexity, which is very real and not always suitable to disjunction, reduction and determinism. I believe that this paradigm of ‘descomplixification’ should at times be contra

balanced by one involving the ideas of conjunction and distinction because simplification is not enough to understand all the relations between the whole and its parts since there are mutual implications that must be looked at in all its totality and density to be fully understood.

Therefore, the above paper can be seen as standing in favor of the idea of substituting disjunction and separation - between disciplines and between concepts and notions – and replacing them by models that preserve necessary distinctions but aspire to accommodate several levels of human reality within a single arrangement. This engenders the observance of multiple fields of knowledge, and while my aim was never to promote the development of a new super-discipline, since disciplinary research still nourished my ideas, I firmly believe that these established disciplines must take advantage of one another and incorporate the know-how emerging from combinations of different branches of knowledge instead of avoiding it.

If the goal of understanding processes of identity in the present Western world cannot be fully achieved within a single disciplinary framework it is required from researches to go beyond disciplinary boundaries; not in an antagonistic but in a complementary way.

The discipline of Social Anthropology has as an overall purpose the study of interactions and exchanges between humans inside interconnected environments. The mission of such work, or the mission of anthropologist if you will, is to contribute to peoples' understandings of themselves, of others, and of the differences between the two. This is a discipline that set the stage for researches to understand humans in its complexity and to reach for the meanings humans assign to themselves, to others and to the world around. This implies recognizing and respecting diversity of viewpoints. Social anthropology is by definition an interdisciplinary field and because of this characteristic it poses a critical essence that is pivotal to the advance of human understandings about society and its relations because it helps to refine existing debates. Anthropology can behave as a key discipline since it can be integrated with almost any other. To achieve such ambitious objectives anthropologists, more often than not, choose to perform qualitative observation and examples of themes frequently analyzed are the elaboration of rites and beliefs, cultural clashes, and the structure of social organization. The most usual and expected way to approach these topics is the traditional method of isolating cultural groups and its characteristics and then comparing it with other such isolates.

My purpose along this thesis was to reflect about the concept of identity as it relates to situations of change and to suggest a theoretical integration of perspectives addressing individual agency, social roles and cultural experiences. The juxtaposition of such traits outline identities as a construct resulting from the dialectic of internal and external happening in all individuals, what in my opinion is a hint to identities as experiences that gain personal meanings through individual's strategic manipulation. That is why I focus on negotiations of identity. The notion of negotiating identities is suitable to be explored through empirical data from individual experiences - as a more traditional anthropological analysis would be performed - but I choose not to conduct my thesis in such manner and to do instead a study that compares the notion of identity in relation to time. This means an approach to theories of identity with a historical perspective, but one that could provide analytical applicability if used empirically.

The three disciplines of Anthropology, Sociology and Psychology all have important contributions to make when considering a research interest in changeability and negotiability of identities, but they also have different theoretical assumptions as their starting points. Conventional sociological theories brought to the table important elements such as role performance and identity crisis, but it usually underemphasizes the feelings, thoughts and experiences of individuals. Psychology feels that gap, but in its turn gives very little importance to issues of culture. Across this paper I used elements from these three disciplines to compose a complex picture of identity in current Western societies, but I also had to deal with the lack of interaction between them.

So one final question to be asked is: Do we really need an all encompassing theory of identity? I personally believe that yes, a holistic approach is advantageous to gain further insight over this complex and dynamic topic. This should be done not by creating a new discipline but by performing cross-fertilization and transversal studies. The proposition of this paper was not to be conclusive in itself, but to open space and shed light on the diversity - and confusion – that exist in relation to the issues discussed. The important thing to remember after reading this broad review is that a great deal of knowledge is required to perform complex thinking and identity is not a given but a construction, performed daily and only understood partially.

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