Fostering a Global Identity: Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and the Emergence of a Hypothetical Other

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Abstract

In this essay we argue that there are certain processes at work in the world, which could *theoretically* contribute to the fostering of a global identity. Even though a global identity is regarded by many social scientists as unviable, if not impossible, because an "Us" is always in need of a "Them", we aim to transcend these conceptions. The central theory is that as humanity's sense of interconnectedness grows and the need for a global collaboration becomes necessary in order to deal effectively with climate change and environmental degradation, a process *could* be set in motion whereby, as we move towards a collaborative "Us" *(the unified social body),* a hypothetical or historical "Them" is constructed *(the divided social body)*. The purpose of this speculative paper is primarily to challenge prevailing, perhaps pessimistic, convictions that the construction of a global identity is impossible, even though in light of the nature of current pressing issues it is highly necessary.

Keywords: Global Identity, Climate Change, Environment, Us versus Them, Globalization.

Introduction

Globalization is described by Robertson (1992, p.8) as "a process of compression and intensification." The first of these terms refers to an increasing sense of spatial proximity and denseness, and the latter to a growing consciousness of the global. At first glance, this process could be conceived of as a unifying movement, drawing people closer to each other as they get acquainted with each other's world views and practices. Augé (1992) however, envisions rather a lonely future as an outcome of globalization: a world not of familiarity, historical richness and purposefulness, but rather of emptiness and despair, a world where people live an anonymous existence, dwelling in indistinguishable places and without distinctive individual identities. We are born in hospitals, and we die there. Perhaps his vision is too grim, but his argument relates to a broader concern: that globalization might equal homogenization, referring to a centripetal movement in which various cultural substances, shapes and textures are mashed into a single, undifferentiated pulp. Eriksen (2007, p.10) assures us that this is not the case. According to him, the "local" continues to flourish, absorbing the global and manifesting it in a unique fashion. This could be the case, but what the academic eye beholds from a distance is not necessarily a reflection of the subjective experience of millions of individual persons. Maintenance of individual identity is a serious concern for many persons. It could even be said that "glocalization" (i.e. the localization of global phenomena) is an expression of, or reaction to, this perceived threat to the self. According to

Meyer and Geschiere (2003, p.2) globalization and the perception of a movement towards uniformity is not only motivating counter-movements toward heterogeneity, but is actually causing people to harden cultural boundaries, and thus engendering new distinctive identities. Meyer and Geschiere have coined the term "cultural closure" to describe this reaction. It entails the search for fixed points of orientation in an environment of fluidity—thus alluding to Appadurai's (1996) "global flows"—and the effort to fortify or construct boundaries for the purpose of protecting one's identity.

Surely, such a defensive attitude cannot be a fruitful basis for dealing with the troubles that currently beset the world. Serious problems, whether they are environmental, economic or political in nature, require cooperation and mutual support that transcends local, national, religious and ethnic boundaries, given that the problems themselves transcend these boundaries and affect us all. In this essay, we argue that, in order to deal constructively with global challenges, individuals need to seek a way to relate to one another so that an attitude of *competition* can give way to one of *collaboration*. Without forsaking cultural peculiarities, we argue, it should be possible to imagine a sense of commonality and to join forces on the grounds of a common global identity.

Some might dismiss such a utopian aspiration, stating that a global identity as such is not feasible because an "Us" can only exist in opposition to a "Them". However, what exactly is a "Them" but a moral and cultural depiction of what the "Us" is not? Does a "Them" need to be

physically existent, contemporary, or even real? We argue that such is not the case but that, rather, a hypothetical or historical "Them" would suffice for the construction of a global "Self". With this in mind, we perceive various processes in the world which might prove to be conducive for the imagination of such a hypothetical "Other" and thus the fostering of a global identity. In this essay, we will focus on one such process—namely, climate change and environmental degradation.

Linking Robertson's (1992) "growth of consciousness" to this environmental issue, we will argue that humanity is increasingly becoming aware of a certain interconnectedness that recognizes people's relationship and interconnectedness with their environment. Once this realization reaches a certain turning point, we argue, this could automatically call into being a hypothetical or historical "Other", enabling humanity to cultivate a common identification. We will first discuss the relationship between humans and their environment. Then we will discuss the various ways in which humanity is currently threatening this very environment by exploitative and exhaustive practices that are clearly unsustainable. After this, we will explore the various ways in which the environment in turn is threatening humanity. We will argue that certain developments are symptoms of a rising consciousness of the aforementioned interconnectedness, relating people to each other and the environment. We will connect these findings to our main point, namely, the construction of a global identity by examining the theoretical debates on identity. Then we will set out our own theory, in which we argue that this growing consciousness of humanity's relationship with the environment can provide a basis for fostering a global identity in which the existing notion of "Them" is effectively incorporated into the "Us", and replaced by an alternative, historical or hypothetical "Them."

Humanity and the Environment

In this section, we will discuss several conceptions of the human-environment relationship. Especially in Western-based discourses, the environment is often split into a natural and a human or cultural environment, with pristine patches of wilderness belonging to the former, and farms, cities and technology belonging to the latter. Dove and Carpenter (2008, p.3) argue that the narrative that emerges from this dichotomy conceives of the human being as a contaminating and degrading

actor with regard to the natural environment. Therefore, nature must be saved from culture. Often, conservation efforts that are based upon such a conceptualization work to (re-)separate the natural environment from people, creating enclosed parks, and often favoring biodiversity over local sentiments, economies and culture. As Paige West (2006, p.215) explains, this focus on maintaining biodiversity is partly related to a nostalgic longing for a lost and idealized past, in which the environment was still untouched by human civilization.

This separation however, between man and the environment, culture and nature, is not as logical as it might appear to some. First, purely from a materialistic perspective: do not the bodies of people consist of the very stuff they extract from their environment and ingest? Are the sidewalks not paved with the minerals of the earth? In what ways is a random stick different from a wooden crossbow? On the grounds of substance alone, culture cannot be separated from nature. As Ingold explains, it is often the form and meaning of a certain object that determines its cultural or natural identity. However, Ingold (2000, p.339-342) convincingly argues that, for example, weaving a basket is not purely a human (cultural) endeavor. Surely, the maker of the basket has an idea in her mind, but the actual weaving of the basket is not simply a singular flow of human force by means of which an idea is materialized. Rather, it involves engaging with a substance that has certain natural characteristics with regard to plasticity and texture. Weaving is a process in which multiple forces influence the end-product in their own particular ways. These forces emanate from the human being involved *and* from the materials he or she utilizes. In addition, we must not forget the earth's gravitational force. As the maker engages with these forces and adjusts his or her ideas, there is a process that can be characterized as one of discovery and gradual unfolding rather than as one of cultural imposition. And even after the basket has been completed, it continues to develop as it hardens, yellows and attracts dust. In this light, a basket nicely demonstrates the intermingling of culture and nature on a material level. This concept also applies to the environment as a whole.

To see in what ways nature and culture, human beings and their environment, are actually part of a single totality, we need to focus on some mental aspects relating to ideas and knowledge. Levi-Strauss saw the human brain as a processor of

information and a storage device for knowledge. He firmly placed the "mind" in the human brain and viewed the environment as "the world outside" (Ingold, 2000, p.17-18). Gregory Bateson (1972), however, placed the "mind" *between* the human brain and the environment. For him, the mind of man extends beyond the skin and into the environment. It's not difficult to see how our mental world extends beyond the boundaries of our bodies into the environment. Think of the ways in which we translate processes in nature into metaphors in order to grasp complicated problems. It is in this way that we arrive at certain technological innovations (e.g. planes were inspired by birds), or become able to comprehend certain spiritual principles in symbolic terms. Or think of the extent to which certain smells, sounds or specific locations and objects form a part of our memories. Or the dialectical relationship between environmental phenomena and our imagination: how an external phenomenon is internalized and triggers interpretative processes, producing thoughts which in turn color our perception and thus project the internal into the external (see Bateson, 1979, p.93).

Furthermore, Ingold (2000, p.20-21) posits a direct relationship among knowledge, the transmission thereof, and the related production of culture. He argues that cultural knowledge is often transmitted *through* the environment. By this, he does not mean that objects or locations are used as media through which parents divulge information to their children. This is because neither information itself nor the accumulation thereof, is knowledge. Knowledge comes through experience and understanding. From this perspective, Ingold argues, parents direct their children to focus their attention on certain objects or spaces within the environment, enabling them to locate information and to gradually understand its meaning "within the context of a direct perceptual engagement with [the] environment" (Ingold, 2000, p.21). Stated differently, cultural knowledge is not projected onto the surrounding environment, but rather emanates *from* the environment, through the guidance of a child's human educator.

Thinking in this way about the material and mental intermingling of the environment and humanity, nature and culture, enables us to see their fundamental oneness. Culture is part of nature and vice versa. Humanity is part of the environment and vice versa. However, within this whole there is also clearly differentiation. Air is not water, a tree is not a skyscraper, and a human is not a plant. Humans do indeed possess certain faculties that distinguish them from other entities in the world that they inhabit. Our ability to reason, discover, to make choices that go against instinctive logic, our artistic inclinations, our modes of worship, and our scientific endeavors are some of these characteristics. Humanity's relationship with the environment is thus highly ambiguous. In one sense, we are *a part of it*, while, in another sense, *we stand apart from it*. And it is this dualistic concept that we perceive as being contained within the realization of "interconnectedness". This is important, as we will argue that humanity as a whole is gradually becoming aware of this interconnectedness, partly due to climate change and environmental degradation.

In the next section, we will argue that humanity's present mode of engagement with the environment reflects a dichotomous conception of humanity and the environment, culture and nature. It is *within* such a discourse that we will discuss the ways in which humanity is threatening the "natural world". After this, we will demonstrate how, with regard to climate change, the environment in turn is threatening humanity. Let it be clear that this does not mean that the environment could possibly serve as the hypothetical "Them" or "Other" that we have referred to in the introduction. As we will show, humanity is becoming increasingly aware of its interconnectedness with its surroundings. Because of this undeniable interconnectedness, the environment is not a suitable candidate for the role of a cultural and moral "Other"—a concept that is necessary for the fostering of a global identity.

It is beyond doubt that there is a high degree of diversity within humanity's engagement with the environment. Some are more outspoken against our current conduct than others, some people abstain from eating meat, and certainly, there are many people that do not concur at all with the dichotomy between man and nature. However, we will not embark on a quest to distinguish the "noble human", in tune with his environment, from the "exploiter". This would be a futile task, since we are all inextricably bound up with one another, and every action bound up with every other action. What this means is that seemingly harmless actions may in fact be harmful. Therefore, when we refer to "humanity's threat to the environment," we are referring to humanity's general form of engagement, wherein the generality is based upon humanity's overall effects. However, we will argue

that there are certain practices on the rise that can be regarded as symptoms of a transformation in our global consciousness.

Humanity's Threat to the Environment

Climate change is a meta-concept; an umbrella encapsulating a wide array of concepts such as global warming, greenhouse gases and El Niño. These concepts appear to be omnipresent in popular, political and academic discourses, always floating around in the ether, popping up in newspapers, speeches, and at various conferences. "Climate change" is the buzzword of late, and is subject to a great deal of debate. We are not, in the Newtonian sense, trying to make a contribution to this specific debate by attempting to see a little further than the giants whose shoulders we stand on. Rather, we see ourselves as more akin to Orion, the clumsy and blind giant, in need of guidance from Cedalion to enlighten us and lead us through the daunting morass of contradicting theories. As we have plodded our way through this morass, we have come to the conclusion that humanity is significantly threatening the environment: not only through destruction and exploitation, but also indirectly by changing the climate. We argue that this kind of engagement with the environment can only arise from the above-described dichotomous conception of the relationship between humanity and nature. By regarding ourselves and our cultural surroundings as completely distinct from (but materially dependent upon) the natural world, we resort to a kind of behavior that can only be characterized as parasitical. As we expand our industries, exploit the planet's resources and leave behind a trail of pollution that is the byproduct of "development," we have come to pose a definite threat to the (natural) environment. We do observe gradations within this general engagement. Some actions are of course more threatening than others. This diversity can be categorized in several layers that differ in terms of scope, intensity and effect.

On the one hand, there is the *direct* destruction of the natural environment. This entails environmental destruction which has climate change as a byproduct. In this connection, we note a downward spiral: as we destroy our environment, the climate is altered, and the alteration in the climate in turn further damages the environment. Examples of this *direct* damage are abundant. Mass deforestation in several locations worldwide is one such example. Other examples are the hunting of whales, the global marine fisheries crisis, and the

pervasive disturbance of coastal ecosystems as a result of overfishing, pollution and the degradation of water quality. This form of engagement has driven several marine vertebrates to near extinction. Moreover, fish populations cannot reproduce fast enough to keep pace with the depletions caused by fishing activities. The increasing demand for seafood, combined with technical advances in the international fishing fleet, has depleted the world's primary species of fish, such as salmon and eel (Worm & Lotze, 2009, p.266).

On the other hand, there are the *indirect* effects that humanity has on the environment: the destructive effects that are meditated through climate change. Such effects are rooted in the exponential growth of the human population, combined with our unsustainable lifestyles. Mass production and the exhaustion and burning of fossil fuels have resulted in an alarmingly high emission of greenhouse gases (i.e., gases that can trap heat near the earth's surface). The more greenhouse gases there are the more heat is trapped near the earth's surface, which leads to global warming. One of these greenhouse gases is CO_2 (carbon dioxide). The amount of CO_2 in the atmosphere at Mauna Loa in Hawaii has been closely monitored since 1958. The research results show that the atmospheric concentration of CO_2 has risen by 36% between 1958 and 2005 (Burroughs, 2007, p.201). Other multi-sited research confirms the hypothesis that there is a strong correlation between the rise in CO_2 and global warming (Letcher, 2009, p.7). This climate change in turn has devastating effects on the environment. One of these effects is the extinction of animals. The golden toad is one example of an animal that has become extinct as a result of climate change. As a matter of fact, according to Flannery (2005, p.128), the golden toad is the very first well-documented victim of climate change. Ever since this confirmation of the devastating nature of climate change, the documentation of the decline in biodiversity has proliferated. Karoly (2003, p.236) reports that an astonishing one-third of the roughly six thousand amphibian species worldwide is facing extinction. Other examples of the devastating effects of global warming are the melting of the Arctic (Comiso, 2003, p.3501), the deprivation of the coral reef eco-systems (Bellwood, 2004, p.830), and the rising of the temperatures in the world's oceans (Flannery, 2005, p.187).

Humanity is producing an increasingly large volume of greenhouse gases, and this poses a

threat to the environment. Surely, one could state that the person who buys a mass-produced wooden cabinet is just as culpable as the lumberjack who cuts down a tree with his chainsaw. However, the person who purchases the cabinet may not see things this way, and might even denounce the very timber industry producing it. In other words, notwithstanding the fact that both actions are equally destructive and the fact that they reinforce one another, the perception of the two disparate actions might be completely different.

The sum total of the threats we pose to our environment is far from proportionally distributed. Each person plays his or her part, and yet it is obvious that the effect a small-town farmer has on the environment through raising his crops is trivial compared to the grave threat that a multinational cooperation poses as it deliberately bulldozes away age-old trees to make room for grazing fields. Nonetheless, it can be safely asserted that humanity at large does form a threat.

The Environment's Threat to Humanity

On the flip side, it can be argued that the environment in turn is posing a threat to humanity. Some scholars even suggest (e.g. Burton *et al,* 1978) that the environment is becoming more hazardous. Recent disasters have claimed large losses of property and lives. Consider the Bangladesh cyclone of 1970. Within mere hours, large numbers of people, cattle and homes were violently swept away. Even if we consider only the first decade of the twenty-first century, we can see that there have been a number of serious disasters of very broad scope. Recently, Indonesia's Mount Merapi volcano erupted again, killing dozens of people and forcing thousands to flee. Then there was the catastrophic Haiti earthquake in 2010. This cataclysm was followed by the catastrophic flooding in Pakistan. Before these more recent events there was the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and then Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Disaster, however, is a far more complex phenomenon than first meets the eye. First, it is complicated by a number of external variables. Multiple natural and technological phenomena can trigger various kinds of destructive physical processes, ranging from gradual phenomena such as droughts to sudden cataclysms such as tsunamis (Oliver-Smith & Hofmann, 1999, p.20). Moreover, the threat nature poses to humanity is also influenced by social networks and political and economic factors (Wisner *et al,* 1994, p.10).

Natural disasters also have differential effects on various sub-populations of the area affected.

Two components are at play here. First, there is the *physical component*. Certain geographical regions are, simply put, more dangerous than others (Hewitt, 1997). One can imagine the slopes of a volcano being a more dangerous habitat than the slopes of the Swiss Alps. Just as living in an area with multiple reports of earthquakes each year, say New Zealand, can pose a greater threat than a country like the Netherlands, where earthquakes are extremely rare. It is apparent that various geographical regions can differ in the kind of possible disaster (e.g. flood or earthquake), the likeliness of occurrence, and the intensity and scope of the hazard as well. Secondly, there is the *social component*. Inherent in nearly all societies is a high degree of economic and social inequality. Sub-populations differ with respect to their vulnerability, which Wisner (1994) defines as "the characteristics of a person or group and their situation that influence their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist and recover from the impact of a natural hazard" (p.11). In this connection, it is useful to recall the three Weberian dimensions of social stratification. Differences in wealth, power, and prestige result in an unequal distribution of access to resources and opportunities. More economic capital, a higher social status and a large social network are all factors capable of increasing one's mobility and decreasing one's vulnerability. In the end, both society and nature decide which people in which regions are more likely to be most vulnerable.

This differential vulnerability, however, in no way diminishes the fact that there exist severe global risks. In fact, Beck (1999, p.5) coined the term "world risk society" to encapsulate the processes of modernization and globalization resulting in a new order of *manufactured* uncertainties. This idea of risk, as omnipresent in contemporary society and as a constant succession of chance and danger, strongly resonates with Gidden's (1999, p.22) conceptualization of risk as being inseparable from the *ideas* of probability and uncertainty[1]. As described in the introduction,

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[1] We stress *ideas,* because perception of risk is central here. Probability and uncertainty are, of course, core components of the experienced risk. But these probabilities are very much dependent upon our conduct in the world and the way we deal with risks.

globalization and uncertainty, more often than not, constitute a "package deal." Consideration of world history reveals a chain of hazardous events, strengthening our belief that disasters are likely to recur. This possibility in turn generates great uncertainty. When and where will the next disaster be? Katrina has proven that even the wealthiest countries are not free of risk. Other Western countries are predicting the occurrence of major disasters. The Netherlands is currently considering whether or not its levees should be strengthened. The dialectical relationship between chance and danger affects all of us, as nature continues to threaten humanity. Risk, however unequal, is omnipresent.

The Growing Sense of Interconnectedness

If we look at the previously described ways humanity is currently engaging with the environment and its unsustainability, it will not be difficult to discern the prevailing sense of distinction –separating humanity from the environment- that underlies this behavior. It is this sense of distinction that lies at the heart of much of the discourse regarding environmental issues. The exploitation of natural resources and the consequent exhaustion of the planet has largely been framed within a discourse that supposes a certain dichotomy. Just as has happened before, humanity is seen as posing a threat to the environment and, in other cases, the environment is seen as posing a threat to humanity. In this discourse, the environment is equated with "nature", excluding cultural spaces such as cities and villages, which are rather lumped together with "humanity". Thus, nature is seen as a threat to human bodies, settlements and livelihoods, while human bodies, settlements and livelihoods are seen as a threat to nature.

However, there have been developments that point to a growing sense of interconnectedness. As we have mentioned before, interconnectedness still supposes a distinction, but it also takes complexity into account. Interconnectedness, as we define it here, recognizes two main points: 1) It recognizes both humanity's oneness with the environment and its being inherently distinct from the environment; 2) It also refers to the web that connects each person to everyone else, meaning that our individual and collective engagement with

In the next section, we argue that the consciousness of our behavior is gradually increasing.

the environment affects all of us in myriad ways. Concretely, the sense of interconnectedness recognizes that whatever harm we do to the natural environment, it will eventually be harmful for our own bodies and cultural spaces. By exhausting the environment, we exhaust ourselves. And by taking care of our environment, we secure our own future. We argue that there are certain developments that signal an emerging recognition of this fact.

Krause (1993, p.126-127) tells us that, in recent years, many people have become concerned over environmental issues. The primary reason for this, he argues, is that people have become increasingly aware that the present global mode of engagement with the environment is responsible for growing threats to human health and safety. He is not referring here to the countless people that for generations have been living in a way that is closely connected to their natural surroundings, but to those living in the so-called "advanced" regions, whose ties to natural environments are more tenuous. Krause explains that now, even in these regions, people are becoming more concerned, as their air is becoming dangerously polluted, their beaches are closed due to the bad quality of the water, and as they are facing increased restrictions on their utilization of water and energy in their homes.

Another sign of this growing awareness, which is connected to the concern over the environment, is the increasing demand for sustainable or "green" products. As people worldwide are beginning to realize that their purchasing decisions indirectly influence processes such as climate change, which in turn affects their daily lives, their consumer behavior is gradually changing (Schlegelmilch *et al,* 1996, p.96). Consequently, manufacturers are adjusting their modes of production to this growing demand, aiming to get their products labeled "green", "eco", "organic" or "natural". Sadly, some companies that cannot get their products properly certified, deceptively wrap their products in green packaging, or use images of dolphins, trees or the earth as a means of (falsely) suggesting that their product is sustainably manufactured (Harris, p.2007).

This movement has gained momentum, not only as a result of locally perceived threats of climate change, but also because of the emergence of global political and academic discourses that revolve around climate change. The Climate Change Conference 2009 in Copenhagen, the Kyoto Protocol, and Al Gore's documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* are prominent examples of the

emergence of climate change as a high-profile global issue. In addition, there are also countless examples of private endeavors aimed at altering our relationship with the environment. One individual who has undertaken such an effort is John Hardy, who went to Indonesia and, together with local villagers built an all-green school, consisting entirely of products from the surrounding forest. This school is materially in harmony with its surroundings. Additionally, children are being taught how to live a sustainable life, which is a skill that will be beneficial to themselves, their offspring and their environment. An interesting result of this effort is that local people living in the vicinity of the school have adjusted their own modes of engagement: they have rebuilt their houses using a similar approach and are trying to transform their ways of living accordingly (see Hardy, 2010). As can be expected, such endeavors don't necessarily generate the political will to significantly adjust global modes of engagement with the environment. The main barrier to the generalization of such efforts is, of course, powerful economic interests (see Shah, 2009). However, in spite of this lack of political will, these developments in general show that many people are beginning to cultivate a sense of interconnectedness in which they recognize that their behavior influences their environment, which in turn affects the quality of their own lives. How these developments are connected to our view of the fostering of a global identity will be discussed next.

The Barrier Between "Us" and "Them"

In this age of intensified globalization, the maintenance of identity is a serious concern for many people. It might be said that it is actually moving people to strengthen social boundaries, in order to ensure a certain sense of belonging, unity and connection with both the past and the future. In fact, the post-Cold War world seems to be marked everywhere by the emergence of identity politics. Some of this type of politics is ethnic in nature, while in other cases, it is national, religious or political. And their aims may vary a great deal too. While majority groups in several countries are working to marginalize minorities in order to safeguard a sense of cultural homogeneity, in recent years several minority groups have developed a separatist ideology, demanding spaces of political and cultural autonomy for themselves (Eriksen, 2007, p.144). Scientific debates trying to grapple with these identity-related developments have been

a part of this process. These debates have given rise to many theories. Some are outdated and trumped by recent studies. Some of these theories contradict each other, while others complement one another. We will now explore some of these theories.

For our purposes, the shift from a primordialist to a constructionist approach is a fitting point of departure. Essentially, primordialists argue that a collective identity is based on a common descent and shared claims to blood, soil, and language (Appadurai, 1996, p.140). This view faces severe criticism in many of the recent studies on group and, especially, ethnic identity. First, a primordialist focus on the uniqueness of groups wrongly assumes that a given group is isolated from other groups. In accordance with this view, a shared identity is a primordial feature rather than being part of an ongoing social process. Secondly, this approach assumes that the maintenance of boundaries between groups is unproblematic (Barth, 1996, p.11).

Contrasting this essentialist view, Barth's approach to social identity is *relational* and *processual* (Eriksen, 1993, p.38). It is processual because one's shared identity is part of an ongoing process of (re)locating these boundaries, which themselves are not necessarily geographical or territorial, but rather social and symbolic. Social identity, moreover, is highly relational because a group is defined in relation to the "Other", as well as by the above-mentioned boundaries. Both groups demarcate their identity and distinctiveness vis-à-vis the "Other". Within the social sciences, this argument marked a shift in focus from intra-group factors to the frontiers between groups. Social identity, as such, is not something groups possess. Rather, it is the ever-changing and situational relationship between groups. Identity does not lie *within* groups but *between* them (Eriksen, 1993, p.58).

Following this line of thought, many scholars have argued that a global identity is evidently impossible—a contradiction in terms. For how can a globally inclusive identity exist without an "Other" against which it can define itself? How can any social identity come into being without dichotomization, contrasting "Us" and "Them"? We do not oppose to this idea. However, what exactly is an "Other" but a depiction of cultural and moral entity that is distinct from the "Self"? Must this "Other" be real, or can it be hypothetical? We argue that the "Other" can indeed be hypothetical and theorize that the construction of this

hypothetical "Other" could be a result of our growing sense of interconnectedness.

Skeptics might argue, as outlined above, that there can only be an "Us" if there is a real "Them". But, as Abizadeh (2005) has shown, the view that every identity must be ultimately oppositional is derived from a theory of individual ego formation. This view states that the "Self" needs an external and real "Other" for basic human notions, such as self-differentiation and self-consciousness, in order to come into being (See also Fay, 1996, p.30-49). Critics of an inclusive global identity have simply extrapolated this theory of individual identity formation into the social realm. As such, it is assumed that the formation of a collective identity also requires an external and real "Other". But this argument overlooks a crucial difference between individual identity and social identity: "[It] fails to distinguish between an 'other' external to the collectivity to which I belong and other individual members of the collectivity to which I belong" (Abizadeh, as cited in Karlberg, 2008, p.5). Specifically, while it might be true that an *individual* needs a real "Other" in order to become aware of its "Self", with regard to a *collectivity,* this general rule of the formation of a self-conception might apply differently. A collectivity has the advantage of containing multiple identities (or ingredients) to an extent that one individual could never have. It is thus able to draw on its internal diversity to construct complex realities that transcend the constructionist capacity of a single individual. Anthropologists should especially be keenly aware that a collectivity operates according to a dynamic different from that of an individual, and that qualities can thus emerge from a collectivity that cannot possibly develop and become manifest in a single individual. It is from this perspective that we argue that humanity as a whole could produce a hypothetical "Other" that is realistic, but not real, and that would be sufficient to sustain a global all-inclusive sense of "Self". Below, we will hypothesize how this dual formation is related to the growing sense of interconnectedness.

The Fostering of a Global Identity

In this paper we have related the growing sense of interconnectedness to the current climate change and environmental degradation. As our modes of engagement have attained a broader scale, intensified and accelerated, the effects of our activities have expanded accordingly. Partly due to this development, people around the world are becoming increasingly sensitive to the fact that their manner of engagement not only influences their environment, but that it also affects their own lives. This sensitivity and consequent sense of interconnectedness can only increase as the dialectic between the local and the global—with regard to human-environment relations—becomes ever more manifest: Local practices of gross environmental exploitation and deprivation ripple into the global sphere, changing air and water quality and the climate. These environmental alterations in turn impact numerous local areas worldwide, causing all kinds of disruptive effects. It is crucial to note here that the environment at large *does not discriminate* between "exploitative communities" and those locales seemingly in "harmony with nature". Everyone is affected. And it is on the grounds of this observation that we have resorted to a broad generalization in this essay, wherein we have depicted the relation between humanity and the environment as mutually threatening.

This mutuality is, however, far more complex than it appears to be. Taking into account the previously described manner in which humans are physically and mentally interconnected with their surroundings, the ways in which our engagement with the environment impacts upon our daily lives, how social inequities determine the unequal distribution of vulnerability and risk, and how interconnectedness divides both effects and accountability (however differentially) among each and every person, it can be said that humanity is not being threatened by an external environmental force, but actually *constitutes a threat to itself.* From this perspective, humanity shares a common enmity and victimhood. And as humanity is realizing that its own mode of engaging with the environment is posing a threat to its own existence, the perceived need for a global transformation is increasing. And such a transformation can, in light of the interconnected web within which we live, *only be realized if we form a coalition (*i.e. a *unified social body).* In other words, it is our contention that our growing sense of interconnectedness, and the global problems currently affecting us, are producing a "need" for a *unified social body.* Consequently, our current *divided social body* poses an obstacle. And it is our view that, as our global consciousness grows and we shift toward a *unified social body*, the *divided social body* which is our current "Self" will gradually become the

historical or hypothetical "Other". The old "Self", which did not recognize its interconnectedness and which was marked by competition, will then be depicted as the cultural and moral "Other" that is necessary to construct and maintain a global identity and community.

Huntington (1993, p.41-49) regarded this global community or "Universal Civilization" as he termed it, as a Western idea, at odds with notions of particularity prevailing in most Asian societies. First of all, it is highly dubious whether this notion of a universal civilization is a Western construct. How many religions that have originated in the (Middle-)East, including Christianity, haven't envisioned a world-enveloping civilization reaching the four corners of the earth? Also, Huntington somehow neglects the fact that even in these particularistic-minded Asian societies that he is referring to, multi-layered communities are readily imagined. Apart from these objections to Huntington's rejection of a "Universal Civilization", we do concur with some parts of his article. We too conceive of (a global) civilization as primarily dependent on people's subjective self-identification, and as one that, as a result of the compositions and boundaries of civilizations, can be altered. Furthermore, like Huntington, we do not see civilization as culturally homogeneous. It is internally diverse, and this should not be a problem at all. For as Karlberg (2008) argues: "A global "we" can accommodate multiple secondary distinctions between "us" and "them" [as long as] those distinctions are not understood in a hostile or adversarial manner" (p.315). The global identity, we have alluded to, does not comprise a single form wherein all distinctive attributes have been mashed together into a pulp of sameness. Rather, in accordance with Fay (1996, p.241-242), the universal exists through and only because of particularities. No two humans are ever exactly the same. "The human" only comes in distinct forms, and its variation can never be exhausted. Think only of the uniqueness of each individual's fingerprints. A similar principle applies to nature. No two forms in nature are ever exactly the same. Even though they might appear as such, at a microscopic level at least, they are always in a transformative mode of becoming, either composing or decomposing. At the same time, we must realize that no particularity stands on its own. Particularities are always expressions of a single universal category. Even though there are a billion ways to smile, each manifestation of the behavior is

a version of a "smile". Similarly, although there are countless ways to be human, each is a manifestation of a common humanity.

In sum, the global identity we perceive to be possible is one that is based on a common fate, responsibility, sense of interconnectedness and interdependence. Even though these factors might be unequally distributed, all people are nonetheless entangled in the same web. Given that humanity at large poses a threat to itself, it is possible—and necessary—to change from a mode of competition to one of coalition, from adolescence to adulthood, and from segregation to integration. Only then can humanity as a whole remedy its own deficits: not only to enhance and stabilize environmental circumstances, but also economic, political and cultural systems. We argue that these cannot be stabilized by forceful extrapolation or intensification of outdated patterns, but by radical transformation. We must adjust to the needs of the present age. It is in this light, with the aim of transcending old ways of conceptualizing, that we have sought to argue against dominant notions of identity formation that rule out the construction of a global identity. Rather, we have argued that, as people are realizing how intimately they are connected to each other and their surroundings, the necessity for a *unified social body* or coalition is becoming an ever more pressing need. And as this need grows and we respond to it, our current "Self" – the *divided social body*- could become the hypothetical "Anti-Self", the historical "Other" that we hope never to become again.

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