

CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN ANTHROPOLOGY: REFLECTIONS ON 'UNITY' AND 'UNCERTAINTY' IN THE DIALOGICAL SELF

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ABSTRACT. The dialogical self is a very useful concept for the analysis of the multiple identifications of individuals in multicultural circumstances that are so characteristic of the contemporary era of globalisation. It complements the dynamic conception of culture that has emerged in anthropology in recent decades, while it has a number of advantages over the traditional concept of identity. This article discusses the development of the concept of culture in anthropology as well as the parallel debate about the notion of cultural identity in anthropology in order to demonstrate that the notion of the dialogical self to some extent overcomes the difficulties with the concept of identity in the analysis of the dialogical interaction between different conceptions of culture within the self of individuals. At the same time, however, this article aims at showing that the theory of the dialogical self may also benefit from anthropological debates about multiple identifications in multicultural situations, which indicate that bicultural individuals are not necessarily hampered by 'uncertainty' whereas the dialogue within their self does not automatically culminate in 'unity' either.

Keywords: anthropology, globalisation, culture, identity, dialogical self, uncertainty, unity

Culture is hot! Until some 25 years ago culture was the trademark of cultural anthropologists, mainly associated with exotic rituals in what they used to call "primitive" societies. Since the onset of globalisation, however, culture has also moved centre stage in western discourses. Culture is no longer associated exclusively with pre-modernism, but instead it has become part of popular discourses all over the world, ranging from the representation of corporate organisations to the worldview of cultural minorities in western nation-states. As such, culture has acquired a range of different meanings that require reflection and analysis, not in the last place because the significance of contemporary culture, or rather: cultures, has enormous implications for everyone's conception of self. The increasing multiplicity of culture is reflected in the self of individuals and for that reason, too, the concept of dialogical self

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seems very useful to address the different and even opposing demands resulting from the differentiation of culture in the context of globalisation and its associated processes of migration.

Indeed, the prominence of culture in the contemporary era seems itself a cultural phenomenon that cannot be analysed in isolation of the unprecedented impact of globalisation. When the impact of innovations in communication technology gathered some momentum and the rise of neo-liberal ideologies seemed irreversible, the emergence of globalisation became rapidly uncontested in the 1980s. Initially, some pessimists still predicted that globalisation would entail an increasing homogenisation of customs and cultures throughout the world (Ritzer, 1992), but some 15 years later it is no longer disputed that globalisation seems to involve increasing heterogeneity instead (Appadurai, 2001). After all, in contrast to earlier expectations globalisation has incited a large-scale revival of cultural traditions at local levels.

The so-called paradox of globalisation is particularly evident in small-scale societies that believe to be in danger of losing their cultural uniqueness under the impact of global influences, as a consequence of which they have become engaged in a large-scale revival of cultural traditions (Otto & Pedersen, 2000, 2005). The reconstitution of local traditions and traditional forms of culture in many non-western societies, however, could also be argued as pointing to a declining hegemony of western capitalism (Friedman, 2003). This suggestion is further corroborated by a parallel upsurge of a series of alternative cultural identifications in many western societies, such as those based on indigeneness, regional location and immigrant status, which all have a negative influence on the capacity of nation-states to nationalize.

The fragmentation of the nation-state in the global era is to a large extent caused by migration. Contemporary movements of labour are fundamentally different from those in the past, both in terms of quantity and quality. Some five million people cross national borders each year, and they are on the move not only in search of employment, but also for a whole range of other reasons, including cultural reasons associated with differences in lifestyle as represented in and disseminated by multiple global media ("Screens," 2002). The scale and diversity of migrations are therefore not only unprecedented, but their consequences are more far-reaching as well. Transnational migration is not only complicating culture and cultural relationships within the nation-state, but the rise of the multicultural society that is associated with it is simultaneously having fundamental implications for the self of individual migrants and all their relations at home and abroad. In this context, a dialogical perspective on the self is required to take into account the increasing number of voices and counter-voices that are represented in the self of multicultural citizens.

Not surprisingly, the implications of the processes of globalisation, transnational migration and the growing complexity of cultural relationships for the self of

individuals in a variety of different cultural settings are featuring high on the research agenda of social scientists. The concept of self, however, is alien to the toolbox of most cultural anthropologists. Apart from a small number of cognitive anthropologists, mainly in the United States, most anthropologists interested in individual interpretations and representations of culture tend to use the concept of identity, and, formerly, the notion of personality. In this paper, now, I will argue that anthropologists are badly in need of a multidimensional concept of self in order to tackle the increasingly dynamic nature of cultural processes, and the manner in which they reflect the constitution of culture within the self of individual actors. I will do so partly by reflecting on the outdated concept of personality, but mainly by discussing the drawbacks of the concept of identity for the analysis of complex cultural relationships and their consequences for the self. At the same time, however, I will argue that the psychological theory of the dialogical self may benefit from anthropological analyses of cultural processes, that will not only raise new questions, but to some extent also provide new answers to old questions, e.g. regarding the experience of uncertainty in the context of multiple positions within the self as well as the alleged unity of those positions within the self as a so-called *unitas multiplex*.

‘Culture’ in the old days

The contestation of culture is not a unique feature of the existing *Zeitgeist*. By mid-twentieth century two American anthropologists, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952), found 164 definitions in their famous review of what anthropologists meant by culture. In the course of the 1960s and 1970s, however, culture nearly disappeared from view in European anthropology, although in the United States it did retain its value as a crucial concept (Kuper, 1999). Over the past 15 years or so, partly with the help of cultural studies, it can be argued that ‘culture’ has resumed its key position in anthropology throughout the world, which is largely due to the central role of culture in popular discourses of multicultural societies. But contemporary conceptions of culture are radically different from the meaning culture used to have when anthropology developed as a discipline within the academy in the nineteenth century. A brief excursion into the shifting meaning of culture over the years may help to clarify contemporary connotations of culture.

Many anthropological textbooks open with the definition of culture as a whole way of life of a group or society as it was first formulated by the English evolutionist Edward Tylor:

‘Culture’ is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Tylor, 1871/1924, p. 1)

However, if this was a point of departure for modern anthropology, it was not a basis for consensus and anthropologists in different national traditions set off along divergent

paths. The anthropologist Tylor himself attempted to combine the romantic notion of the German philosopher Johann Herder that nations, and groups within nations, have distinctive 'cultures', with the idea originating in the Enlightenment that each of these 'cultures' was positioned at a different evolutionary stage (Wright, 1998). Franz Boas, the founding father of empirical anthropology in the United States, rejected Tylor's social evolutionism by emphasizing the particularity of each culture as a result of the group's responses to different environmental conditions and their specific historical development. By treating 'culture' as the product of historical and social forces, rather than a biological organism, he criticized the racial determinism that was underlying the evolutionary perspective of the armchair anthropologists (Stocking, 1974). In Britain, modern anthropology's first professional field worker and ethnographer, Bronislaw Malinowski, advanced a different critique of the rationalistic Victorian conception of 'man' by arguing that far from being 'savage' and illogical, each of the 'peoples' in Africa, South Asia and the Pacific had a distinct, rational and legitimate way of life which should be valued (Young, 2004). Thus, anthropologists differed profoundly in their theories and in the aspects of western thought that they questioned, but they shared an idea of the world as made up of 'peoples', each with a coherent way of life, or 'culture' (Wright, 1998).

Although in the meantime anthropologists have developed new and more dynamic ways of thinking about 'culture', the old, essentialist conception of culture has percolated out from academic discourse and is still widespread in public parlance. The main features of this 'old idea of culture' are that culture is basically a bounded, small-scale entity; with a number of defined characteristics (following a checklist); that is unchanging, in balanced equilibrium or self-reproducing; with an underlying system of shared meanings, a so-called 'authentic culture'; and, last but not least, with identical, homogenous individuals (Wright, 1998).

In the 1970s the notion of 'a people' having a 'culture' came to be considered as a crucial aspect of colonialism. The first critics contended that an essentialist conception of culture created fixed entities in which the West could intervene. By measuring, categorizing, describing, representing and thereby supposedly 'knowing' others, the objects of that knowledge were made the subjects of new forms of power and control (Asad, 1973; Said, 1978). Following these early critiques of the colonial connotation of 'culture', a spate of further reviews and reflections followed (see Pels & Salemink, 1994). The influential tradition of British (structural-) functionalism was unpacked as having treated 'cultures' as small-scale, bounded entities organised through economic, social and political institutions which interacted as a self-contained 'whole' sustained in a static equilibrium. Eric Wolf, among many others, argued that this had been a fiction when most of the places studied, however remote, were being visited not just by anthropologists, but also by merchants, missionaries and colonial administrators. Societies were therefore neither unchanging nor bounded, but part of a world order

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dominated first by colonialism and later by nation-states, international capitalism and international agencies, but these had been left out of a picture of 'cultures' as ahistorical, self-contained entities (Wolf 1982).

Obviously, Wolf's critique also had implications for anthropology's quest for the unique 'authentic culture' of another society in the form of an integrated system of consensual 'essential meanings' which self-reproduced regardless of economic and political change. If anthropologists constructed the social order out of 'essential meanings' which did not change in new historical or economic conditions, what then would generate social and cultural transformations (see Keesing 1990)? In addition, anthropologists of various persuasions have been criticized for treating 'culture' as if it were a set of ideas or meanings which were shared by a whole population of homogeneous individuals. Indeed, a long-standing assumption of twentieth century anthropology was that individual persons are primarily members of cultures, and that they are therefore regarded as having a preexisting identity (Strathern 1994). This assumption found expression mainly in the anthropological concepts of personality and identity.

Identity

In the early days anthropology's interest in the person was reflected in the concept of personality. The relationship between culture and personality was object of research in American anthropology especially, with a peak of interest between the 1920s and the 1950s. The rise of the so-called culture and personality movement in those days was brought about by the encounter between anthropology and psychoanalysis, represented mainly by Freud and the American psychiatrist Harry S. Sullivan. Most participants in the deliberations aimed at showing that the development of both culture and personality were subject to mutual influences: personality was considered to be resulting from the internalization of culture, whereas culture was regarded as the projection of personality. A detailed examination of this important tradition of research in the history of anthropology is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is probably not unfair to say that this circular view of culture and personality is in a variety of ways to be found in the work of leading exponents of this movement, among whom Abram Kardiner, Clyde Kluckhohn, Edward Sapir, Ralph Linton, Cora DuBois, John Whiting, and last but not least, Margaret Mead (Harris, 1969).

When the culture and personality movement had reached a theoretical deadlock in the 1950s, it was the psychologist Erik Erikson whose work on the so-called 'ego identity' of children and youngsters made eventually that the psychological notion of identity replaced the concept of personality and entered anthropology as a key term. Erikson examined the psychological conditions that influenced the adjustment of the 'personality' of self to his or her environment. In his view identity referred primarily to a coherent sense of self or the feeling on the part of the individual of being the same as

how he or she is viewed and identified by other(s). Thus, identity referred to a well-adjusted personality that emerges from the same, or: identical, identification of self by self and other (Erikson, 1950). This meaning of identity proceeds directly from the etymology of the concept, which is derived from the Latin *identitat* and/or *identitas*, which, in turn, was derived from *identidem*, a contraction of *idem et idem*, meaning ‘repeatedly’ (literally ‘same and same’; cf. Sökefeld, 1999). It goes without saying, however, that ‘sameness’ in this context must be understood in the sense of ‘similar’ rather than as a unifying concept (Sovran, 1992).

The connotation of sameness is also apparent in the more sociological meaning of identity that emerged in the structural-functional tradition of anthropology. Identity came to be understood as the historically and culturally rooted self-image of a group of people that was predominantly sketched and sharpened in contact *vis-à-vis* other groups of peoples. This meaning of identity was related to other anthropological concepts, such as worldview, value, ethos, and, last but not least, culture, all of which suggested a certain kind of homogeneity among members of a community (Abu-Lughod, 1991). Corresponding with the assumption of homogeneity was the view that the identity of individuals reflected the identity of their cultural group. As mentioned above, the identity of individuals was supposed to be identical to the identity of the group to which they belonged, which was consistent with anthropological theories about the relation between person and group or community (La Fontaine, 1985). Another important aspect of this view of identity concerned the presupposition of stability and permanence. People were regarded to share the same identity because they also shared the same history. The community or society to which they belonged was consequently considered to be solid and immutable.

The conclusion to be drawn from this brief excursion into anthropological interpretations of the relationship between culture and personality, or, more recently, between culture and identity, is that at both social and individual levels of analysis these concepts share the same assumptions of sameness and stability. In recent years, however, the anthropological focus on homogeneity and permanence has gradually fallen into disarray. For that reason, too, the concepts of culture and identity have been intensely debated, as has the relationship between the two (e.g., Friedman, 1994). The notion of identity has not only been criticized for its lack of explanatory power (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000), but, paradoxically, too, the narratives of identity that are so characteristic of the contemporary era of globalisation cannot be understood as expressions of social homogeneity or as representations of immutable realities either. Not infrequently they highlight the supposedly unique aspects of local identities, which invariably are intertwined with rapid changes in the social and cultural organisation of societies resulting from their inter-linkages with the global community. And the changing conditions for the expression of local identities are itself entangled with a new meaning of culture.

‘Culture’ in the Present Day

In view of Eric Wolf’s critique of culture and the concept’s position in former anthropological accounts of colonial history, it is useful to situate the emerging new meaning of culture in a historical perspective again. The end of colonialism that influenced the old meaning of culture was marked by changing political and economic conditions. Most countries in the world became independent during the 1970s, but that did not stop the continuing expansion into new areas of relations of production and exchange based on capital (Jameson, 1991). Most recently, these new domains would include the international organisation of production and consumption, the international integration of financial systems, and, last but not least, the rapid spread of global communication and information networks. These changes have, in turn, sparked off large-scale movements of labour, people and cultural meanings, with due consequences for contemporary constitutions of culture.

Above I already indicated that currently international movements of people are quantitatively and qualitatively distinct from those in the past. Migration has never been as pervasive as it is today and it is not only significant for economic reasons, but its consequences for the transformation and differentiation of culture are equally important. In this context, it might be useful to briefly consider migration in the Asia-Pacific region, which is one of the most interesting regions since it accounts for almost 40 % of the millions of people who cross national borders each year (Goss and Lindquist, 2000). In Asia the most conspicuous case is made up by the Philippines since currently more than 10% of the Philippine population is working overseas in 130 different countries. In the year 2000 their remittances contributed about 21% of the country’s gross national product. It is also remarkable that Filipinos have not only moved to other Asian countries, with which they share more cultural similarities than with other countries, but also to the Pacific. It began as early as 1950, when a military base was established in Guam, where they now account for more than 25% of the total population of 145,000. They are also found in other areas in the Pacific, where also many other Asian migrants are to be found, and then the migration of Pacific people themselves has not even been mentioned.

Theories of international migration rarely consider the case of the Pacific Islands, despite persistent and extensive circulation and small island depopulation that characterizes the movement of migration in the Pacific. In this context, it is relevant to distinguish the Pacific into three different cultural areas, and to clarify that Polynesia is characterized by international migration to metropolitan countries of the Pacific or the Pacific Rim, notably Australia, New Zealand and the USA, that Melanesia is characterized by internal migration, mainly from rural to urban areas, and that Micronesia is characterized by both patterns. Polynesia is in this context the most interesting. I mentioned Guam already, which is part of Micronesia, but in Polynesia one can also find American Samoa and Hawaii, where the presence of the US

stimulated new streams of migration to the American mainland. Other countries have subsequently followed. In Niue and the Cook Islands, both of which are freely associated with New Zealand, three fourths or more of the total population now resides in New Zealand or has moved on to Australia. Altogether, at least half a million Polynesians are living abroad today, which is about 25% of the total population. About 250,000 of those are living in New Zealand, where they make up some 6% of the total population, and for that reason Auckland is often referred to as the Polynesian capital. This massive migration is of course not unique to the Pacific, yet in this region the impact of such transnational movement is magnified in small populations (Goss and Lindquist, 2000).

Until recently, migration was primarily interpreted in terms of its so-called 'push' and 'pull factors', which involved too strong an emphasis on the economic dimension of migration. Currently, however, there seems to be consensus that migration can no longer be explained with the ancient laws of supply and demand, it can no longer be understood within a framework of costs and benefits, and it can no longer be controlled by nation-state governments because of its transnational character (Van Meijl, 2007). It is also essential to take into account that individual mobility has increased dramatically as a result of technological advances in transportation and communication. It has simply become easier to move around and that causes people to migrate not only for economic reasons, but also for reasons of identity. For instance, an university educated woman from the Philippines is willing to accept a job as a domestic servant overseas. For her migration involves sacrificing a high social status for a better income that enables her to support her family, which remains essential for her identity. Non-economic factors are increasingly significant. Labour is not only a commodity, but it is also important for someone's cultural status and identity.

The dynamics of contemporary transnational migration make it therefore necessary not only to look critically at neoclassical economics, but also at the rigid use of some old concepts within the social sciences, such as culture. Fluidity, non-fixity, contingency, contextuality and multiplicity are the order of the day and these require particularly imaginative sets of epistemologies and methodologies if we are adequately to understand the underpinnings and implications of transnational flows of goods, people and their cultural baggage. A new paradigm for the study of transnational movements should therefore not only confront economism, but also the presuppositions underlying the 'old' conception of culture.

While in the past culture referred principally to the coherence of cultural notions that were believed to bind a group of people together, in the present the meaning of the concept of culture has shifted to include the diversity and derivations of individual constructions, representations and interpretations of culture following the large-scale processes of migration across the globe (Wright, 1998). A 'culture' is no longer considered to speak with one voice, so to speak, but to be multi-vocal and polyphonus.

Thus, a distinction must be made between, on the one hand, a traditional discourse in which culture was equated with a – group of – people that can be delineated with a boundary, and, on the other hand, a new discourse in which culture is not represented as a reified essence but, instead, as a political process of contestation among *individual* members or groupings over the power to define social situations (Wright, 1998). The dynamic relationship between individual and community has in other words become characteristic of the anthropological concept of culture in recent history.

The intrinsic fluctuation of culture that is currently associated with its multivocal contestation implies that culture is being used in a variety of different meanings that are contextually dependent. Similarly, culture is no longer regarded as unchanging and identical for all individuals, but as an inherently dynamic process of domination and marginalization in which individuals are positioned differently. Thus, the association of homogeneity that was so characteristic of the old concepts of culture and identity, has been replaced by a concern for the question how different people attempt to use the economic, political, and symbolic resources that are available to them in order to try and impose their interpretation and understanding of situations on others, while at the same time attempting to prevent others from making their definition of the situation hegemonic. The situations in which these contemporary struggles for culture and identity are taking place are also characterized by unboundedness. Local, national and global networks often meet in them, and for that reason, too, the links between the various aspects of culture and identity are always historically specific and never form a closed or coherent whole.

Multiple Identifications

A clarification of the new meaning of culture not only sheds light on the contemporary context in which identities are being reconstituted throughout the world, but it also clarifies the need to situate the analysis of identity in different dimensions of social and cultural situations. Any contextual analysis of contemporary representations of identity will necessarily have to pay attention to the cultural complexity and inherent ambiguity of identity (Hannerz, 1992). In the global era identity implies not only sameness and uniqueness, since these features cannot be defined in isolation of other – cultural – identities. In increasingly multicultural contexts identity obtains its meaning primarily from the identity of the other with whom self is contrasted. Indeed, any construction of identity is preceded by a recognition of difference and an awareness of what self is not, but this psychological process is particularly prominent in intercultural situations (e.g., Woodward, 1997). Not until the difference with other individuals with a different cultural background has become apparent will the sameness and uniqueness of the cultural identity of self come to the surface. Thus, the new conception of identity refers simultaneously to the difference *and* sameness of self and other, both with psychological *and* sociological connotations.

The problem with this multidimensional view of identity, however, is its elusiveness since the precedence of difference over sameness makes it logically impossible to provide a positive perspective on what identity actually is. The absence of a 'self'-generated foundation of identity, however, seems unavoidable in the current condition of postmodernity that denies the possibility to define in positive terms the contemporary conditions of knowledge and representation, also of the subject of self (Lyotard, 1984). The postmodern rejection of the absolute foundation of knowledge and representation by Lyotard is, in turn, interwoven with Foucault's (1966) vigorous critique of the sovereign subject that was so characteristic of the period of modernity.

As the aspect of sameness has been eclipsed by difference, so has the aspect of uniqueness been substituted by plurality in the contemporary perspective on identity. Identity is no longer seen as exclusive, as individual, or rather: indivisible, but as multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. As a result, the attention has shifted from singular identity to multiple identities, although this emphasis is literally contradictory to the original, etymological meaning of sameness of self (Sökefeld, 1999, 2001). Nevertheless, the focus is now on fractured identities as well as on their flexibility and changeability. In this context it is also relevant to refer to Stuart Hall's (1996) definition of identity as 'the point of *suture* between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to "interpellate", speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be "spoken"' (pp. 5-6). Identity, in other words, is a kind of nexus at which different constructions of self coincide, and sometimes also collide.

The increasing recognition that identities are never singular, but always multiply constructed in different contexts, which, in turn, is intertwined with the prevalence of difference over sameness in their meaning, leaves unresolved the question how we can understand the value of identity and how we may explain the emergence of interest in identities in recent history. Hall (1996) acknowledges that reading identities only against the grain of modern interpretations will not lead to an improved understanding. For that reason, too, he argues that it is important that the subject of identity continues to be placed on the research agenda of the social sciences. Formulating the parameters of the context in which the contemporary study of identities is to be situated, he contends, firstly, that it is important to link the social and the psychological. In this context he elaborates his definition of identity as an intersection of temporary attachments to different subject positions in various discourses and practices, by arguing that identities can also be seen as resulting from successful articulations of different discourses in different dimensions, notably social and psychological dimensions of reality.

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Since in this view the construction of identity, or rather: identities, is a never-ending process, always incomplete, unfinished and open-ended, Hall (1996) also proposes the term *identification* above the essentialist concept of identity, which idea has recently been corroborated by the influential philosopher Zygmunt Bauman (2001). Rather than being characterized by a singular and stable identity, in the contemporary global world the subject is constantly 'suturing' itself to different articulations between discourse and practice, which process, in turn, leads to multiple identifications (see also Cohen, 2000).

The interesting aspect of these developments is that they have raised new questions for anthropology: to what extent is the differentiation of contemporary cultures reflected in the construction of identities and the emergence of multiple identifications? How do multiple identifications come about in individual lives? And how do multiple identifications of an individual relate to the identifications of other people in a dynamic socio-cultural context? In addition to these questions regarding the sociological implications of changing cultures and changing identities, it is important to examine the psychological implications of contemporary cultural developments. The main question in this respect concerns the relationship between multiple identifications *within* individual constructions of themselves as persons (rather than between or among individuals). How are multiple identifications mediated within individual consciousness? And how do individuals relate different representations of their identifications within their experiences of themselves?

These questions, now, raise, in turn, the methodological question whether the concept of identity, or identification, is the best term available to address these research questions. Some not only consider the analytical value of the concept of identity insufficient to address its entanglement with cultural complexity, but the ambiguity of identity is also compounded by the reification of identity in popular discourses, in which frequently the focus is exclusively on aspects of sameness, homogeneity and historical continuity. The confusion about the essentialization of identity in popular discourses versus the ambivalence surrounding the concept of identity in academic discourses has caused some to argue that identity has been charged with so many meanings that it has ceased to be a meaningful concept (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000).

In contrast, the German anthropologists Martin Sökefeld (2001) has argued that the ambivalence caused by the co-existence of constructivist conceptions of identity within academia and the reification of identity in popular discourse is an essential aspect in the usefulness of identity as an analytical category. After all, the dual hermeneutics of identity enables social scientists to point simultaneously to the essentialist implications of identity in social reality and to the de-constructivist stance of social scientists. The Janus-faced semantic structure of identity would then, if fully realised, offer an insurance against the conflation of categories of practice and analysis. It would remind the academy that identities, although posed by actors as singular,

continuous, bounded and more or less integrated, can at the same time be considered as subject to the postmodern conditions of plurality, intersectionality and difference.

Although it is important to make the distinction between discourse and practice, the analytical value of the concept of identity might still be rather limited to address multiple identifications within multicultural settings. For that reason, too, I would argue that an examination of the questions raised above regarding the relationship among multiple identifications within individual consciousness and experience might benefit from the analytical value of a multidimensional concept of self, such as the dialogical self, which does not suffer from the same drawbacks as the concept of identity.

Self

In his introductory book *Anthropology of the Self* (1994), Brian Morris argues that in the history of anthropology the self as primarily a psychological concept has been largely absent, although a large number of anthropologists have been concerned with cultural conceptions of the person. One of the most influential anthropologists who generated an interest in cross-cultural understandings of the person was probably Marcel Mauss (1938). Mauss did use the concept of self (*moi*), but in the French tradition of *ethnologie* he was inclined to prefer the concept of person (*personne*). Implicitly he focussed on the notion of person as a cultural category while he seemed to reserve the conception of self for the psychological dimension of personhood.

Mauss' reflections on the relationship between sociology and psychology were paralleled by the emergence of the culture and personality school in American anthropology (see above). Although the mutual influences of French and American anthropology of the person or personality were negligible, there were some remarkable similarities. In both traditions of thought an implicit distinction was made between cultural representations and social practices. Accordingly, the person or personality was considered primarily a cultural conception, or a 'category' of a particular community, as Mauss phrased it. As such, the person was to be distinguished from the self, which was understood as a self-conscious agent that was constituted socially as well as psychologically (Morris 1994). A notion of the human person as an individual self is, indeed, lacking in anthropology in which discipline the concept of identity became of prime importance instead. The marginal position of the concept of self in the anthropological tradition makes it necessary to elaborate in some detail on the differences and similarities between self and identity.

Morris (1994) has emphasized that the self is not an entity but a process that orchestrates an individual's personal experience as a result of which he or she becomes self-aware and self-reflective about her or his place in the surrounding world. The concept of self may accordingly be defined as an individual's mental representation of her or his own person, as a self-representation, while the concept of other refers to the mental representation of other persons (see also Spiro, 1993). A clear separation

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between self and other seems to be universal (Spiro, 1993), but the meaning of this distinction varies from person to person. At the same time, it seems obvious that the relationship between self and other is also a function of culture (Shweder & Bourne, 1984). Indeed, the most crucial form of interaction and exchange takes place, neither between the individual and society, as suggested by Durkheim and Mauss in French sociology, nor between the psyche and culture, as implied in the American culture and personality movement, but instead between the self and her or his cultural environment as mediated in social practices (Morris, 1994).

In view of the dialectics between the self and the cultural milieu, which is assumed to be different in different types of society, a dichotomy between Western and non-Western notions of self has long been embedded in Western philosophical and psychological traditions of thinking. Geertz (1983) provided an exemplary definition of the Western conception of self as

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 its social and natural background...(p. 59)

This essentialist construction of an autonomous, unitary and stable self in the West is grounded in a contrasting assumption that non-western people do not possess an individuated self that is differentiated from other. As a corollary, a socio-centric model has long dominated western perceptions of the non-western self, presupposing that in non-western societies a self is inseparable from the surrounding community. Over the past decade, however, it has become increasingly apparent that this dichotomy is problematic for two reasons. First, the individualist notion of the western self must be revised since it is unquestionably more heterogeneous, contested and dialectical than is usually assumed (Murray, 1993). Second, it is currently widely accepted that a socio-centric worldview in non-western societies does not necessarily preclude the development of an individual self (Kusserow, 1999).

The relatively recent deconstruction of the antithetical interpretation of a western versus a non-western self follows partly the rise of postmodernism. This new discourse of knowledge contributed to the dismantlement of the conception of reason and truth that characterized western philosophy since the Enlightenment (Lyon, 1994). In addition, it rejected the foundation of knowledge in an autonomous self or, as Foucault (1966) phrased it, a sovereign subject. In a postmodern perspective, then, the self is no longer considered as the source of all reflection, but it is decentred to a mere function of social practice. The self does not constitute the world, but is itself constituted by the world. For that reason, too, in postmodern thought the self is never unified, but increasingly disunited, while it is never singular but always constituted in manifold manners in different domains of society (Hall, 1996). Hence, the self is

currently understood as pluralist, fragmented, emergent, dialogical, relational, inconsistent and culturally determined, both in western and non-western societies (Murray, 1993).

The Dialogical Self

A multidimensional conception of the self may be more suitable to address the self in postmodern circumstances, but it does not automatically provide the answers to the critical questions mentioned above: how are individuals constituted in and through multiple different identities, or rather identifications. More specifically, how do multiple forms of difference, such as culture, space, ethnicity, class and gender intersect within individual actors? And how can multiple differences within individual actors be acknowledged without representing their identifications as negative, damaged or in crisis?

In this debate two different arguments tend to dominate. For a long time the prevailing perspective was offered by cognitive dissonance theory as developed by Leon Festinger (1957). The central hypothesis of this approach is that any person experiences the existence of dissonance between cognitive elements as uncomfortable and therefore everyone will always try to reduce a discrepancy between conflicting cognitions and attempt to achieve consonance, consistency and coherence. In addition, people are supposed to actively avoid situations and information which might increase cognitive dissonance since these entail a form of psychological tension that any individual wishes to diminish. The underlying concept of self in this theory is that people attempt to preserve a consistent and stable sense of self.

A comparable notion of self also characterizes the work of some cognitive anthropologists (Holland & Quinn, 1987; D'Andrade & Strauss, 1992; Shore, 1996). They refer to cognitive schemata and cultural models that are shared by members of a society and internalized into the self. In multicultural or other dynamic situations this notion of self implies that people have no choices but to accommodate diverging cultural identifications within a relatively stable and coherent self. In order to maintain a cohesive whole the self is therefore claimed to reject or suppress identifications that may conflict with other types of cognitive information and self-representations.

Currently, it is widely accepted that this theoretical approach of the self is inadequate to explain the dilemmas faced by multicultural citizens in globalised circumstances, but the assumption that a sense of consonance or consistency is crucial for an individual self remains deeply embedded even in attempts to discard with the notion of a stable and coherent self. Many continue to hold that actors generally experience their self as a symbolic whole in spite of multiple and changing representations that often seem mutually inconsistent. This may best be illustrated with reference to Katherine Ewing's (1990) frequently cited paper 'The Illusion of Wholeness'. Ewing tried to show how individual selves throughout the world

continuously reconstitute themselves into new selves in response to internal and external stimuli. In her view individuals construct these new selves from an available set of self-representations, that are highly dependent on context and mutually inconsistent. According to Ewing, the self is generally not aware of these shifts in self-representation, which do not therefore thwart individual experiences of wholeness and continuity. The shifting selves can only be observed by others, who are generally also unable to identify an overarching, cohesive self. In Ewing's perspective this implies that the experience of personal continuity and wholeness by self is illusory.

Others, mainly in the field of cognitive anthropology (e.g., Quinn, 2006) and personality psychology (e.g., Hermans and Kempen, 1993), have linked up the idea of plural, competing conceptions of the self with the notion of a person as a composite of many, often contradictory, self-understandings and identities. This strand of analysis has been inspired mainly by the Russian literary critic Mikhael Bakhtin, and has resulted in a view of the self as a multiplicity of I-positions among which dialogical relationships are established, which hardly requires further elaboration for the readership of this journal. The most important implication of the dialogical perspective on the self is that it is not an intra-psychological but a relational phenomenon that transcends the boundaries between inside and outside, between self and other, which view has been foreshadowed in the theory of William James. Although James (1890/1950) might have focused more on continuity than on discontinuity in his interpretation of the self, with his statement that a person "has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him..." (p. 294) he laid the foundation for the contemporary view of a dialogical relationship between multiple identifications of the self.

The Illusion of 'Unity'?

At first sight, a dialogical perspective on the self seems to contradict Ewing's conception of the 'illusory whole', but on second thoughts it can be argued that the theory of the dialogical self as it has been developed by Hubert J. Hermans has yet to come to terms with the question whether 'unity' is the most appropriate concept to describe the relationship between dialogical interactions among an extensive repertoire of I-positions. Although the concept of the dialogical self is theoretically equipped to discard with the notion of unity to represent a steady and stable interaction among a variety of internal and external positions, I would argue that the role of the concept of unity in the debate about the dialogical self is at least ambiguous, if not ideologically incorrect.

In his latest book on 'dialogue and misunderstanding', for the time being only in Dutch, Hermans (2006) borrows the metaphor of *unitas multiplex* from the German psychologist and philosopher William Stern to represent the sense of integration of the dialogical self that he assumes is necessary in order to maintain a balanced personality as distinct from dissociative identity disorders (DIDs). Since the main characteristic of

dissociative identity disorders is a disturbance of the dialogue among a range of I-positions resulting in an imbalanced selection of internal and external positions, the assumption is that balanced personalities, in contrast, have managed to achieve a certain sense of cohesion among their I-positions. The integration of I-positions is to some extent portrayed as a unity, but at the same time Hermans does seem to acknowledge that the unity he assumes characterizes the experience of dialogical relationships in the self of co-called 'healthy' human beings, is incomplete.

Hermans argues that the main aim of the dialogical interaction among a large variety of internal and external I-positions is to establish 'unity' in the self, but at the same time he points out that this process is never-ending. Unity seems to be achieved only in a meta-position, when individuals reflect on their interactions and invariably highlight the consistency among their different positions. Hermans also adds that the unity which is claimed at a reflexive moment of the meta-position is an 'illusion', which paradoxically is the same term as used by Ewing who takes a rather different stance in theory. I would argue, however, that the unity of the self in both theories is essentially incompatible with the multiplicity of positions and their shifting importance depending on context. By the same token, many people tend to represent their self as continuous, but that is usually not consistent with the ongoing alterations among positions that point to a structural discontinuity of the self.

The notion of unity in the theory of the dialogical self may therefore be disputed, both on theoretical grounds as well as on the basis of recent empirical research. Theoretically, it could be argued that in view of a long-term perspective on the development of the self, from pre-modernity to modernity, and subsequently to post-modernity, the concept of unity is an ideological device derived from the period of modernity during which indivisible individuals constituted the core of society. Over the past few decades, however, globalisation has transformed the core of modern society into a contact zone (Appadurai, 1991) or rather a network society (Castells, 1996), which implies that many people are dealing not only with the demands of their own culture, but also with the challenges of global society. As a corollary, many people, adolescents in particular, now develop multicultural identities. Part of their identity is rooted in the culture in which they were born and raised, but another part is influenced by and oriented towards the more global situation. Some may manage to develop a hybrid identity, relatively successfully combining aspects of both local and global circumstances, but invariably characterized by components of a different origin that require to be recombined continuously. Others will be involved in a never-ending struggle to work out in which situation they ideally belong. In any case, the cultural identities of most will no longer be obvious and a great deal of confusion has emerged among young people growing up in multicultural situations. Local cultures are changing under the impact of globalisation, while globalised circumstances are often radically different for new migrants, which often causes young people to feel alienated both from

their old home and their new home. Indeed, home seems to have been lost for many, which raises the question how young people cope with the dynamics of the contemporary era, characterized by multiculturalism. Hence, too, it is interesting and also essential to investigate whether in the postmodern era the core of the modern self has been substituted by a dialogue among a variety of different I-positions that still try to achieve unity but in practice never will.

The hypothesis underlying this question is argued not only on theoretical grounds, but also on the basis of empirical studies of the relationship between different cultural positions of the self in multicultural circumstances. In a recent paper Naomi Quinn (2006), a well-known cognitive anthropologist, revisits the ethnographic case presented by Katherine Ewing (see above), who examined the cultural dilemmas faced by a Pakistani woman who has moved away from her traditional place of residence. As a consequence, she was undergoing inner turmoil over the impending choice of a husband she herself does not favor. On the one hand, she is an obedient daughter, who “hoped that I would be able to sacrifice my feelings so that my parents can be happy.” Yet, in her very next utterance, she is a clever politician who will do what she can to get her way: “I will try to convince them but will try not to pressure them.” Subsequently, the Pakistani woman veers back to a representation of herself as an obedient child: “those who disobey their parents are not successful in life” (Ewing, 1990, p. 253).

Ewing argued that this Pakistani woman herself did not realise that her concept of herself is shifting and inconsistent, but instead that she experiences each self-representation as coherent in the context within which she invokes it. According to Ewing, the Pakistani woman was able to keep potentially conflicting representations of herself as a good daughter and a scheming politician apart in her mind. This argument is substantiated with reference to a cognitive device labelled ‘containment’, on the basis of which she would be able to keep potentially conflicting representations of herself as a good daughter and a scheming politician separated. Quinn, on the other hand, argues that Ewing’s analysis is not just incomplete but also misleading, leaving a false impression that all is shift and inconsistency, context and illusion. Instead, she proposes to analyse the cultural attitude of this Pakistani woman as “a cultural solution to the otherwise unbearable demands of formal deference in a severely hierarchical system of family relations” (Quinn, 2006, p. 373). Quinn supports this conclusion of the case with reference to Joseph LeDoux’s neuroscientific theory of the so-called ‘synaptic self’, in which the self is viewed as ‘a unit’, but not as ‘unitary’. From this perspective, the sense of being a whole arises as a consequence of neural systems acting in concert to achieve integration, but the integration is never perfect. Indeed, the unit of the neurobiological whole contributes to the integration of the self, but unity in the strict sense of the term is never achieved.

The neurobiological theory of the self as a non-unitary unit is particularly useful for the analysis of the self who finds her/himself in cross-cultural situations that are so

characteristic of the contemporary global era. For that reason, too, it can best be verified with ethnographic examples of inter-cultural dilemmas. Thus, the same point could be made on the basis of my own ethnographic studies of the problems faced by young Maori people, who are alienated from the traditional culture that is currently being revived in contemporary New Zealand, but who at the same time feel obliged to make an effort to familiarize themselves with the Maori language in order to become conversant with ceremonial protocol (Van Meijl, 2005, 2006). On the one hand, Maori youngsters are inclined to acknowledge the need to maintain Maori ceremonies in order to continue Maori cultural traditions which they consider an essential part of Maori society and Maori identity. On the other hand, however, they are reticent in making an effort to learn the Maori language and the principles of traditional protocol necessary for Maori ceremonial life because they also think it is archaic and therefore unnecessary. Yet it would be unfair to criticize these youngsters for being contradictory or inconsistent. In my view, they are facing an irresolvable dilemma that is increasingly common in the present day, when people are continuously moving across cultural landscapes. People living in cross-cultural circumstances are mediating the differences between cultures, also within their – dialogical – selves, but they realise more and more that some differences cannot be integrated into a whole. As a corollary, they attempt to come to terms with their multiple identifications, but they are increasingly aware that the pursuit of unity in the self is an illusion, mainly because the different cultural dimensions of their life are irreconcilable.

The implications of these ethnographic examples for the theory of the dialogical self are not negligible. Instead of living in one particular society that may be characterized by a rather homogeneous kind of culture, more and more people are living in the contact zones of different cultures and societies. The increasing interdependency of societies around the world and the cultural networks transversing them not only involve an intensification of contact between different cultural groupings, but also a strengthening of cultural contact within the self of individuals. Increasing interculturality, so to speak, is reflected in the rise of different cultural positions within the self of individuals, which in turn deepens the dialogue between these positions that all have a voice within the self. And these voices are involved in complicated conversations that reflect the differentiation of culture in the global world. Negotiations, tensions, conflicts, agreements and disagreements not only take place between different cultural groupings at the social level, but also within the dialogical self of multicultural individuals. And since the world is becoming more heterogeneous and multiple, the self also becomes more heterogeneous and multiple with due consequences for the internal organisation of the self. Cultural differentiation and multiplication requires more than ever before a well-developed dialogue, but the chances that this will lead to a coherent unity of the self have not increased over the years. Indeed, strong cultural differences, contrasts and oppositions indicate more than ever before that unity is no longer the

appropriate term to characterize the self of multicultural individuals who are engaged in a dialogue between different cultural positions. Although it is highly questionable that individuals in the past were not aware of inconsistencies and incoherencies among their different I-positions, I would suggest that especially in the contemporary, multicultural contact zones it can no longer be maintained that the self of individuals involved in both local and global networks is attempting to achieve unity. Dialogue and unity no longer seem to mix, if they ever did.

Dialogue and Uncertainty

The argument that ‘unity’ may no longer be an appropriate concept to describe the balance of the dialogue in which individuals are involved in multicultural circumstances also reflects on a related assumption in the theory of the dialogical self, namely that the process of globalisation arouses a great deal of uncertainty. In his latest book Hermans elaborates his theory of the dialogical self in line with an earlier publication on the implications of the emergence of cultural connections and cultural mixtures for the self (Hermans & Kempen 1998). Uncertainty, they argue, is a sign of the present since more and more people participate simultaneously in different cultural networks which are largely disjunctive. The contradictions, ambiguities and contrasting interests that accompany the rise of the multicultural network society are assumed not just to complicate the self’s attempt to attain unity among its range of I-positions, but also to confront the self with uncertainty.

In a more recent paper, Hermans elaborates the concept of uncertainty in cooperation with the Italian psychiatrist Giancarlo Dimaggio (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007). Uncertainty, they argue, is a direct consequence of the condition of globalisation, which has not only compressed time and space, but which has also led to the worldwide rise of a neo-liberal ideology that has removed the certainty of jobs and income in the past. In developing countries it has introduced a range of extra conditions for the donation of development funds. Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) even link these latest economic currents with a new source of uncertainty: terrorism. Since the attack on the Twin Towers on 9/11 al-Qaeda has had a far-reaching influence on world politics, which according to the authors is reflected in increasing uncertainty of the individual self. In my opinion, it is here that Hermans and Dimaggio make a logical mistake by jumping immediately from the global picture of the world to the self without questioning the direct relationship between the increasing dynamics of international politics and the alleged experience of uncertainty by individuals.

Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) specify their view of the ‘experience of uncertainty’ as made up of four aspects: cultural complexity, ambiguity following the increasing dynamics of contemporary politics, deficit knowledge referring to the demise of the *grand récits* of modernity, and, finally, unpredictability, implying that the future is generally no longer obvious. Their vision is that multivoiceness in the global world

makes a fixation of meaning no longer possible, as a result of which a universal voice for resolving contradictions and conflicting information has been silenced, which makes the future unpredictable and therefore also uncertain. The question is, however, what the implications of these global observations are for the self of individuals. In this respect, Hermans and Dimaggio (2007) themselves are ambiguous too, since they add to their observations that the experience of uncertainty is ‘not necessarily a negative experience’ since it ‘may open and broaden the space for possible actions, adventures, and explorations of the unknown (e.g. traveling, international contacts, forms of international and intercultural cooperation)’. In addition, ‘uncertainty can be seen as a definitive farewell to the dogmas and ideologies of institutions that restricted and confined the self in earlier times’. But if uncertainty is not necessarily negative and even has positive connotations, is uncertainty then the most appropriate concept to describe the contemporary *condition humaine*?

Let there be no misunderstanding that I am not questioning that the rising mix of cultures raises a range of new questions regarding the nature of the conversation between the different cultural voices in the self: “How do they find their way when they move across such contact zones without any overall integrative knowledge system that might be helpful in organizing their lives intelligibly. How do they respond? Do they construct an individualized combination of some of the landscapes, do they superspecialize in one of them, or do they recombine elements to form different landscapes into new mixtures?” (Hermans & Kempen, 1998). However, contrary to the assumption of Hermans, Kempen, and Dimaggio that uncertainty characterizes the self when moving across cultural contact zones, I would like to launch the hypothesis that the increasing interculturality of the world does not necessarily make the self increasingly uncertain at the same time. Of course, globalisation challenges people to extend their selves and identities beyond the bounded domain of traditional settings, which automatically leads to a multiplication of internal positions and intensifies the multi-voicedness of the self, but whether it also leads to permanent uncertainty of the self is not self-evident. The dialogical self in multicultural situations is, in my view, well aware that it will never achieve the unity that was still the ideal of the modern self, since a differentiation in cultural dimensions is becoming a natural part of people’s lives nowadays. A disjunction between different cultural perspectives is becoming an inherent aspect of the lives of an increasing number of cosmopolitan citizens. Rather than making them uncertain they take it for granted that their self is disunited and that dialogue is essential to maintain a balance between the different cultural landscapes in their lives and minds.

Concluding Remarks

Over the past few decades the world has probably changed more swiftly than before. Following the increasing exchange of capital and communication across the

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globe, people are more on the move than in the past. As a corollary, cultures have mixed and changed in unprecedented manners, which has tremendous implications for the identity and self of individuals who are moving across a variety of different cultural landscapes. The globalized world is characterized more by cultural misunderstandings, disagreements, prejudices and tensions, which altogether poses a number of challenges for a large number of people who for the first time in history are living in different cultural zones than in which they have grown up. Never before have so many people been interconnected, with all due consequences for the lives of individuals. For the interpretation and analysis of the impact of globalization on the individual level new theoretical approaches and new concepts are required.

In this article, it has been argued that anthropology and psychology offer complementary insights that are very useful for the analysis of the cultural exchanges taking place not only at social levels of societies, but also in the mind of individual selves. Anthropology has recently developed a more dynamic concept of culture than the old, essentialized and bounded notion of culture that emerged in the nineteenth century. Currently, culture is characterized by change and contestation within groups as well as within the self of individuals who are torn between a localized situation in which they grew up and a globalized location to which they have moved in search of work, money *and* pleasure. The reflection of this concept of culture at the individual level creates the demand for a new conception of individual persons. In anthropology the notion of identity is still dominant, but many have commented on the drawbacks of the term for the analysis of the highly dynamic and contested circumstances in which individuals currently find themselves. Identities have multiplied and therefore tend to shift in meaning according to context, as a result of which some have suggested that the concept of identity should be replaced by the notion of identification, pointing to the processual nature of contemporary identities. Others have suggested that the analytical value of the concept of identity is insufficient to do justice to the vibrant character of the lives of multicultural individuals.

Against this background, it has been argued in this article that anthropology would benefit from the analytical value of the concept of the dialogical self for the examination of the multiple identifications of the self in inter-cultural circumstances. The concept of the dialogical self is better equipped than any other notion to cover all aspects of the multidimensional practice of intercultural exchange in the individual mind to the extent that it reflects the intercultural dialogue in the global world. By the same token, however, it has been argued that the psychological debate about the dialogical self might take advantage of the ethnography of multiculturalism as carried out by contemporary anthropologists to reflect on some of its core assumptions, especially regarding the rise of 'uncertainty' in the global era and above all its relationship with the notion of 'unity'.

It has been disputed that the uncertainty that may dominate public debates about the consequences of globalisation not necessarily bothers or burdens the individual self with uncertainty. Likewise, it has been called into question whether multicultural individuals continue to endeavour to achieve unity among the various dialogical positions within their self. After all, ethnographic research suggests that people who are simultaneously participating in a multitude of cultural contact zones are not necessarily hampered by the uncertainty about which journalists report as characteristic of the global world in the third millennium. Similarly, many people living and working in multicultural circumstances no longer seem to share the illusion that a new unity between different cultural dimensions of their lives can be achieved. Instead, they seem to accept more and more that their lives will never stop to be a struggle to reconcile the irreconcilable, but then some would argue that the most fundamental challenge of life has always been the art of equilibration.

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