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The Question of Identity – Chinese Lutheran Christians in West Malaysia

Social, Psychological,
and Theological Dimensions

Leseprobe



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2.1.2. Classical concepts of the formation of personal identity in the social sciences

In contrast to this traditional concept of identity as a fixed attribute and property, social scientific concepts suggest that the identity of a person is developing, changing, and shaped by the environment: the identity of an individual must be seen in relation to others – be it the family, peer-

group, work-colleagues, local communities and social groups, or society as a whole. The dynamic process of forming an identity is triggered by successive stages of growing and maturing of the personality from birth to old age as Erik Erikson suggested and by interaction with other people, the society, or the physical environment as William James and George Herbert Mead highlight. Such a process is possible because humans have mental abilities to reflect about their own person and to project themselves through the eyes of others. As such, identity is formed and constructed by individual persons, by the “significant others”¹², society and the environment. Identity expresses relations, and the question of identity is to be phrased more precisely: “Who am I in my relation to others?”¹³ The formation of identity is a task to carry out; it is not a predetermined destiny or the automatic emergence of imposed attributes. For Erik Erikson¹⁴ the phase of adolescence is essential for the development of identity¹⁵, as it results ideally in the formation of a “coherent, integrated and workable identity that will guide them [i.e. adolescents] into young adult life, adult responsibility and successful task completion in later stages.”¹⁶ The formation of identity is basically a lifelong process of integration (“ego-synthesis”) or an “evolving configuration”¹⁷ by which individuals adapt themselves to the changing environment.¹⁸ This gradual integration and accom-

12 *The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (Scott & Marshall, eds. 2005, p. 599) defines the term, “Significant others are those who have an important influence or play a formative role in shaping the behaviour of another.”

13 Keupp et al. 2008, p. 95 quotes Gossieux.

14 Erik H. Erikson (1902-1994) was a US American psychoanalyst and one representative of the school of “ego psychology”, which claimed against S. Freud “that the ego is capable of functioning autonomously and is not confined to conflicts with the id and superego” (Colman 2009, p. 241).

15 The (ego) identity is the “the cumulative product of a person’s completion of the first five stages of development prior to and including late adolescence” (Gillespie 1991, p. 145). Gillespie indicates further that Erikson distinguishes between the terms “personal identity” and “ego identity” while the latter is usually referred to when speaking of “identity”. The personal identity is “the simultaneous perception of one’s sameness and continuity, the mere fact of existing, where ego identity refers to the ego quality of this experience” (pp. 144-145).

16 Sedwick 2001, p. 354.

17 Erikson (1982, p. 74 – italics in original) summarises, „the process of identity formation emerges as an *evolving configuration* – a configuration that gradually integrates constitutional givens, idiosyncratic libidinal needs, favored capacities, significant identifications, effective defenses, successful sublimations, and consistent roles. All these, however, can only emerge from a mutual adaptation of individual potentials, technological world views, and religious or political ideologies.”

18 Krappmann 1997. „Die Identitätsproblematik nach Erikson aus einer interaktionistischen Sicht.“ In Keupp & Höfer, eds. *Identitätsarbeit heute: Klassische und aktuelle Perspektiven der Identitätsforschung*. p. 67.

modation happens by observing and reflecting on one's own person in relation to others, by comparing judgements and expectations of others (e.g., roles in society) with their concepts, and vice versa. The capacities necessary for carrying out the task of "identity formation" by integration are fully developed in adolescence for the first time.¹⁹ Unlike animals, who develop "according to an instinctive adaptation to a circumscribed natural environment", humans have to be guided during their long childhood by significant persons and communal values in order to develop a proper response to their cultural environment and to develop a sound identity.²⁰

Such processes of integration contain "crises" where conflicting expectations and options are explored, negotiated, and resolved. The so-called "identity crisis" commonly happens in the period of adolescence which is the fifth stage out of the eight stages of psychosocial development Erikson identifies.²¹ This stage is central to the psychosocial development in general and formative to the evolution of identity in particular: an adolescent person has to struggle with the polarity of "identity" versus "identity confusion" in the crisis of this stage. Crises occur in each stage of psychosocial development and are regarded as "turning points" and necessary steps in the continuing formation of an identity which is "an internal, self-constructed, dynamic organisation of drives, beliefs, and individual history."²² For Erikson, the struggle in each crisis demands a decision between opposing forces that lead either to a "basic strength" or an "antipathy" which can become pathological: in the fifth stage the "sympathic" strength "fidelity"

- 19 Stevens (2008, pp. 63-64) calls "identity formation" the "key process in Erikson's conceptualization of identity [which] comes in adolescence" (p.63) and "involves expanding self-awareness and more conscious exploration of the self" (p. 64). "Identity formation" replaces the processes prevalent in the earlier stages of infancy ("introjection") and childhood ("identification").
- 20 Erikson 1982, p. 80. He contrasts the "*instinctive* adaptation" of animals with the "*instinctual* reaction patterns" of human beings (p. 80, italics in original).
- 21 Erikson gives in chart 1 (1982, pp. 32-33) an overview of the eight stages, their respective "Psychosocial Crises" and the resulting "Basic Strengths" or "Antipathies", together with the respective "Radius of Significant Relations" to key figures, "Related Principles of Social Order" and their "Binding Ritualizations" and negative counterparts of "Ritualism". Erikson identifies stages I-III (Infancy, Early Childhood, Play Age) as "pregenital modes" (pp. 34-37) and "pre-school years" (pp. 77-78), stages IV-V (School Age, Adolescence; pp. 72-77) as "psychosexual" and "psychosocial moratorium" (p. 75), stages VI-VII (Young Adulthood, Adulthood) as "links between the generations" (pp. 66-72), and stage VIII (Old Age) as "the last stage" (pp. 61-66) which concludes the generational cycle (p. 55) and "turns back on the beginnings" of the cycle (p. 62).
- 22 Sedwick (2001, p. 354) refers to Marcia's summary of identity in Marcia 1980. *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, p. 159. Erickson specifies identity also as "sense of identity" (cf. Keupp et al. 2008, p. 28f).

must “outbalance” the “antipathic” potential “repudiation of roles” in order to overcome the identity confusion.²³ Such resolution of a crisis results in the development of basic strengths or competences and enables an individual to proceed to the next stage of the psychosocial development.²⁴ Erikson regards these strengths as “ego qualities” which reflect and contribute to the formation of a sound, enriched and unified identity at each stage. This process of human development follows the “epigenetic principle”: it makes patterns unfold at a particular time “until a functioning whole is formed”.²⁵ According to this concept, identity is developed in a dynamic process of consecutive stages aiming at a more and more complete, capable, and stable personality.

Without resolving the identity crisis, the person’s self or identity lacks coherence and continuity, it remains in the state of an “identity confusion” and cannot proceed to the next stage of the psychosocial development. Also important for the formation of a stable identity is the confirmation of the individual’s choices by others. Social groups, communities or society provide a framework of values, norms, roles, and beliefs for the individual to make choices. Erikson called such framework “ideology”. The commitment to the “ideology” of a group helps the individual to choose a suitable role or to make choices that become acknowledged by the social context he or she is part of. Adolescence is the period in which society allows young people to mature, to try out different roles without making definite commitments. Such a “psychosocial moratorium” is not only necessary for the healthy development of an individual; it has also the creative potential of introducing new ideas and ways of life “for the adaptive self-renewal of society”.²⁶ In Erikson’s model of development the first stage in the cycle of life, the infancy, is elementary because “identity is [...] formed in a resolution of trust versus mistrust”.²⁷

23 Erikson (1982, p. 80) regards these opposing forces and potentials as necessary for the human adaptation and the processes of psychosocial crises in the different stages. However, whenever the “dystonic antitheses” (e.g., Identity confusion) or the antipathetic potentials (e.g., repudiation of roles) prevail and become permanent qualities of an individual, these potentials become pathological and prevent the further psychosocial development (p.72-73). In this context Erikson introduces the term “negative identity”, “that is, a combination of socially unacceptable and yet stubbornly affirmed identity elements” (p. 73). - See also Gillespie 1991, pp. 145-146.

24 Krappmann 1997, p. 70.

25 Gillespie 1991, p. 147. Cf. Erikson 1982, pp. 26-33.

26 Erikson 1982, pp. 74-75. Erikson values the important role of “loyal rebels” who reject previous common and accepted patterns of society (roles, rituals, lifestyles) for the sake of a better or improved response to a changed environment, and in doing so enable a “psychosocial evolution” (p. 75).

27 Gillespie 1991, p. 149. Erikson (1982, p. 58) calls the stages of infancy (I), adolescence (V),

Such “basic trust”²⁸ produces the virtues or competences of faith and hope²⁹ which are related to religion as the corresponding social institution. This basic trust is transferred from the mother as the “primal other” to God, the “ultimate other” and becomes a “joined identity experienced as most real” that creates the sense of “we” in a group.³⁰ In Erikson’s view, religion “synthesizes and socializes the deep crises of life” because “religious traditions provide a collective restitution of basic trust”.³¹ Religious groups and their framework of beliefs and traditions are an essential component for the formation of an individual’s identity.

Erikson’s concept integrates three kinds of organising processes in human development: the “somatic processes” which relate to the physical development of organ systems, the psychological or “psychic processes of personality development”, and the “ethical power of the social process”, the “communal ethos”, are seen as interdependent and serving each other in human development.³² This concept allows Erikson to address the issue of human development in general and the formation of identity in particular from a holistic view: it combines aspects of the biological development with the personality of an individual, and the influences of culture and society on them. The dynamic process of forming an identity reflects these diverse aspects and explains the arousing crises in their respective stages that require apt capacities and strategies of integration. Whenever such integration happens, an individual has “a sense of ‘I’ [...], a sense of being *centred* and *active*, *whole* and *aware*”, “a sense of being *at home* in one’s time and place”.³³ In brief, “identity is a vital basis of psychological well-being.”³⁴

and adulthood (VII) “strategic” and attributes their emerging “human strengths or ego-qualities” hope, fidelity, and care “basic qualities that [...] ‘qualify’ a young person to enter the generational cycle – and an adult to conclude it.” (p. 55).

- 28 Gillespie (1991, p. 149) explains, “Basic trust means there is some sort of correspondence between your needs and the world.” – In Erikson’s concept (1982, p. 60), basic trust is the capacity to trust others and oneself; it develops in the phase of adolescence into “fidelity”, i.e., to be trustworthy and loyal. Such basic trust in the “numinous image of the primal other” prepares the way for the “confrontation with the ultimate other” i.e., God (p. 79).
- 29 Erikson (1982, p. 59-60) specifies, “Hope is ‘expectant desire’” and the “root of ego development” because it provides “a sense of leeway inviting expectant leaps” of development. Due to this central function, “Hope, is so to speak, pure future” (p. 79) and “the most basic quality of ‘I’-ness” (p. 62).
- 30 Erikson 1982, p. 88.
- 31 Gillespie 1991, p. 150. – See also fn. 28.
- 32 Erikson 1982, pp. 25, 31, 59.
- 33 Erikson 1982, pp. 86, 89 – italics in original.
- 34 Stevens 2008, p. 60.

Erikson's findings, based on his research in the 1950's among white middle-class US American males, were questioned as being biased in terms of time, culture and gender.³⁵ Erickson's theoretical concept was confirmed in cross-cultural studies, although the ways and behaviour how people form their identity are different and shaped by their respective cultural contexts.³⁶ The issue of forming a stable identity has been and remains a challenge today – regardless of gender, cultural background and location. Under contemporary social, political, and economic conditions of rapid and drastic changes due to urbanisation and globalisation people experience uncertainties and (identity) crises. Individuals struggle with this challenge in postmodernity, even more intensive and more frequent than in the past.³⁷ Also individuals of other cultures such as Chinese in Malaysia face the challenge of finding their own, distinct identity within the multicultural and multi-religious setting of their social environment.³⁸

Erikson assesses such connection between the individual and the community from the perspective of developmental psychology, while William James³⁹

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- 35 Stevens (2008, pp. 57-58) raises the question how universal Erikson's stages of the psychosocial development are in relation to cultures, classes, or sexes. Erikson himself by anthropological studies and seminars tried to find out parallels and differences with human development under the conditions of other cultures. However, Erikson did not question his assertion that the male pattern of human development is normative for both sexes. Carol Gilligan proved "that female development follows a significantly different pattern than that of males" (p. 57).
- 36 Cross-cultural studies on identity confirm Erikson's theoretical concept and the validity for the identity statuses in other – including Asian – cultures, although this does not imply simply "identical behavior" of all people, as Marcia spells out in his Research Review. (Cf. Marcia 1993. "The Status of the Statuses: Research Review." In Marcia et al. *Ego Identity. A Handbook for Psychosocial Research*, pp. 40-41.)
- 37 Erikson's developed his theory in the 1950s, a rather stabile period in Western societies, compared to the 1980s when manifold changes announced the turn from the modernity to the post-modernity. It is to assume that "in today's rapidly changing world, identity crises are more common today than in Erikson's day." (Kendry 2011. *Identity Crisis – Theory and Research*). See also fn. 49. - The newspaper article "Quarter-life crisis: One in three Malaysians in their 20's, 30's affected" reports on one current example of how "young Malaysians are facing increasing pressure to succeed personally and professionally before they turn 30." (*theSun* of 26 June 2018, p. 15).
- 38 John Clammer highlights that "migration, diaspora and culture-contact have been the very elements out of which contemporary Southeast Asian identities are constructed" (p. 9). In such a multi-cultural context the challenge for individuals and groups to negotiate and form their own hybrid identities is stronger than in other more homogenous societies. (Cf. Clammer 2002. *Diaspora and Identity: The Sociology of Culture in Southeast Asia*, pp. 9-13.)
- 39 William James (1842-1910) was an US American philosopher and representative of the philosophy of pragmatism. He influenced the development of the social psychological theory of Symbolic Interactionism "via his view that the empirical consequences of an idea

and George Herbert Mead⁴⁰ explore this aspect for the formation of identity from the sociological view. A stable identity and a coherent conception of his/her own self allow an individual to navigate in the physical environment (nature) and to relate to others in a society; as such a coherent identity or self-concept of individuals is also foundational for the formation of a society. The interaction of the individual with other people by actions such as gestures or attitudes, symbols, rituals, and communication (language) plays an important role for the formation of the identity or self.⁴¹

James and Mead distinguish between two perspectives or constituents in this process of interaction. The first constituent is called the “social self” or “Me” and is shaped by the attitudes of the “significant others”,⁴² meaning closely related people such as parents, peers, and authorities who serve as models. But also, expectations of society, for Mead the “generalized other”, become internalised in the “Me” and govern the relations to other people and the society. As expectations of the society provide roles, norms, and patterns to follow, they strongly determine the social self and set standards for the recognition of a person by the society. The social self is reflected in the self-concept, “how people see themselves through the eyes of others”.⁴³ Charles Horton Cooley compared this process of becoming aware of the self with looking into the mirror of society and coined the term “looking-glass self”.⁴⁴ The ability of individuals to assess themselves as objects allows them to construct a self-concept of themselves and to assume roles accordingly. Such interaction and role-taking are accessible

constitute its meaning.” (Scott & Marshall 2005, p. 327). Erikson analysed James’ life in a case study of identity development.

40 George Herbert Mead (1863-1931) was an exponent of social psychology at the University of Chicago (“Chicago School”) and one of the founders of the theory of “Symbolic Interactionism” (Scott & Marshall 2005, p. 397).

41 This is one basic focus of the “Symbolic Interactionism”, a social psychological theory, which claims that “meanings emerge through interaction” and the social world as such is shaped by interaction. This view characterises humans as beings connected to others and excludes the notion of a “solitary individual” (see Scott & Marshall 2005, pp. 653-654).

42 Mead suggests that the concrete actions of individuals (the “significant others”) play the prominent role in the earlier or initial stage of the process of forming an identity during childhood, while later the expectations of the society as expressed in more general and abstract values or norms (the “generalized other”) take over this function. (Heyl 1998, pp. 24-25) The psychiatrist Harry Stack Sullivan first used the term “significant other” in order to mark the person who is “the most influential” in the life of a child. Usually the mother plays such a role (Colman 2009, p. 698). This concept is today interpreted wider: “Significant others are those who have an important influence or play a formative role in shaping the behaviour of another.” (Scott & Marshall 2005, p. 599).

43 Scott & Marshall 2005, p. 589.

44 Scott & Marshall 2005, p. 653.

for observation and description – for James the “social self” is one part of the “empirical self”.⁴⁵

The second constituent in the process of interaction is the “I” (Mead) or “pure ego” (James): it expresses the unique individuality of a person which is independent from society. Such inner sense of identity is rather difficult to determine,⁴⁶ however active in the process of forming the self: the “I” responds subjectively and creatively to the expectations of the “Me” and modifies them in such a way that persons find their individual place and role in society. The interaction of these two components governs human actions and behaviour, and it shapes the identity of an individual.

In this concept, identity is formed by the tension between the two poles of “I” and “Me”. From this perspective the ability to keep a healthy balance between these two poles characterises the achievement of sound identity. The overemphasis of the “Me” causes the loss of individuality, and a person merges into an expected role or gets directed by others. The overemphasis of the “I”, however, leads to antisocial behaviour and may isolate a person. In general, both of them, the conformist and the egoist, do not gain respect and recognition by others.⁴⁷ Such balance between the “I” and “Me” needs to be maintained and recovered if lost. This is a permanent task over the whole of the life. Identity does not depend on a specific position achieved or a choice taken in a certain age, but it depends on the ability to anticipate the responses of others to one’s own wishes and actions. In other words, it is to keep the balance between the competing expectations of the individual and the others. Like Erikson also Mead was confident that individuals can achieve such a “balance” and with it a stable identity that is recognised by others.

In the 1980s James E. Marcia modified Erikson’s strict linear progressing sequence of irreversible stages by his differentiated and dynamic “identity-status model”, but confirmed Erikson’s concept of the psychosocial development of identity in general.⁴⁸ Marcia’s investigation was triggered by the results of empirical research that showed from 1984 on a sig-

45 Apart from the “social self” James also specifies “material” and “spiritual” selves as divisions of the “empirical self”, which is “an object in the world identified with the sum total of all that a person can call his or her own” (Browning 2001, p. 652).

46 Browning, (2001, p. 652) calls James’ explanation of how the “I” keeps the identity of a person up a “complicated theory”.

47 Keupp et al. 2008, pp. 96-97.

48 See Keupp et al. 2008, pp. 80-82.

nificant increase of young adults who were in the state of “identity diffusion”. Following Erikson’s concept, such a result would indicate that 40% of these young people had not achieved a sound identity at this point of age, when it was overdue.⁴⁹

Marcia realised that Erikson’s polar model of identity achievement and identity confusion as positive respective negative results has to be supplemented in two ways: rather than focusing on the final results of the crises, the evolving process with its two components of crisis and commitment determines the status of an identity. Marcia suggests four “identity statuses”: 1) The “Foreclosure” describes a person who has made a commitment by only following the ideas of parents, religious or political authorities. There was no exploration of other options and also no crisis, but rather a decision out of convenience or under pressure. 2) “Identity Diffusion” happens when a person refuses to make a commitment and to explore options. Motives could be the general lack of interest and the inability to decide. This status is regarded the “least mature and least complex” one.⁵⁰ 3) “Moratorium” is usually a transitional status, a period of struggling with different alternatives explored. The persons know that they must make a decision but are not yet ready at this point of time, due to ideas still too vague or missing information. The crisis is felt very strongly, however the commitment has yet to come. The “moratorium” is often a preparation for status 4): The “identity achievement” is the result of individuals who have actively explored options, evaluated them together with the ideas of parents and authorities, and finally, have chosen one option and committed themselves to it. These four statuses can be stable or temporary, so that a movement from one status to the other in any direction is possible at any time.⁵¹ A person can move from the “moratorium” to the “identity achievement”, but also to the status of “foreclosure”, if the person breaks off the period of crisis and exploration by taking over the decision of others. There can be different statuses in different life-domains or life areas at the same time.⁵² Therefore the “Identity Status Interview” by

49 Keupp et al. 2008, pp. 80-81. James Marcia’s research found out that from 1984 on the amount of young people with “identity diffusion” doubled (before 1984: about 20%; after 1984: 40 %). This indicates that under the instable conditions of a postmodern society also the number of youth increases who do not achieve the status of commitment, be it with or without the exploration of options in a crisis. (Cf. Marcia 1989. “Identity diffusion differentiated.” In Luszcz & Nettelbeck, eds. *Psychological development across the life-span*. North-Holland: Elsevier, pp. 289-295.)

50 Retrieved on 17 June 2011 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Marcia.

51 Keupp et al. 2008, pp. 119, 195.

52 Haußer 1997, pp. 126-127.

Marcia “investigates an individual’s extent of exploration and commitment across different life areas”,⁵³ especially occupational roles, religious and political beliefs and values, and sexual orientation.⁵⁴

Marcia’s more differentiated concept describes the development of identity as a process more open in result and movement than Erikson’s universal concept of a linear development in successive phases. Especially the status of “Identity Diffusion” lost its negative and “abnormal” connotation; it is no longer seen as the final status of a failing development, but as a temporary status from which a person can move away to another status.⁵⁵ As the identity status is related to one among other life-domains, the status refers to one component only, but not to the whole identity of a person. Marcia’s open concept regards the development of identity as a dynamic process that endures as long as a person lives.⁵⁶

The formation of identity is basically a process of matching the individual or “inner” dimension of a person with the “outer” dimension of the society in such a way that the individual finds his or her role and position in societal groups, and is acknowledged and respected by society.⁵⁷ Identity can be called a “self-reflexive hinge”⁵⁸ joining and connecting the individual with society, it is developed at the “intersection of individual, personal concepts and social attributions”⁵⁹. As a result, the process of identity formation aims at the development of a stable identity, which is coherent, distinct, and complete, and the embedding of an individual into society. This at least would be the result of a “normal” formation that should and could be achieved according to Erikson, Mead and other classical conceptions.

53 Retrieved on 17 June 2011 from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Marcia.

54 Keupp et al. 2008, p. 91.

55 Marcia claims that under certain social circumstances it might be useful for a person to remain indifferent to options provided by society, and not to be bound by decisions or long-term relationships. Marcia calls such non-committal attitude a “cultural adaptive diffusion” (see Keupp et al. 2008, p. 81). The change of Erikson’s term “identity confusion” with its negative connotation into the more neutral term “identity diffusion” underlines Marcia’s attribution of a different quality to this status.

56 Keupp et al. 2008, p. 82.

57 Keupp et al. 2008, p. 30 speak of “inner and outer world”. On p. 54 Keupp et al. refer to Stuart Hall’s description of identity formation.

58 Keupp et al. 2008, p. 28 – This function reveals the “double character of identity” to display “the distinct individual” and “the social acceptable”.

59 Krappmann 1997, p. 67.

These results and aims are questioned by empirical research done over the last three decades: it shows that identities of many individuals – especially of youth and young adults – are instead ambivalent, fragmented, instantly formed, short-lived, and fluid-like. Such findings refer to a substantial group of people, not just a minority or a group of extreme outsiders, and pose the question: what is “normal”? Is there a “normative” formation of identity at all?

2.1.3. Formation of identity under postmodern conditions

As identity and its formation are closely related to society and interdependent, the microcosm of an individual mirrors the changes happening in the macrocosm of society: “A fragmented social world, which came apart at the seams, produces precarious torn identities”.⁶⁰

This shift is reflected in the terms used to define this new paradigm: the transition from “modernity to post-modernity”.⁶¹ The era of postmodernity is also called the “late”⁶² or “second modernity” as it follows directly the “classical”, “first” or “organised modernity”⁶³ and stands in stark contrast to it: Since the 1970s many basic premises of “modern” society were questioned and eroded: a well-organised society with fixed norms, collectively moulded role-models and careers, or defined patterns of lifestyle made life reliable and provided security and order. Social institutions such as marriage, family, class or churches supported this stability. Ulrich Beck states a continuing “individualisation” that dissolves traditional sup-

60 Eickelpasch & Rademacher 2004, p. 14 – transl. by W.G.

61 Keupp et al. 2008, pp. 45-46. The term “post-modernism” was first used in art to describe a movement in the 1960s that promoted “plurality, diversity and relativity” (Scott & Marshall 2005, p. 508).

62 The term “late modernity” is used by writers like Anthony Giddens, Jürgen Habermas, and Ulrich Beck “who do not accept that there has been a transition to a new societal stage of post-modernity, but who do wish to acknowledge that there has been a radical intensification of some of the tendencies of modernity.” Consequently, postmodernist writers “tend to emphasize fragmentation and centrifugal forces” while these writers “emphasize the continued significance both of centripetal, ordering, forces and of the possibility for emancipatory politics”. (Scott & Marshall 2005, p. 355) Despite the different interpretation of this change in contemporary society, as expressed in the use of different terms, both groups of writers refer to the same phenomena of change happening in the same era. In the following the term post-modernity is used because this term is widely accepted and became a common term in discussions about societal and cultural changes in the current era.

63 Keupp et al. 2008, pp. 73-74. “Modernity” comprises “the period of the last 150 years” (p. 71), which is characterised by industrialisation.

port networks and leads to a plurality of lifestyles and self-conceptions.⁶⁴ While Beck identifies the individualisation as a driving force of postmodernity, in Zygmunt Bauman's view postmodernity is marked by the transition from a society of producers to a society of consumers.⁶⁵ For modernity the occupation and work was central for the integration in society: it provided a livelihood, affiliation to a certain class and acceptance by others. Long term employment related to the local production of goods. The strong structures of the welfare state absorbed the effects of unemployment or sickness. This changed under postmodern conditions of consumerism: forces of the market regulate production in terms of location (cheapest costs of production in a global world) and diversification of products (adaption to local markets and desires of consumers).⁶⁶ This leads on the one hand to the stimulation of the consuming individual to buy more, and on the other hand to the reduction of work and an increase of unemployment for the producing workers. Global economic forces reduce the influence of national governments on economy and cut back benefits of the welfare state because everybody is responsible for oneself as an "enterprising self".⁶⁷

Also, culture, concepts of thinking and "collective mentalities" are affected by this development: Concepts of thinking in modernity tried to structure the complex and ambiguous world by clear, "objective" and rational principles, they aimed at creating authoritative universal orders and standardised definitions. Uniform patterns of meaning and orientation were provided by "meta-narratives" of religions, nations, or ethnic groups.⁶⁸ The function of knowledge in such a "culture of unambiguous-

64 Eickelpasch & Rademacher 2004, pp. 16-18: The transition from the feudal to industrial society was also accompanied by the dissolution of traditions and paradigms, and as such by a certain individualisation and diversification of roles in society. According to Ulrich Beck (quoted by Eickelpasch & Rademacher 2004, pp. 19-20), however, the development in postmodernity is speeding up dramatically and impacting all aspects of life, that nobody can escape the societal and economical forces of making someone to choose an option.

65 Eickelpasch & Rademacher 2004, pp. 39-40 with reference to Bauman, Zygmunt. 1995. *Ansichten der Postmoderne*. Hamburg: Argument, pp. 75, 79.

66 Eickelpasch & Rademacher 2004, pp. 41-42.

67 Keupp et al. 2008, pp. 73, 277.

68 Keupp et al. 2008, pp. 52, 275. A "Meta-narrative" is literally a "big" or "grand story": "It represents, in short, an explanation for everything that happens in a society. In Sociology, the concept of a metanarrative is sometimes referred to as a 'high level theory' or, more-usually, a perspective / ideology." Examples of meta-narratives are political (e.g., democracy), economical (e.g., Capitalism) or religious concepts (e.g., Christianity or Protestantism). Often meta-narratives claim that they are universal and valid without limits of time and culture. ("Meta-narratives" in *Sociology Central*, retrieved on 18 June 2011 from