

Zygmunt Bauman and Ulrich Beck and the question of Identity in Postmodernity

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Abstract: According to psychologists, self-concept is a term used to refer to the way someone thinks, perceives or evaluates him/herself. To be self-aware is to have a self-concept. The development of a self-concept has two aspects. The first includes the existential self. This is the most basic part of the self-concept; a sense of being separate and distinct from others, from objects, and entities. Once we have existential self, then we can form categorical-self. This is the awareness that even though we are separate and distinct objects or entities, or beings we also exist in the world with other objects, beings and entities. And each of these objects has properties. Carl Roger believed that the self-concept had three different components. One of these is self-image: the view we have of ourselves. The second component is self-esteem (self-worth); and this is how much value we place on ourselves and how much we love ourselves. The third aspect is the ideal-self; which is what we wish to be.

Key words: Identity, elusiveness, elusiveness, Globalization, postmodernism, indeterminacy, disintegration, deconstruction, Postmodernity, “social saturation”, DIY individual identity, liquid, habitus, liquid Modernity, ‘corrosion of characters’, Identification, self-identity, disembedding, Individualization

In the epoch of Postmodernity, the problem of identity plays a tremendously important role. However, it remains largely discussed and not definitively answered. Postmodernism is known for its denial of meta-narratives. The definition of identity does not make an exception. The identity of the postmodern agent is largely determined by others and is always in a process. Let us mention some of the more familiar postmodern principles. To some critics, Postmodernity is still limited to certain areas of contemporary culture—usually to mass culture as mediated by television or to the more elitist life style promoted by designer magazines—or to certain sociologically definable groups within the western world. A key factor in this interpretation of postmodernism, as the superstructure of the current socio-

economic order, is the ever-increasing commodification of both the public and the private. The result is a massive confusion that has given important new impulses and opened new territories for intellectual exploration. The common denominator to postmodernism, if there is one at all, is that of a crisis in representation: a deeply felt loss of faith in our ability to represent the real, in the widest sense. This crisis in representation has far-reaching consequences and is in direct link to identity formation. Now that transcendent truth seems forever unreachable, hermeneutics must replace our former aspirations to objectivity. There are other effects which also have influence on identity. Postmodernism has for instance led to a spectacular upgrading of cultural studies. Culture, long seen by many as determined, either directly or indirectly, has now become a major constitutive power in its own right.

If there is a single word that we can use to describe Postmodernity, and in this context identity in that epoch, this should be – elusiveness. It gives the epoch the ability to accommodate a number of critico-political utopias and dystopias, varying from visions of liberation, emancipation, Globalization to sincere visions of the apocalypse. In 1981 Andreas Huyssen, in discussing postmodernism's affinities with the historical avant-garde, very perceptively spoke of 'the temporal imagination of postmodernism, the unshaken confidence of being at the edge of history which characterizes the whole trajectory of American postmodernism since the 1960s'.¹ In Huyssen's view being at the edge of history here, in 1981, implies a wholesale rejection of the past: "The problem with postmodernism is that it relegates history to the dustbin of an obsolete epistémè, arguing gleefully that history does not exist except as text, i.e., as historiography."²

The postmodern, writes Huyssen, is not simply a major cultural shift, it also involves a new relationship between humankind and their environment. He suggests that: "...we are witnessing a transformation of man more radical than anything Copernicus, Darwin, Marx, or Freud ever envisaged..." "Mind" is becoming "its own reality. Consciousness becomes all".³

¹ A. Huyssen, "The search for tradition: avant-garde and postmodernism in the 1970s," *New German Critique* 22, 23–40.

² *Ibid.*, 35.

³ I. Hassan, "The New Gnosticism: Speculations on an Aspect of the Postmodern Mind," *Boundary 2*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Spring, 546-570.

Regarding identity, the most important tendency that characterizes the age is that of indeterminacy. It is defined in the essay "Desire and dissent in the postmodern age" by I. Hassan: "compounded of subtendencies that the following words evoke: heterodoxy, pluralism, eclecticism, randomness, revolt, deformation. The latter alone subsumes a dozen current terms of unmaking: decreation, disintegration, deconstruction, decenterment, displacement, difference, discontinuity, disjunction, disappearance, decomposition, de-definition, demystification, detotalization, delegitimation."⁴

As mentioned, that subject of identity has not and is not resolved by postmodernism, and if there is a global crise of identity, this state or condition of society is the least capable doctrine to resolve it. That is why Amin Maalouf's in his book *In the name of Identity* calls for acceptance of multiple and dynamic identities, without prejudices of anyone. He rejects a single static, essential self "deep down inside", coercing other allegiances. Maalouf insists on respect, reciprocity, non-exclusiveness, in the exacerbated traffic fields of cultural force, anthropological zones, estates of personal being. This however is a dream vision of a plural Postmodernity.

It is worth mentioning Kenneth Gergen who writes about post-modern social-psychology and who maintains that the driving force behind the newly emerging way of thinking about 'self' is what he calls "social saturation". "Social saturation" is essentially a kind of dramatic expansion in the range of relationships that we can have, whether real, virtual, or even imaginable. In this case one can be many, many different selves with many, many different others in wide variety of places and contexts. The person you are in a face-to-face relationship with someone could be just one of your identities, one of yourselves.

"It is my central thesis that this immersion is propelling us toward a new self-consciousness: the postmodern. The emerging commonplaces of communication—such as those just cited—are critical to understanding the passing of both the romantic and modern views of self. What I call the technologies of social saturation are central to the contemporary erasure of individual self...However, we shall also see that as we become increasingly conjoined with our social surroundings, we come to

⁴ I. Hassan, "Desire and dissent in the postmodern age," *Kenyon Review*, 5, 1983:1–18.

reflect those surroundings. There is a populating of the self-reflecting the infusion of partial identities through social saturation. And there is the onset of a multiphreme condition, in which one begins to experience the vertigo of unlimited multiplicity. Both the populating of the self and the multiphrenic condition are significant preludes to postmodern consciousness.”⁵ Discussing the topic Kenneth Gergen also outlines: “Modern man is afflicted with a permanent identity crisis, a condition conducive to considerable nervousness.”⁶

If there is “a permanent identity crisis,” as Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner have said, one may wonder what is the postmodern solution of this crises? Its solution is not to reclaim, emphasize or adhere to all already established identities, those very identities in favor of the novel and the expressive. Because of this, the postmodern legacy in more recent times has influenced the form of post-humanist thought with the advent of new technology and new forms media and communication.

1. Zygmunt Bauman and the problem of identity in a globalized world

Bauman thinks that the question of identity plays a tremendously important role in late Modernity. For him, a given person has to create his own identity. He does not inherit it. And the person in question needs to spend his life re-defining it, because of the lifestyle and what is considered to be good/bad for someone. According to his understanding, it is the supremacy of the individual self, whether self-identity, self-reliance, self-reference or self-transcendence, which emerges as the pivotal importance between the two, because he recognizes that liquid modern men and women are first and foremost individuals who are always guided by themselves rather than by the will of others. In his view, DIY (Do It Yourself) individual identity seeking is our fate in liquid Modernity. What Bauman is suggesting is that being modern in liquid society means living and believing differently, rather than version of the already existing reality.

If we go back to the Bourdieu’s idea of “habitus,” which was discuss in previous chapters, we will see that it cannot be taken in isolation

⁵ K. J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self* (Basic Books, 1991), 49.

⁶ Ibid., 73

from the subject of identity. Bauman, however, suggests that the concept of habitus is of limited efficacy for understanding individual identity formation in liquid Modernity. And the reason is that it fails to recognize that social actors today are hardly ever inhibited in their pursuit of their individual freedom.

Consequently, he replaces habitus with the concept of habitat: “a space of chaos and chronic indeterminacy, a territory subjected to rival and contradictory meaning-bestowing claims and hence perpetually ambivalent. All the states habitat may assume appear equally contingent (that is, they have no overwhelming reasons for being what they are, and they could be different if any of the participating agencies behaved differently) ... The existential modality of the agents is therefore one of insufficient determination, inconclusiveness, motility and rootlessness. The identity of the agent is neither given nor authoritatively confirmed. It has to be construed, yet no design for the construction can be taken as prescribed or foolproof.”⁷

Humans in the epoch of late Modernity have very different perceptions of identity. Identity is tied with the idea that one belongs everywhere and nowhere. Bauman suggests that “one can even begin to feel everywhere *chez soi*, ”at home” - but the price to be paid is to accept that nowhere will one be fully and truly at home.”⁸ Bauman continues to argue that “Identity is revealed to us only as something to be invented rather than discovered; as a target of an effort, ‘an objective’; as something one still needs to build from scratch or to choose from alternative offers and then to struggle for and then to protect through yet more struggle.”

The question of identity is in correlation with the breakdown of welfare state. As a result of this, insecurity grew enormously. Subsequently, insecurity and flexibility in the workplace produced “corrosion of characters.” That facilitated the hollowing out of democratic institutions and a privatization of the public sphere which led to injustice and lack of freedom in the modern world. The ‘corrosion of character’ that figures so prominently in Bauman’s works is the most striking manifestation of the profound anxiety that typifies the behavior, decision-making and life projects of men and women. Bauman explores the his-

⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London: Routledge, 1992), 193.

⁸ Cf, Zygmunt Bauman, *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004).

torical roots of this problem. He argues that a wide variety of developments have cut a firm sense of identity. Some of these developments are global. They include the 'transport revolution' that brings constantly increasing number of people into contact with forms of life that questions their saliency of their existing sense of identity. This constituted slow process of disintegration and shrinking of the holding power of neighborhoods. The new modern state that faced the need to create an order no longer automatically reproduced by the well-settled and closely-knit societies annexed the question of identity and deployed it in its novel and unfamiliar legitimacy claims. Bauman writes:

"After all, asking "who you are" makes sense to you only once you believe that you can be someone other than you are; only if you have a choice, and only if it depends on you what you choose; only if you have to do something, that is, for the choice to be 'real' and to hold. But this is precisely what did not occur to the residents of the backwater villages and forest settlements - who never had a chance to think of moving places, let alone to seek, discover or invent something as nebulous (indeed, as unthinkable) as another identity. Their way of being-in-the-world stripped the question of identity of the meaning made obvious by other ways of life - ways that our linguistic usages prompt us to call modern."⁹

The idea of 'identity' and in particular 'national identity' did not occur 'naturally' out of experience as self-evident fact. Rather that idea was forced by the modern society on its citizens.

"The idea of 'identity' was born out of the crisis of belonging and out of the effort it triggered to bridge the gap between the 'ought' and the 'is' and to lift reality to the standards set by the idea - to remake the reality in the likeness of the idea. Identity could only enter the *Lebenswelt* (the world of lived experience) as a task, as an as-yet-unfulfilled, unfinished task, a clarification call, a duty and an urge to act - and the nascent modern state did whatever it took to make such a duty obligatory for all people inside its territorial sovereignty."¹⁰

National identity, unlike other identities, did not demand unequivocal allegiance and exclusive fidelity. It would not recognize competition, or opposition. Being the subject of a state was the sole feature

⁹ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰ Ibid., 27.

authoritatively confirmed in identity cards and passports. Whoever else you might have been or have aspired to become, the state's institutions were the ones that had the final word.

"Let me repeat: the 'naturalness' of the assumption that 'belonging-through-birth' meant, automatically and unequivocally, belonging to a nation was a laboriously construed convention; the appearance of 'naturalness' could be anything but 'natural'."¹¹

The problem of 'Identification' becomes ever more important for the individuals desperately seeking to be a part of a community. Bauman quotes a Scandinavian writer Lars Dencik regarding this:

"Social affiliations - more or less inherited - that are traditionally ascribed to individuals as a definition of identity: race ... gender, country or place of birth, family and social class, are now ... becoming less important, diluted and altered, in the most technologically and economically advanced countries. At the same time, there is a longing for, and attempts to find or establish new groups to which one experiences belonging and which can facilitate identity making. An increasing feeling of insecurity follows . . ."¹²

It is appropriate to add also a quote by Eric Hobsbawm from his article about identity "The cult of identity politic": "Men and women look for groups to which they can belong, certainly and forever, in a world in which all else is moving and shifting, in which nothing else is certain."¹³ Jock Young gives a very good summary to Hobsbawm's observation: "Just as community collapses, identity is invented."¹⁴

Young thinks that the desire for demonization of the other is based on ontological uncertainties of those inside. That communal world is complete in so far as all the rest is hostile, chaotic, and full of danger. This communal world has an inner harmony, which shines against the background of the obscure and tangled jungle outside. And while a few

¹¹ Ibid., 23

¹² Lars Dencik, "Transformation of identities in rapidly changing societies," *The Transformation of Modernity: Aspects of the Past, Present and Future of an Era*, ed. Mikael Carleheden and Michael Hviid Jacobsen (Ashgate, 2001), 194.

¹³ Eric Hobsbawm, "The cult of identity politics," *New Left Review*, 1/217-May/June 1996, 40.

¹⁴ Jock Young, *The Exclusive Society* (London: Sage, 1999), 164.

decades ago the subject of 'identity' was nowhere near the center of debates but just an object of philosophical discussions, today, identity is the burning issue. Martin Heidegger once considered vanishing things. That is, you tend to notice things and put them into the focus of your scrutiny and contemplation only when they vanish, go bust, start to behave oddly or otherwise let you down.

With the advancement of Globalization, the orthodox frames of reference tend to be nowadays electronically mediated, 'virtual totalities', easy to enter and easy to abandon. They are hardly a valid substitution for the 'solid ground', and even though may promise to be more solid forms of togetherness, promising that comfort of "we feeling." But chasing and clicking the 'join now!' offers flashing on computer screens which deprives us of the ability to enter into spontaneous interaction with real people. But these "virtual communities" give no substance to personal identity - the primary reason to seek them out. They make coming to terms with one's own self more difficult.

"In the words of Andy Hargreaves, professor of education and a uniquely perceptive observer of the contemporary cultural scene: "In airports and other public spaces, people with mobilephone headset attachments walk around, talking aloud and alone, like paranoid schizophrenics, oblivious to their immediate surroundings. Introspection is a disappearing act. Faced with moments alone in their cars, on the street or at the supermarket checkouts, more and more people do not collect their thoughts, but scan their mobile phone messages for shreds of evidence that someone, somewhere, may need or want them."¹⁵

Turning on the mobile, we turn off the street. Physical proximity no longer collides with spiritual remoteness. We seek and construct and keep together the communal references of our identities while on the move - struggling to match the similarly mobile, fast-moving groups we seek and construct and try to keep alive for a moment, but not much longer.

Globalization means that the state and the nation are not in a rock-solid relationship. The state ceded everything to the market; labor, capital, even patriotic fervor. Now people are proud to work for a multinational company. That's part of their identity. But these identities have no reas-

¹⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Identity: conversations with Benedetto Vecchi*, 25.

surance, or guarantees, because the markets have been thoroughly deregulated in free market neoliberal style, while social rights are replaced one by one by the individual duty of self-care. Of course, the state is nowhere near to monitor and protect its citizens – exposed to a free play of competitive forces. The main reasons for identities to be unambiguously defined by the state and retain the same recognizable shape over time, have vanished or lost much of their power. Identities were given a free run; and it is now up to individual men and women to catch them in flight, using their own wits and tools. “Longing for identity comes from the desire for security, itself an ambiguous feeling... On the other hand, a fixed position amidst the infinity of possibilities is not an attractive prospect either. In our liquid modern times, when the free-floating, unencumbered individual is the popular hero, 'being fixed' - being 'identified' inflexibly and without retreat - gets an increasingly bad press.”¹⁶

Locations where the feeling of belonging was traditionally invested (job, family, neighborhood) are either not available, or untrustworthy and they understandably placate the fear of loneliness and abandonment. In today's world of rampant 'individualization', identities are mixed blessings. They swing between a dream and a nightmare and one never knows when one will happen. “In a liquid modern setting of life, identities are perhaps the most common, most acute, most deeply felt and troublesome incarnations of ambivalence. This is, I would argue, why they are firmly placed at the very heart of liquid modern individuals' attention and perched at the top of their life agendas”¹⁷

In today's globalized world a large number of people are living from one project to another, and their life processes are sliced into a succession of projects, there is no time for diffuse discontents to condense into a bid for a better world. Such people would wish the day to be different for everyone, rather than better future for all. In the uncertainty of the liquid today, there is no place for thoughts of 'good society'. This idea of 'better society' was a collateral damage from the accelerated fragmentation of social dissent, a progressive disintegration of social conflict into a multitude of intergroup confrontations. Now the lack of this 'better world' is vindicated by current group-or category-

¹⁶ Ibid., 29

¹⁷ Ibid., 32.

related causes. It remained indifferent to other deprivations and is not offering a universal, comprehensive solution to human problems. The struggle for social justice has been substituted by a plethora of battles for recognition. This quite nebulous idea will remain nebulous as long as money is shunned as a topic of conversation. "The 'problem of capitalism', writes Bauman, is shifting in its present planetary stage from exploitation to exclusion. It is exclusion, rather than the exploitation suggested a century and a half ago by Marx, that today underlies the most conspicuous cases of social polarization, of deepening inequality, and of rising volumes of human poverty, misery and humiliation."¹⁸ In a world where disengagement is practiced as a common strategy of the power struggle and self-assertion, there are few if any firm points in life that can be safely predicted to last. "...the hard core of identity - the answer to the question "Who am I?" and even more importantly the continuing credibility of whatever answer might have been given to that question - cannot be formed unless in reference to the bonds connecting the self to other people and the assumption that such bonds are reliable and stable over time. We need relationships, and we need relationships in which we count for something, relationships to which we can refer in order to define ourselves."¹⁹

Bauman maintains that 'identity' is an ambiguous idea and a "a double-edged sword". It could be used as a strive of individuals or communities. But it could be turned against individuals and groups, accusing them of wish to devour or destroy other individuals and groups. When the card of 'identity' is played by a bigger and stronger side, usually differences between individuals and groups are played down, as not important enough to prevent allegiance to a larger totality which is always presented as ready to embrace and provide a 'home' for all, despite the differences.

2. Ulrich Beck and the problem of identity in Risk society

For Ulrich Beck, an obvious outcome of the industrial Modernity's success has been its wide spatial distribution and its ability to cross borders and infiltrate cultures. He maintains that the advent of Globalization

¹⁸ Ibid., 41.

¹⁹ Ibid., 68.

challenges the territoriality and sovereignty of the state, reduces the authority of a country and its citizens to act unilaterally or independently, and compromises economic autonomy by forcing national structures to act in ways and adopt policies broadly commensurate with the whims of highly mobile capital. Globalization de-nationalizes markets, creates international patterns of competition for foreign investment and forces the state to respond to an international rather than purely domestic constituency. "A universalization of hazards accompanies industrial production, independent of the place where they are produced: food chains connect practically everyone on earth to everyone else. They dip under borders... The Globalization tendency brings about afflictions, which are once again unspecific in their generality."²⁰

Thus, Globalization results in "a power-play between territorially fixed political actors (government, parliament, unions) and non-territorial economic actors (representatives of capital, finance, trade)" and consequences in the "political economics of uncertainty and risk". Bigger individualization is accompanied by greater individual risk. This is what Beck means by individualization, "the disintegration of the certainties of industrial society as well as the compulsion to find and invent new certainties for oneself"²¹.

Beck maintains that the reflexive modernization confronts and at one point try to accommodate the tension between human indeterminacy and inevitable tendency to objectify and naturalize institutions. Indeterminacy comes from an to renegotiate coherent narratives of identity. It will not be comprehensive to discuss Beck's reflections on identity issue without mentioning the parallel between his ideas and Anthony Giddens' ones in Giddens' "Modernity and Self-identity". Giddens has developed a number of themes around the distinctive form reflexivity takes in Modernity, and above all about the self-creation of identity in late Modernity through the reflexive shaping of our own biography. It is worth mentioning that reflexive Modernity for Giddens is very much based in his previous concept of 'double hermeneutics'. And his notions of risk and trust are grounded in his pre-

²⁰ Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society Towards a New Modernity* (London: SAGE Publications, 1992), 36.

²¹ Ulrich Beck, A. Giddens, and S. Lash, *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 2.

viously developed notion of 'ontological security'. Beck's theory stems from experience as a sociologist of institutions, on which he has built a macro-sociology of social change. Beck, like Habermas, understands social change as a learning process.

He understands that the status-based social environment and life-style of class-culture have lost their significance. The tendency is towards the emergence of individualized forms and conditions of existence. This forces people, for the sake of material survival, to make themselves the center of their own life. Everyone has to choose between different options, including as to which group or subculture one wants to be identified with. In fact, one has to choose and change one's social identity as well and take the risks in doing so. Beck argues that while the bourgeoisie developed its social and political identity in the struggle against feudal structures of domination and authority, in late Modernity, by contrast, individualization is a product of the labor market and manifests itself in the acquisition, proffering, and application of a variety of work skills. The new forms of cultural and social identity often have politically provocative effects. Unstable alliance of community and market society has been partially transformed or even dissolved in the course of post-war developments. In this historical development, the identity of the social classes melts away. The conditions and the risk of wage labor become generalized and, as a result of that, class loses its subcultural basis. However, class does not disappear because the traditional way of life vanishes. For him, that is a new 'chapter in the history of classes'. Beck does not give any further qualifications of these classes as he thinks that they are still in a process of formation. But a new social life-style and new group identities begin to emerge. He maintains that the process of individualization deprives class distinctions of their social identity. As a result of the process social groups lose their distinctive traits in terms of self-understanding and in relation to other groups. Social mobility, which was of a considerable importance for social identity formation, pales into insignificance. The dynamic of individualization which removed people from class cultures reflects on the family structure as well. Beck focuses on the new diluted social relationships. In search for some form of stability and happiness people are driven into marriage and bonding, hoping to find shared inner life. But because of the individualization sooner rather than later these relationships bring indifference and isolation. In forms of male-female cohabitation "the

conflicts of the century break through. Here they always show their private, personal face.” “Divorce law and divorce reality, the lack of social protections, the closed doors of the labor market and the main burden of family work characterize some of the contradictions which the individualization process has brought into the female life context. Men's situations are quite different. While women have to loosen their old ascribed roles of an 'existence for others' and have to search for a new social identity, for reasons of economic security among others, for men, making a living independently and the old role identity coincide. In the stereotypical male gender role as 'career man', economic individualization and masculine role behavior are joined together.”²²

The new roles of men and women in relationships and marriage, have brought changes to their overall identity. According to Beck, “individualization strengthens masculine role behavior.” But at the same time, he also points out that on the one hand, men are freed by the greater participation of women in the labor force from the duty of being sole supporter of the family. On the other hand, 'family harmony' is becoming fragile. The female-determined side of male existence is getting out of balance, while at the same time men get a sense of their dependency in everyday matters and their emotional reliance on women. “In both areas, essential impulses are found to loosen identification with the dictates of the male role and to try new modes of life.”²³

The process of modernization, Beck thinks, does not just led to formation of centralized state power, concentration of capital and division of labor and market relationships etc. but also to a triple individualization. The first layer is so called “disembedding,” which is a removal of historically prescribed social forms and commitments. The second layer is loss of traditional security to practical knowledge, faith and norms. And the last one is a new type of social commitment. Beck looks very closely and thoroughly in the process of “individualization” because it is a change of life situation and biographical pattern and therefore directly linked to consciousness, identity, socialization and emancipation. Beck also maintains that differentiation of socio-biographical situations is accompanied at the same time by a high degree of stan-

²² U. Beck, *Risk Society Towards a New Modernity*, 112.

²³ *Ibid.*, 113.

dardization. "...the very same media which bring about an individualization also bring about a standardization. This applies to the market, money, law, mobility, education and so on, each in its own way."²⁴

Ulrich Beck's risk society, and indeed the theory of "reflexive modernization" is characterized by two theses: an environmental thesis or the "risk thesis" and an 'individualization theses'. According to Scott Lash, Individualism takes place in what Beck understands as "the first" or "simple Modernity", while the individualism at stake is a phenomenon of "the second," "reflexive" Modernity. At stake is a decidedly nonlinear notion of the individual and individualization. The reflexive individualization of the second Modernity presumes the existence of non-linear systems. "In this sense also the individual of the first Modernity is reflective while that of the second Modernity is reflexive. The idea of reflective belongs to the philosophy of consciousness of the first Modernity. To reflect is to somehow subsume the object under the subject of knowledge. Reflection presumes apodictic knowledge and certainty. It presumes a dualism, a scientific attitude in which the subject is in one realm, the object of knowledge in another...Beck often describes today's non-linear individual in terms of, not the "I think therefore I am," but instead in terms of "I am I." "I think, therefore I am" has to do with reflection. "I am I" has more to do with reflex. And Beck often indeed works from the contrast of "reflex" with reflection. Reflexive he argues has more to do with reflex than reflection. Reflexes are indeterminate. They are immediate."²⁵

Second-Modernity individuals do not have sufficient reflective distance on themselves to construct linear and narrative biographies. Everything is liquid, everything is moving and transforming. They may wish to be reflective but have neither the time nor the space to reflect. The non-linear individual puts together networks, constructs alliances, makes deals. He must live, is forced to live in an atmosphere of risk in which knowledge and life-changes are precarious.

Individualization consists in transforming human identity from a "given" into a "task" – and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task. As Zygmunt Bauman has put it in his forward

²⁴ Ibid., 130.

²⁵ U. Beck, and E. Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization* (London: SAGE Publications, 2001), 9-10.

to the Becks' book *Individualization*, "individualization is a fate, not a choice; in the land of individual freedom of choice, the option to escape individualization and to refuse participation in the individualizing game is emphatically not on the agenda. That men and women have no one to blame for their frustrations and troubles."²⁶

The process of individualization does not annule class differences and family connections. They still continue to exist in the background of the biographical life. For example, people of the same "class" must choose between different lifestyles, subcultures, social ties and identities. One can no longer determine his or her personal outlook, relation, social and ideas or **identity**, from knowing his or her "class".

"Individualization in this sense means that each person's biography is removed from given determinations and placed in his or her own hands, open and dependent on decisions.... Individualization of life situations and processes thus means that biographies become self-reflexive; socially prescribed biography is transformed into biography that is self-produced and continues to be produced."²⁷

As a result of this process, today many events are considered "personal failure" than 'blow of fate.'" A person even has to choose one's own social identity and group membership to manage own self and change its image. But in this case, Beck writes: "In the individualized society, risks do not just increase quantitatively; qualitatively new types of personal risk arise, the risk of the chosen and changed personal identity."²⁸

In the industrial age, wage labor and occupation have become axes of living. The occupation also serves as mutual identification pattern which helps someone to assess personal needs and abilities as well as economic and social position. But today the situation is totally different:

"In this system (late modern industrial society, N.A), unemployment in the guise of various forms of underemployment is "integrated" into the employment system, but in exchange for a generalization of employment insecurity that was not known in the old uniform full-employment system of industrial society."²⁹

²⁶ Ibid., 15.

²⁷ U. Beck, *Risk Society Towards a New Modernity*, 135

²⁸ Ibid., 136.

²⁹ Ibid., 143-144.

Ulrich Beck puts it clearly and unambiguously what is the effect of the individualization in his essay “On the mortality of industrial society”:

“What emerges from the fading social norms is naked, frightened, aggressive ego in search of love and help. In the search for itself and for an affectionate sociality, it easily gets lost in the jungle of the self... Someone who is poking around in the fog of his or her own self is no longer capable of noticing that this isolation, this “solitary confinement of the ego,” is a mass sentence.”³⁰

³⁰ Cf. U. Beck, *Ecological Enlightenment: Essays on the Politics of the Risk Society* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press), 1995.