



Armenians' Dual Identity in Jordan

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Abstract

William Saroyan, a famous American Armenian writer states, "For when two of them meet anywhere in the world, see if they will not create a New Armenia"(video, google.co.uk, 2009). This quote assures that there exist Armenian individuals who are willing to work for the group and its future in a global society. It is this way they have, up to now, succeeded in maintaining their cultural identity, and reproducing it through the years no matter what has happened in their surroundings. For example, the strength of Jordanian-Armenians lies in their solidarity. Through maintaining their unique cultural heritage and the assets that have always belonged to them, the community has, through the years, created an identity that will live on as long as there exist individuals to maintain it. By keeping the group's infrastructure intact, this dual-identity Armenian and Jordanian in Jordan with different cultural differences, has continued to exist. This identity is reproduced within the group through global education, global socialization techno globalization and a common basis of values that sets it apart from new Diasporas.

Keywords: Globalization, Diaspora, Identity, Migration, Education, Techno globalization

1. The Armenian Diaspora and Education

To write about Armenians in Jordan can seem rather far-fetched to the uninitiated. But I wanted to write about as I am an insider, an Armenian-Jordanian person with dual identity. My grandparents were exposed to extermination and genocide in 1915. To Armenians, especially for the senior members of the community, April 24 is a day of mourning and remembrance. To the younger generation, it is a day to openly profess their Armenian heritage and demand justice for their ancestral loss to remind the world about the first genocide of the 20th century (Surmelian, 1968). The Genocide was the great "equaliser" of identity. Everyone became a victim or was affected by it. Being Armenian, namely in the Diaspora, meant being a survivor of Genocide and a member of a community of sufferers. This mentality of victimhood is an important part of Armenian identity. Gallegos (2002) described Diaspora as exiled people, and has its origin in the Jews' exile from their historical homeland. The term has, over the years, also been applied to immigrant and political refugees. These are individuals who live in exile, most often with the goal of at sometime returning home (Gur-Ze'ev, 2008). At times both the Jewish and the Armenian Diasporas have undertaken international political initiatives that conflicted with the desires of their homeland governments (Shain, 2002). Thus, through analyzing the Armenian and Jewish cases it will be clear the existence of an important third level in the negotiation and resolution of ethnic conflicts which can have a significant impact on the sovereign decision making of states (Shain, 2002).

The Armenian Diaspora has the most in common with the archetypal Jewish Diaspora (King, Schilling-Esters, Fogle, Lou & Soukup, 2008). Just like the Jews, the exiled Armenians have a historical homeland and origin. They have been exposed to some form of attempted genocide. The genocide was deliberate and systematic destruction of the Armenian population of the Ottoman Empire during and just after World War I. This genocide was characterized by the use of massacres, and the use of deportations involving forced marches under conditions designed to lead to the death of the deportees, with the total number of Armenian deaths generally held to have been between one and one- and- a- half million (Armenian National Institute, 2009 ; Panossian, 2002). The genocide survivors may still live outside their home country but they keep their identity.

The Armenian Church, as the heart of the community and its identity, has preserved Armenian history and culture. Therefore, priests are responsible for organizing youth groups in which they teach Armenian language and history. Working with youth is important for the continuing existence of the group (Gur-Ze'ev, 2008). In other words, an Armenian whose family has for generations lived in Tokyo or Europe is often aware of the same cultural origins as an Armenian in Jordan and in the Middle East. Even if those people have grown up in different places and have never met, if they have strong connections with the church, they likely will have grown up with the same values and collective cultural inheritance (Chan-Tibergien, 2006; Loutzenheiser 2005). However, as the Armenian Church plays big role in the community these people will also find a strong relationship between education and identity.

Loutzenheiser describes how “identities are changing and constructed within the text or lecture” this shows how literature helps to form identities. Not only is the teaching of literature help to enforce the cultural identity but language itself strengthen cultural identity. It is important to point out that the future of any language, including Armenian, is in the hands and mouths of the speakers themselves. They are the ones who must set their language goals through indigenous institutions, organizations, and activists (King, 2001). Literature, history, culture, and language affect one’s identity but one should benefit from education for the future. For this reason, literacy must be understood in terms of culture, language, identities, as a way of being and knowing, in addition to other elements that make up education (Harris & Wills, 2003).

White (2004) argues education has a critical role to play in humankind’s acceptance of a new global social reality and adaptation to the future, which will be different from the present social existence. White (2004) illustrates that globalization must be incorporated in curriculum from the perspective of “a view from below.” In other words, he shows the importance of motivating and improving the conditions of Third World people. For this reason he points out the necessity to teach critically about empirical problems and explore genuine solutions that have practical implications from the perspective of those who suffer. “By basing education on the past we fight evolution and force it to force us, through extremity” (White, 2004, p.78). The past reveals how the future is built by illustrating a futurist interpretation of education. Thus, futurology or the vision of education and future evolution will lead into an effective global education. Hall (1996) describes lost identities: “Actually identities are about questions of using the resource of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being.” For me, as an Armenian-Jordanian with dual identity, I wonder “who we are” or “where we came from,” so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.” Further, Willinsky (2002) supports this saying by asking who-belongs-where? In short, education, language, place, history and culture shape identities through teaching and learning.

Therefore, an affective learning process should be designed specifically to assist learners to re-think about identity. My interpretation for this is illustrated by Figure (1) identity. This figure shows three levels (a) self identity as an earthly being (b) identity between self and group (c) intergroup level identity. It illustrates how identity is continuous as it moves from the self identity to the community identity and finally to the global identity even if we do not physically move in Diaspora but are living it in the techno global era that leads to the so-called great human families. Thus, techno global era is the new technological movement that leads to social movements. However, technology is an essential tool for globalization as it enables people to easily communicate in different parts of the world. This, of course, enhances the global identity and strengthens the concept of one world.

Insert Figure 1 Here

Utilizing Figure (1) is an attempt to educate individuals about becoming global citizens. Therefore, moving education toward future globalization is essential in global political, social, economic issues. All these are included under the new techno-global Curriculum model umbrella (White, 2004). Kress (2008) addresses this when he writes that by “producing a global (lised) curriculum” through involving social and economical factors, a culture will act as a reminder for both global and local forces to work in equal measure. In other words, to construct a globally relevant curriculum requires a simultaneous account of the communities and their cultural shapes for whom such curricula are needed. Lipman (2005) describes the resistance between education and social situations related to parents, students and communities. He adds “how difficult [it] is to analyze what is happening in schools and other educational sites without examining relationships to this broader context.” Loutzenheiser (2005) in her study explains the effects of “feeling different.” Torres, Millan and Inda (1999) argue “what makes your difference different from my difference? That is our ethnicity.” Thus, ethnicity is one way to describe cultural specificity.

In addition, Kelly (2006) explains that culture is embedded within literature. She adds it is important to experience cultural differences in order to have the knowledge to write about a specific culture. Further, to examine cultural differences. However, individuals require being educated toward human oneness, toward a community beyond the individual in order to reach the dream of “one world” (White, 2004). Roth and Selander (2008) explain the use of education to shape identity. Moreover, they discuss the future work force for a better world and its implications for identity formation and learning in an age of globalization (Roth and Selander, 2008; Willinsky, 2002). However, this fact of using education to shape identity does not mean that global societies have no role to play; on the contrary, they are of critical importance. For it is the wider society that largely determines whether indigenous languages such as the Armenian language will be valued (King, 2001). Different civilizations with various languages lived in Jordan. Armenians are one of these and they maintained their language. History is the story of people. It illustrates the relationship between different cultures and points out place and language identity.

2. Historical Background in Jordan

Jordan is a young country that occupies an ancient land, one that bears the traces of many civilizations. Separated from Palestine/Israel by the Jordan River, the region played a prominent role in biblical history; the ancient biblical kingdoms

of Moab, Gilead, and Edom lie within its borders, as does the famed red stone city of Petra, the capital of the Nabatean Kingdom and of the Roman province of Arabia Petraea. Of Petra, British traveler Gertrude Bell said, "It is like a fairy tale city, all pink and wonderful" (Jordan, 2009). Jordan was also part of the Ottoman Empire until 1918 and later a mandate of the United Kingdom. Jordan has been an independent kingdom since 1946. Jordan is among the most politically liberal countries of the Arab world, and although it shares in the troubles affecting the region, Jordan's rulers have expressed a commitment to maintaining peace and stability (Jordan, 2009).

The modern history of Jordan has given the country a population derived from many ethnic backgrounds. The native Jordanians are the bedou ("Asiatour, Jordan/People," 2009). The majority of the people are Arabs 98%, basically Jordanians and Palestinians. Although the Palestinian population is often critical of the Jordanian monarchy, Jordan is the only Arab country to grant wide-scale citizenship to Palestinian refugees (Jordan, 2009). Moreover, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, periodic waves of people from Caucasus region of Asia, Armenia, Hejaz (western Saudi Arabia), and Syria settled in Jordan 2%, adding to the ethnic mix of the indigenous population ("Asiatour, Jordan/People," 2009). The expatriate workers in Jordan also add diversity to the ethnic mix of the population. Jordan hosts approximately 200,000 Egyptian workers, and another 80,000 Filipinos, Srilankans, Indians, Pakistanis, Lebanese, Europeans, and North Americans ("Asiatour, Jordan/People," 2009).

The Circassians who came from the Caucasus region in the late 19th century have strong loyalty to King Abdullah; therefore, the king allocated large tracts of land to them (Al-Khatib 2009 ; "Asiatour, Jordan/People," 2009). Circassians also hold key positions in the army and serve as the king's ceremonial bodyguards. Although devout Muslims and fiercely loyal to Jordan, the Circassians retain their own customs and habits and still speak their own language along with Arabic ("Asiatour, Jordan/People," 2009). Also from the Caucasus region came the Chechens, who retain their own customs and language and have a similar role in the country ("Asiatour, Jordan/People," 2009).

3. Armenians in Jordan

Armenians are another ethnic group that migrated to Jordan. Unlike the Circassians and Chechens, the Armenians are Christian but have also retained their language, customs and habits. Traditionally skilled at manual crafts, the Armenians long excelled in fields such as jewelry making, photography and maintenance of machinery (Al-khatib, 2009, "Asiatour, Jordan/People," 2009). Of course, languages, as well as the social and cultural systems in which they operate, have never been static. Indeed, historical linguists point out that language shift and language death are not new phenomena; the world's languages have constantly changed and merged, sometimes disappearing altogether in the process (King, 2001). How language shapes and is shaped by identity is a key topic within sociolinguistics. An individual's identity is constituted through a variety of different factors, including the social, linguistic, cultural and ethnic contexts (Riley, 2007). Riley examines aspects of multilingual identities and through analysis of language and social identity he points out their importance for continuous global identity. Armenian Language is a great resource for educators, students, folklorists, and anyone interested in Armenian culture and identity. That is Armenian language is an historical process of Armenians. Norms and values addressed in language are important factors that give continuity to certain cultures (Stephens, 1992).

Al-khatib (2005) in his article, "Language and Cultural Maintenance among the Gypsies of Jordan," mentions that the social and cultural isolation of the Gypsies from the Jordanian mainstream has contributed to cultural maintenance among them. A comparison between the results of this study on Gypsies identity and those of Al-khatib's work (2001) on the Armenians of Jordan, another minority group inhabiting the country for the same period, shows that, unlike the Armenians, the Gypsies of Jordan are experiencing a clear-cut case of language maintenance and shift. Al-khatib (2001) in his article "Language Shift among the Armenians of Jordan" argues that Armenians of Jordan are assumed to be experiencing a kind of shift in their speech. The main aim of Al-Khatib's (2001) study is to gauge the shift and to highlight the sociodemographic factors enhancing it. The results of the study show that Arabic is used mainly in social domains. However, the Armenian language is found to be used in very restricted situations and by a very small number of people, particularly the elderly. The study suggests that the Armenians of Jordan are experiencing a gradual shift toward Arabic that may lead to language loss.

By calibrating Al-khatib's (2001) results against those of Dweik's (2000) work on the Jordanian-Chechens, Al-Khatib finds that Chechens are much more faithful to their language than the Armenians. The distinction between them is accounted for in terms of the size of each group, demographic concentration, and types of occupation held by them among other sociopsychological factors. Moreover, Al-khatib (2000) in his article "An Introduction: The Arab World: Language and Cultural Issues" traces the effect of globalization on language education. He outlines the impact the language has had on different societies/cultures and the kind of reactions this language has generated among various cultures. The findings reported here are based on data collected from a town in the north where there are few Armenian families living far away from the school, church and clubs. However, most Armenians live in the capital near to the church, school and clubs where the Armenian community established the Armenian quarter.

4. Armenians in Jerusalem

Armenians have inhabited parts of modern Turkey, Iran and the Caucasus Mountains for more than four thousand years. The first known instance of an Armenian to come anywhere near Jerusalem arrived in 95 BC under King Tigranes II of Armenia (Jordan, 2009; Panossian, 2002). The Armenian armies traveled to several cities in Judea before leaving Israel. It was at this time that Jews may have come to trade with Armenia and settle in that far away land. Likewise, some Armenians came to know of the lands around Jerusalem and may have traded with Israel (Jordan, 2009). Following the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 the Romans imported Armenian traders and merchants, craftsmen, soldiers and administrators.

The establishment of the Armenian community in the Middle East specifically in Jerusalem was between 95 BC-AD 640. The connection between Armenia and Jerusalem goes very far back. More than anything, the Orthodox Christian Church has been the link between the countries throughout history (Jordan, 2009). Thaddeus and Bartholomew, both Christian apostles, arrived in Armenia to preach to the Armenians and the small Jewish community there. Subsequently, Christianity spread to higher echelons of Armenian royalty. In 301CE, Armenia was proclaimed a “Christian state” under its king Terdat III. During this period it is believed Armenian pilgrims were already making their way to and from Jerusalem (Jordan, 2009; Panossian, 2002). To conclude, the paradigm of being the “first Christian nation” reinforces the unique national character of the Armenians who are proud of being the “first Christian nation” even if they do not at all take part in Christian rituals or attend church. For example, the role of the Kaghakatzi Armenians in Jerusalem was preserving religious places in the Old City of Jerusalem. Hagopian, the editor of “Armenia’s Special Gift to Jerusalem” illustrated his project which aims to record and preserve the history, culture and traditions of the Kaghakatzi (literally “city dweller”) in recognition of their status as the original, native denizens of the Old City, as opposed to the newcomers who fled the Turkish massacres of the early 20th century, and who found refuge within the nearby Armenian Convent of St James (Armenians of Jerusalem, 2009). Over the centuries, the Kaghakatzi, enriched the Holy City’s multifaceted ethnic and social fabric with a proliferation of talent, vision and hard work, creating a unique culture and identity, unlike any other in the Armenian Diaspora (The Kaghakatzi Armenian Family Tree, 2009). Hagopian added “the project was launched two years ago and now there is a database containing genealogical details of over 3100 people, in addition to other pertinent information” (Hagopian, personal communication, March 18, 2009).

5. Church, School, Clubs and Armenian Language Preservation

An estimated 5,000 Armenians are living within the current kingdom of Jordan. An estimated 4,500 of these are members of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and predominantly speak the western dialect of the Armenian language. They make up the majority of non-Arab Christians in the country (Jordan, 2009). The majority of these Armenians are the ancestors of survivors from the Armenian Genocide during World War I who fled to Jordan on foot from Ottoman Anatolia to the north. The early Armenian refugees in Jordan mainly resided in places like Ma’an, Shobak, Karak and Madaba. Currently, the majority of Armenians live in the capital Amman, with a few families in Irbid, Aqaba, Madaba and Zarqa (Jordan, 2009). Jordan also became a refuge to many Armenians leaving Jerusalem and the Armenian Quarter after the Six-Day War (Jordan, 2009).

The Jordanian-Armenian Diaspora’s infrastructure can be said to have three cornerstones. Each of them played an equally large role in the survival of the group through the years: The Armenian Church, the club, and the school. Such pillars are not unique to the Jordanian group. One finds a similar infrastructure in all countries that contain large groups of the Armenian Diaspora. Church and education played significant role as symbols of Armenian identity. For example, The *Mush Menologium* (Homilies of Mush), which was written in 1200-1202, is the largest known Armenian book, weighing about 62 pounds (28 kilos), with page sizes of 28” by 14” (71 by 35 centimeters) (Abrahamian & Sweezy, 2001). To save this book during the Turkish Genocide of 1915, two sisters living in Western Armenia split it in half and carried away the two parts on their shoulders; when they could no longer carry it, they buried one part in the yard of the Erzurum church, split the other part into two halves, and carried them to Echmiadzin. Later, a Russian army officer discovered the buried part of the book and had it taken to Echmiadzin, where the two halves were rejoined. This book is now deposited in the Matenadaran. Matenadaran means, literally, “repository of books” (Abrahamian & Sweezy, 2001). The *Mush Menologium* is extremely precious for Armenians as it shows the value for the survival of the independent Armenian Church and Armenians themselves (Vlasta Radan, 2009).

Culture is an historical process of human norms and values addressed in books and gives continuity to identity (Stephens, 1992). However, following Armenian beliefs, manuscripts, handwritten charms, crosses or parts of *Khatchkar* are carefully wrapped up in the embroidered cloth and placed on the family shrine and function as saint of the home, protecting their owners from evil and misfortune. Religious books in particular had a power to protect from disasters, help curing disease, and ensure prosperity of the whole community (Vlasta Radan, 2009).

Another example of the importance of the church for Armenians is obvious from the Armenian translation of the biblical gospels. The term “rock” is substituted for the name “Peter” (“Peter” means “rock” in Greek), and so the English verse “Thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my church” reads in Armenian, simply, “Thou art the rock

and upon this rock I will build my church” (Abrahamian & Sweezy, 2001). Armenians take great pride in their ancient history and religion they consider themselves to be lovers of freedom and fairness.

After the pagan period, and specifically in 301, Armenia embraced Christianity as the state religion and became the first nation that accepted Christianity to do so this was due largely to the efforts of St. Gregory the Illuminator who built the Mother Church, Holy Echmiadsin, in 303 (Cherdt, 1959 ; Panossian, 2002 ; Bjorklund, 2003). Armenians all over the world look to the Holy Echmiadsin near Erevan, the capital of Armenia, as the center of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Through many centuries, the Church acted as protector of national culture and values. Although Armenian society is mostly secular, the Church retains its role as the national faith. More than 90 percent of the Armenian population world wide belongs to the Armenian Apostolic Church. To conclude in the second century A.D., Gregory the Illuminator converted king Tiridates, and established Christianity in Armenia (Cherdt, 1959 ; Panossian, 2002). Pagan music, customs, and holidays, were adapted for use in the infant church, which was destined to be a strong unifying force in Armenia. Later, the fifth century saw the invention of the Armenian alphabet by St. Mesrob Mashdotz, the development of musical notation, the translation of the Bible into Armenian, and the appearance of the first Armenian historians (Cherdt, 1959; Panossian, 2002).

St. Thaddeus Armenian Apostolic Church in Amman serves the Armenian Apostolic community. It was built in Amman in 1967. The first priest, a Syrian, studied in Jerusalem. At present the Armenian Archbishop, who serves the Armenian Church in Jordan, is from Lebanon. The first thing the Archbishop did was to renovate the church as well as the school. He sees the church as the heart of the whole community, and therefore considers it important that it functions and plays its role, but also that it preserves Armenian history. Since the church is important for Armenians’ identity, the Archbishop is also responsible for youth groups (where he teaches the Armenian language and history) as well as different activities at the club and in the church where some of the group’s youth function as choir boys and girls.

Moreover, the Armenian Church has always played a tremendously important role in Jordan. Ties to the government are through church. The Archbishop represents Armenians in the Hashemite Kingdom and any official work for the Armenian community and sometimes for individuals is through him. He also represents Armenians during official celebrations in the country. This appointed leaders in Armenian Diasporic communities have done cultural production and political work to preserve and empower exiles to live on as a collective, or at least represent their situation as such to themselves and others (Panossian, 2002).

Next to the church is the Armenian Elementary School “Youzbashian – Gulbenkian School.” The school was opened in 1949, considering that the number of Armenian students weren’t more than 200. Money for building the school was donated from Gulbenkian Foundation. Almost all the students and the teachers in the school are Armenians. Most Jordanian-Armenians’ have chosen to place their children in the Armenian school. After that students finish their studies in Jordanian missionary private schools. The opening of Usbeshian Gulbenkian Armenian School marked a momentous event in the educational history of the Armenian Diaspora in Jordan. Armenian youth no longer faced the separation from home, family, and culture. Most children now attend the elementary school located within the Armenian quarter in the capital Amman and after that students finish their studies in Jordanian missionary private schools.

Increased mobility and access to technology have given Armenian youth greater accessibility to the mainstream world. Regular family and school excursions to neighboring towns and cities in addition to media and technology, especially television and the computer, have greatly broadened the exposure of Armenian youth to mainstream global Armenian culture (King, 2001). Technology is important for designing curriculum and instruction that is accessible for all learners. Thus, it encourages the use of digital materials and software programs to facilitate learning (Rose, Meyer & Hitchcock, 2006). Technology creates strong bonds between Diasporic Armenians in Jordan and in the world as well as between Diasporic Armenians and Armenians in the homeland.

The Homenetmen club is also next to the church and the school. The area that once was inhabited by most of the city’s Armenians has played an important role through the years, particularly as a gathering place. The *Dashnaktstium*, a strong force in the *Spiurk* (Diaspora), the new, post-genocidal diaspora, the fervently nationalist, mildly socialist and staunchly anti-Soviet Armenian party had played a vital role in the Diaspora and succeeded in taking control in the *Katholikosate* of Antelias in Lebanon (Bjorklund, 2003).

The Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) is the largest organization for Armenians in the Diaspora. The AGBU was founded in 1906 and has its main office in New York. The chapter in Jordan was created in 1949 It is also located next to the church and functions as a combined cultural center and sports association. AGBU enriches Armenian projects all over the world. It was established to preserve and promote the Armenian identity and heritage through educational, cultural and humanitarian programs (The Armenian General Benevolent Union [AGBU], 2009). Moreover, the Gybrahyer chapter in Cypress connects Armenian Diasporic people with their homeland, as is clear from the following letter.

An open letter published in the Gibrayer Magazine (2009) to the Minister of Diaspora stating “Dear Minister of Diaspora, It is with sincere regret and disappointment we are made aware that the profession, care, and patriotism of the Diaspora is not put to any constructive use in our homelands.” This letter illustrates the importance of homeland for almost all Diasporic Armenians. It is clear that Armenians in the US share the same attitudes as the Armenians in Cyprus such as “we are made aware that the profession, care, and patriotism of the Diaspora is not put to any constructive use in our homelands” in addition the letter shows the volunteer work of Diasporic Armenians in their homeland and this is clear in the quote “For the record, we were able to volunteer in Karabakh two years ago” the letter also shows the professional cultural and diverse experiences of Diasporic Armenians “Our qualifications include actively practicing medicine in 3 different countries, including well-known hospitals in the USA, over 40 years of experience in the medical field, and fluency in 5 languages” Moreover, this letter was published in web-based magazine established by Diasporic Armenians in Cyprus. This shows the strong techno global era of globalization where Armenian people together with people from different parts of the world can communicate through the net through organized magazines, web pages and other technological facilities. It is clear that through these facilities Armenians’ all over the world can share their Diasporic experiences and this is how in the new era of globalization Armenians’ will maintain their culture and identity (Gibrayer-e magazine, personal communication, March 18, 2009).

6. Conclusion

Language and identity have a home in the context of culture, in daily activities, in social institutions and in ritual performances and ceremonies (King, 2001). Armenian identity continues in the Armenian world. For Armenian youth who grow up in the Diaspora, the Armenian world is the first world they come to know in the course of “living it” through active participation and involvement (King, 2001). The continuing maintenance of the Armenian language and culture, then, offers a strong prospect for effective and successful identity preserving (King, 2001).

Diaspora shapes the identity of a person. For me, identifying as a Diasporic Armenian with dual identity Armenian-Jordanian and rich experience, education shapes my understanding of the “one world” theory. The idea of ethnicity and difference, globalization, and how futurology/futures studies inform my thoughts and plans is illustrated by the figure (1) that shows how identity is continuous. We move from the self identity to the community identity and finally to the global identity, even if we don’t move physically in Diaspora but are living it. Not surprisingly, in this era of techno globalization, we are all becoming Diasporic.

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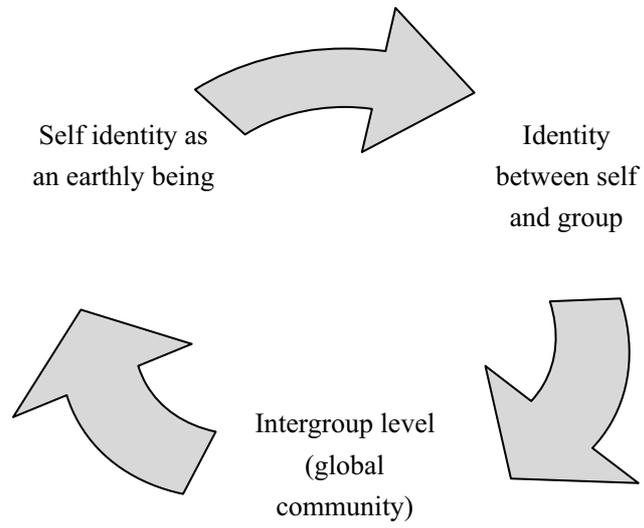


Figure 1. Identity