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Globalisation and the Transhumanist Identities

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Abstract

Globalisation has introduced a variety of changes to the different aspects of human life such as an individual's identity. These changes can be embodied in the variables one depends on to define the self or the group to which they belong. While it is believed that an advanced stage of increased globality has made people more similar, it is also a common argument that globalisation has significantly foregrounded differences to render us more distinct and unique in contrast to others. This analytical essay explores the relationship between globalisation and processes of hyper-hybridisation within transnational affiliations represented in the Transhumanist movement.

Keywords: Globalisation; Identity; Transhumanism; Hyper-hybridisation; Intellectual beings.

Introduction

Perhaps, in a fairly advanced stage of globalisation like we experience today, it would be quite valid to claim that the current level of human openness to the world has paradoxically led to the emergence of multiple shades of difference within groups of similarity themselves. This process happens when the identification of the self as a complex and multilayered entity intersects with the more general and encompassing identity of the group. The identification of the self within the group resulted in the emergence of new 'hyper-hybridised' identities such as the various transhumanist states of being present within the postmodern philosophy of transhumanism.

Background and Rationale

Transhumanism has been gradually developing from a philosophy based on a futuristic imagination of the human condition and its prospects to an identity variable with realisable practical dimensions. Technological and scientific advances in fields such as biological engineering have been promoted by globalisation through increased communication among experts and also through the exchange of creative and innovative ideas. This process pushed towards the initiation and implementation of the transhumanist project. Author and philosopher Nick Bostrom (2003) defines transhumanism as a movement whose core value is the exploration of the possibilities in the posthuman realm in order to enhance the human condition in terms of life span,

intellectual and physical capacities, and mental and emotional health. Before morphing into a popular transnational movement and a highly divergent and controversial global identity variable, transhumanism initially inherited its epistemological legacy from the philosophy of the Enlightenment and Renaissance humanism (Bostrom, 2005). Human aspiration to perfection and emphasis on the transcendence of the normal human capacities are documented in the writings of thinkers listed by Bostrom as Immanuel Kant, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Marquis De Condorcet. Even in the medieval period, thinkers such as Giovanni Pico Della expressed the human agency of unlimited self-enhancement and control of destiny (Bostrom, 2005). Author William Sims Bainbridge (2014) also mentions Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of "Ubermensch" as a quintessential example of the transhumanist ambition which designates a superior state of being that humans strive to accomplish. The fascination of humans with an ideal state of being has even been reflected in early classical forms of art and literature. Mythologies and legends depict inspiring deities and demigods with superhuman abilities such as Zephrus' ability to fly without mechanical assistance and Horus' powerful stamina and superhuman resistance to harm. The instinctive desire of humans for perfection is also reflected in religious texts. In the biblical account of Genesis, Eve is lured by a serpent to eat from the 'Tree of Knowledge' to acquire godlike omnipotence (K.J. Bible, 2001). In the same book, the Nephilim are human-god hybrid beings with large and powerful physique superior to all humans on earth (K.J. Bible, 2001).

As we will see, technological advances and the accumulation of capital accelerated the scope and scale of globalisation which, in return, allowed for technological innovation to disseminate around the globe rapidly. The exchange of innovative ideas in the fields of technology gave rise to regional and international scientific hubs where projects are discussed or implemented in the fields of industry, services, medicine, astronomy, agriculture, and military defence. The diverse scientific products of these hubs did not only create a new niche for cooperation among participating countries but also gradually changed the structure of societies, economies, and governance and promoted the rise of imagined communities that share the same interests.

A number of economic wave models have been suggested to demonstrate the correlative relationship between economic growth and technological innovation. Chris Freeman and Francisco Louça suggest that waves of innovation lead to the rise of technological revolutions (2001). Each revolution taking place is backed up by its antecedent which prepares the conditions for the new wave to emerge (Freeman & Louça, 2001). Also, futurist Alvin Toffler (1990) argues that accumulated technological progress and economic growth are two factors that boost invention and cause the period between revolutions to become progressively shorter.

Kondratieff Cycles is a model that showcases the cyclic growth of the global economy and technological innovation (Nefiodow & Nefiodow, 2014). According to this model, the world has experienced six growth cycles since 1780 when the steam engine was invented and the mechanised textile manufacturing started. The second Kondratieff cycle (1830-1880) was characterised by the emergence of steel and the development of railway systems which allowed mass transportation. The third wave (1890-1920) saw the emergence of electro-technology and chemical industry. The economic growth also prompted a surge in consumption. The fourth wave (1935-1950) was characterised by the development of petrochemical industry, and it was subsequently followed by the fifth wave (1980-2000) that witnessed a rapid development in information and communication technologies. Kondratieff's sixth wave, spanning from 2005 to our present day, is chiefly marked by the developments made in the field of biotechnology, nanotechnology, and psychosocial health (2014).

A 2010 report by Allianz Global Investors analyses the Kondratieff cycles model and suggests that globalisation and demographic change are two factors that will prompt the next wave of economic growth and technological advancement. In the same report, it is stated that advanced information and communication technologies have "pushed globalisation to an entirely new level"

(The Sixth Kondratieff, 2010, p.7) since a whole lot of products, services, and ideas are exchanged across an increasingly interconnected world. A 2014 analytical report by Grinn, Devezas, and Korotayev suggests that the sixth Kondratieff wave was prompted by artificial intelligence as well as quantum monetary economics (Kondratieff Waves, 2014).

The technological innovation of the current Kondratieff wave achieved in biotechnology, nanotechnology, and other highly advanced scientific fields can be seen as the result of the economic growth as well as the accumulation and dissemination of creative ideas shared among influential individuals and communities at the global scale. Indeed, as stated by Freeman and Louça, each wave of scientific and technological achievements prepares the conditions for a far more advanced wave to emerge, and this can also apply to the Kondratieff cycles model. Artificial intelligence as a major factor pushing towards the emergence of the sixth wave is seen as a central element in developing 'superhuman productivity' and expanding the horizon of the human cognitive and practical abilities (Sharma, 2017). As Vineeta Sharma argues, artificial intelligence is meant to engineer a better future for humanity where people are not limited by their insufficient capabilities to understand and live in nature efficiently (2017). Biotechnology, a scientific field that started developing in the sixth wave, is also mentioned by Vineeta to bring about significant changes to humankind by making them stronger and healthier ("The Rise", 2017).

Due to the technological limitations before the industrial revolution, transhumanism remained for centuries a philosophical ambition far from scientific implementation and practice. According to the Encyclopedia of Bioethics (2004), it was until the late 1980's that transhumanist movements started to emerge. These include the Extropians, Transtopians, and the Singularitarians who all endorsed the intertwining of artificial intelligence with the concomitant advances in cybernetics and neuro-technologies to shift social structures and make humans superior beings (Encyclopedia of Bioethics, 2004). The principles of posthumanism are embodied in the Transhumanist Manifesto which was initially drafted and published in 1998 by a group of transhumanists from various nationalities (Transhumanist Declaration, 2016). Its values are the reduction or eradication of existential hardships being the direct result of cognitive limitations, aging, and death and also the endorsement of individual choice of self-enhancement through medical procedures to improve physical, psychological, and mental processes (Transhumanist Declaration, 2016). Based on the transhumanist value of general well-being and the preservation of peace and stability in the international system, the manifesto also vindicates absolute equality and respect to all forms and hybrids of conscious life including humans, "non-human animals", and "any other intelligences to which technological and scientific advance may give rise" (Transhumanist Declaration, 1998). These new intelligences or new forms of life that transhumanists envisioned can be seen in the classification of "Species of Global Persona Sapiens" predicted by the futurist engineer Pentti Malaska. José Luis Cordeiro (Future takes, 2004) of World Future Society states that Malaska as former president of World Futures Studies Federation gave a speech in 1997 in Australia where he distinguished between the "Humie" and "High-Techie" life forms being the far future generations of various hybrid human and non-human beings (Cordeiro, 2004). These include the cyborgs, bio-orgs, silorgs, and symborgs who are fashioned through DNA modifications to think independently and also live in different environments along with normal human beings (2004).

Today, transhumanism as an increasingly growing ideology and identity has gained popularity among experts and normal citizens to become an established epistemology and discipline with various media outlets. These media include the H+ Magazine, various social networks such as H+ Connect and H+ Student Network, academic journals such as the Journal of Evolution and Technology. There are also groups and events with political influence including university and institutes conferences and non-governmental organisations such as Terasem (Bainbridge, 2014). These meetups are held in 19 different countries and have 89 permanent groups scattered over Asia, Europe, Latin America, Canada, and the United States to discuss the future agendas of

transhumanists, their political activism, and also the ethical and legal limitations and challenges to the transhumanist ambition (Transhumanism Meetups, 2015).

Analysis and Prognosis

Based on the observation of the data surveyed, we notice how the subsequent waves of technological innovations and the increased level of globality interact in a correlative relation out of which transhumanism emerged. This ideology is constantly evolving through the multiplication of its offshoots to create various transhuman identities such as those classified by Malaska within the postmodern state of being. Perhaps, it would be relevant to refer to this process as "hyper hybridisation" where several identities emerge from the same aggregation of shared interests. Here, globalisation lies at the heart of this hyper hybridisation since it provides the context facilitating communication among transhumanists, propelling their motivations and providing them with the necessary tools for the implementation of their ambitions. The increasing globality; therefore, becomes not only a leading factor of simple "intra-group" ideological and cultural exchange but also of what I would refer to as complex "inter-group" hybridisation.

Malaska's classification of the different forms of being in the future represents an accurate manifestation of how globalisation might affect human identity in the next generations by promoting mixtures between humans, animals, and cyborgs in order to produce a whole array of transhuman identities within an intellectual self aware race. At this stage of intermixing, we might even experience "postmodern being hierarchies" that are, for instance, based on one's mental and physical capacities or lifespan instead of the traditional variables of social categorisation such as income, level of education, gender, and social class. If the traditional variables persist to be added to the new variables for the definition of a social code of stratification, all forms of intellectual beings might experience "hyper-hierarchies" where, for example, non-enhanced low-income female citizens of colour might be socially and politically discriminated against and marginalised by physically and intellectually enhanced white members of the same society. The enhanced individuals may also have the advantage of economic and political influence to enable the founding of pressure groups and lobbies. These pressure groups would serve the interests of the powerful enhanced beings and promote their agendas to be used as a guiding reference in all institutions for a new world order. The societies living under this order would have a social stratification similar to that of liberal capitalist societies. The enhanced capitalist elites would not only dominate the less powerful within the same society but also maintain their political, economic, and cultural influence globally. Also, international elites can compete at a global level for a status of leadership by demonstrating an optimum level of technological creativity and innovation. In sum, the different identity patterns as analysed can be rendered much more complex through further hybridisation to affect the social order and governance at the local, regional, and global levels.

Historical determinism is an intrinsic characteristic of globalisation which is essentially a state of intensifying human and non-human interaction bound by the time and space continuum. This constant interaction engenders ongoing change and also drives an increasingly advanced replication of certain entities, concepts, or epistemologies to replace their previous versions. Present events, ideas, economic trends, political vision, and modes of governance are the result of the developments achieved in the past which shape and, to a great extent, determine how we should approach the future. In this sense, the present condition of existence becomes, in one way or another, an interpretation or understanding of the past adjusted to our current needs and circumstances.

The Kondratieff cycles model is perhaps a relevant manifestation globalisation's historical determinism. Each wave of technological innovation, which also comes along with social, economic, and ideological changes, greatly shapes the characteristics of the next wave and determines its scope and influence. All these changes and developments, exemplified here in the

Kondratieff cycles, are embedded in the 'experience' of globalisation. Globalisation as a process and concept cannot be stopped or pinned down to a single clear definition. It is also the inevitable outcome of our ongoing interaction in the international system.

Despite the technological advances, we are still at a very rudimentary stage of the practical implementation of transhumanist values in our societies. Only few instances and manifestations of transhumanism in fields such as medical biology and biotechnology have been developed, most of which are primarily intended to aid the normal and conventional human capacities in case of physical or mental impairment. Such technologies include gene engineering, use of microchip implants and prostheses, and implementation of stem cell technologies to curb or treat diseases and different types of medical conditions. However, the future of transhumanism might unfold new beings of intellect diverging from the normal human body and mind for various purposes to eventually create multiple identities. The processes by which new forms emerge, as mentioned before, might result in the coexistence of different "types" with varying degrees of humanness.

I suggest that this postmodern human condition would seem to parallel the prehistoric human condition where various hominid types lived in overlapping primitive social hierarchies such as the Homo sapien, Neanderthal, Homo naledi, and other early human species. According to recent scientific reports, these hominid types co-existed, interbred, and also perhaps even competed for survival against one another (Reuters, 2017). The competition for survival is considered as a potential answer to the question of how Homo naledi, Neanderthals, and other types went extinct and the Homo sapiens survived (Potts, 2012). Paleoanthropologist Rick Potts suggests that the Homo sapiens survived "environmental instability and disruption" in the past and turned that into an advantage thanks to the species' adaptability to change (Neimark, 2012, p.1). Today, climate change, environmental scarcity and instability, the disruptive economic and political crises, the global threat of terrorism, and the fears concerning the involvement of artificial intelligence in future wars are all factors already driving the search for advanced ways to technologically monitor nature and control the human interaction to avoid crises.

In a international system characterised by expanding economic disparities and growing threats, the influential elites who have access to enhancement technologies would perhaps be able to survive as cybernetic organisms whilst those who cannot afford those technologies would face survival hardships leading to potential extinction of the human race as we know it. The beginning of this transformation in the human race is marked by an event futurists refer to as "singularity" (Kurzweil, 2010). According to Ray Kurzweil, singularity is a concept that refers to a future where human thinking and existence gradually merge with technology to a point where we will still be human but go beyond our biological origins. In an age where there will be no distinction between human and machine, pollution, hunger, and environmental changes will be brought to a halt (Kurzweil, 2010). He regards this dramatic change as the culmination of technological ingenuity that humans have been experiencing for centuries. Singularity, in this sense, becomes a major manifestation of the historical determinism driven by globalisation. The historical determinism with its mechanisms of replication gives potential to hyper-hierarchies to emerge again but in a postmodern context that holds new overlapping variables of self and group definition.

At this stage of analysis, globalisation turns out to be a key element serving the deterministic function of the ongoing replication of social orders and the identities of the units constituting those orders. Determinism here implies the ongoing accumulation of scientific and technological ingenuity leading to what Kurzweil refers to as the singularity where the lines between biology and technological are blurred. This determinism which globalisation drives will also represent itself in the constant rise and fall of new social orders, identities, and cultures. Continuous hybridisation and the repetitive emergence of new identities become a highly predicted outcome of intense interaction. Whereas these changes can be understood in terms of historical determinism from a philosophical perspective, they can also be understood within the framework of organism evolution as an integral

part of biological determinism. Based on Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, organisms go through constant phases of self-modification that result in the multiplication of a single species. Here, a single type produces subunits with quite dissimilar qualities and traits. These eventually develop to become new species further expanding the Tree of Life (Natural History Museum, 2015). We can say that the human constant multiplication of identities within the self and also group closely mimics nature's pre-programmed processes of divergence and species multiplication. Species in nature and human identity differentiations are both the indirect outcome of intense interactions and the changing nature of the surrounding environment.

From a psychological perspective, hyper-hybridisation in this era of globalisation and in the future might be explained by the increased personal desire for individualism as a result of the human modern lifestyle that favours agency over structure. Collectivism has been a dominant mode of organising human life for millennia in that members had lived within tribes and social aggregations for security, survival, and protection from an untamed environment. Human affiliations today are becoming increasingly uncommon and mostly founded and maintained by the principle of political, social, or economic utilitarianism to keep societies, institutions, groups, and the international system functional.

Conclusion

Globalisation has indeed propelled the emergence of new identities that are increasingly constructed by complex constituents replacing or adding to the traditional variables of nationality, social class, and gender. The historical determinism of globalisation is already playing a major role shaping new identities that emerge out of the combination between biology and technology such as those classified by futurist Pentti Malaska. This combination gradually progresses to reach an advanced level thanks to the accumulation of technological ingenuity. Instead of making individuals similar as many claim, seeing, for example, the propagation of shared youth cultures, globalisation has not only hybridised our perceptions of the self but has also allowed the crystallisation of individual identities within groups of similarity to create a wide and almost infinite range of identities. Transhumanism is but a single embodiment of globalisation's processes resulting in what I would call the "hyper-hybridisation" of the self and the group.

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