

**THE CRISIS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY IN THE
MEDITERRANEAN BASIN IN THE ERA OF
GLOBALIZATION: THE CASE OF ALGERIA IN A
GLOBAL CONTEXT.**

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1. Introduction:

In recent years, scholars of social sciences and humanities disciplines have taken an intense interest in questions concerning identity and culture and the extent of their impact on both local and global contexts. It is worth noting that in the last two decades much importance has been placed on globalization as a worldwide phenomenon which has brought drastic changes in perceptions, beliefs, thoughts, and tastes of peoples, and had subsequent effects on issues like identity and culture. At this level, however, and to be able to understand the process of globalization and its impact on local and broad identities and cultures, it is important to define key concepts like

"culture", "identity", and "globalization" to better understand the dynamic changes taking place in our contemporary world.

2. What is culture?

Culture is a word that is easier to describe than to define. It has been defined and understood in a number of ways and it is regarded as "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (Williams, 1976: 87). The term culture refers to the appreciation of good literature, music, art, and food. The biologists, on the other hand, view culture as being a colony of bacteria or other micro-organisms growing in a given medium. For anthropologists, however, culture is rather the full range of learnt human behavior patterns. This definition was in fact first coined by the pioneer English anthropologist Edward T. Tylor in his book *Primitive Culture* (1871). To this nineteenth century English anthropologist culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, law, morals, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Culture is, hence, an acquired

phenomenon that is learnt in society being an echo of peoples' lives and experiences both past and present.

In the same vein, the American anthropologist R. H. Lowie, describes culture as being:

The sum total of what an individual acquires from society, those beliefs, customs, artistic norms, food, habits, and crafts which came to him not by his own creative activity but as a legacy from the past conveyed by formal or informal education (A.T. Dalfovo, 2005: 97).

The anthropological definition of culture is also shared by scholars of other fields including linguists who believe that language and culture are interconnected. Tang (1999) advocates the view that culture is language and language is culture. According to him to be able to speak a language well, one has to be able to think in that language. In this context, Brown (1994) describes language and culture as follows: "a language is part of culture and culture is a part of language; the two are intricately interwoven so that we cannot separate the two without losing the significance of

language are regarded as inseparable entities as people use language not only to communicate but also to transmit their cultures as well. Interestingly, learning a language without learning at the same time the culture to which it operates will be learning meaningless symbols to which learners would fix the wrong meaning.

For historians, culture as civilization is "the spirit of the nations", which plays an eminent role in the development of nations, and the enrichment of their heritage and the preservation of people's roots and traditions. It further strengthens, in one way or another, the nations' uniqueness and exceptionality and through it individuals develop their own identity.

3. What is identity?

Identity is very often associated to words like individuality and personality to mean that a person, a group, or a thing is itself and not something else. For the British sociologist Giddens (2007) identity relates to the understandings people hold about who they are and what is meaningful to them. The external components of identity

depend on cultural classification including nationality, race, religion, and gender. On the other hand, identity internal components refer to the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual characteristics which make a person, a group, or a thing different from others, in addition to the innate gifts, talents, strengths, capacities, and personal preferences which also form an integral part of internal identity. Both components, internal and external, have witnessed subsequent changes generated by the process of globalization which has changed individuals' and societies' taste for greater integration.

4. What is globalization?

Globalization has been approached from different perspectives. It is associated to mobility and transformation (Held, 2003). It is a worldwide movement towards interaction and the integration of economies, industries, markets, and cultures around the world. Globalization, hence, describes a worldwide process by which economies, societies, and cultures have become integrated through a globe-spanning network of trade,

communication, investment, immigration, and transportation.

5. The impact of globalization on the Algerian identity and culture:

The process of globalization has speeded up dramatically in the last few decades thanks to technological developments, declining costs, easy access, free flow of information, and progress in media and communication devices paved the way for a broader outlook of an interconnected and interdependent world.

Indeed, thanks to communication and information technologies, Algeria as the rest of the world, witnessed dramatic changes through the formation of the "global village" that is known for us as globalization. Undeniably, globalization transcends cultural, social, political, and economic borders and makes the world more accessible. It further promotes increasing collaborations, interaction, exchange, tolerance, and awareness about human and cultural differences. However, despite its great potential, globalization has also been described as a process which

serves as a double-edged sword particularly for cultural identities and cultures. In short run, globalization is claimed to promote greater interaction and integration among peoples of different cultural, religious, and geographical backgrounds. Nonetheless, in long run and in the absence of cultural awareness, good knowledge about one's heritage and pride in one's own culture, and government support, globalization may negatively contribute to undermining national culture and generates cultural and identity conflicts.

It is worth noting that one of the consequences of globalization is the fact that Western and American cultures are becoming more influential and more dominant to the detriment of other African and eastern cultures and civilizations and this is probably related to the fact that Western and particularly American cultures have the advantage of controlling world economy and technology. The latter urges people throughout the globe to share similar preferences and tastes.

In this regard the American political scientist, Samuel P. Huntington believes that the end of the era of the Cold War (1946-1989) with its capitalist and communist dichotomies was over and the new "global" world was to witness a new era of cultural conflicts based on cultural and religious differences. In his *Clash of Civilizations?* (1993), Huntington explains his theory about the contemporary world in terms of what global politics is likely to be in the coming years. He wrote:

It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great division among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural ...the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future. S. Huntington quoted in:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/samuel P. Huntington](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/samuel_P._Huntington)

Huntington further asserted that the world is divided into six main civilizations and cultures: the Western, the Latin- American, the Orthodox world (former USSR), the Eastern world (including Hindu, Buddhist, Chinese, Japanese ...) and the Muslim world (the Middle East, Northern and Western Africa). The source of conflict among these civilizations will not be ideological or economic as they used to be in the era of the Cold War. The "clash of civilizations" will rather be related to cultural and identity differences among these civilizations and cultures.

There is no doubt that in this situation, no country will be exempt from the outcomes globalization brings about and Algeria is far from being an exception. In the Algerian context, globalization has an eminent impact on people's cultural practices, experiences, and identities and tends, in this way, to be viewed both positively and negatively. While globalization allows peoples, particularly young generations to interact with people across cultures and keeps them up to date with the latest developments, it has

daily exposure to diverse cultures generated cultural gaps within families among teenagers and emerging adults with their parents making the cultural identity development a more complex process that may follow a variety of pathways. Additionally, young generation youth in Algeria are also fascinated by Western and American cultures which paved the way for negative attitudes and habits and stimulated blind imitation by embracing everything different and strange without filtering it. Globalization in this way has introduced unfamiliar and strange norms, ideas, and behaviors, which generally do not fit with the principles of the society's culture and traditions. This is clearly resented through the way people speak, the way they dress, and the way they think.

6. Conclusion:

In the last few decades much emphasis was put on globalization as a worldwide phenomenon and the extent of its influence in all aspects of life particularly the cultural sphere. In Algeria, globalization has an eminent impact on people's cultural experiences and identities. It has brought

individual and society's taste for greater integration. To be sure, in the light of globalization the world has become so interconnected and interdependent and that created a kind of borderless world that is facilitated by communication technologies. It was, in fact, this density of contact among different peoples, cultures, and civilizations which would lead to a global culture. This cultural homogenization is said to promote an extreme standardization of life style and foster a kind of uniformity in all aspects of life namely culture, technology, economy, and politics.

At this level however, it is important to open up to other cultures but at the same time to keep one's authenticity and peculiarity through the preservation of the traditional cultures and values. "The ability of a culture" as stated by Friedman (2000.d.umn.edu) "[is] when it encounters other strong cultures, to absorb influences that naturally fit into and can enrich that culture or to compartmentalize those things that while different can nevertheless be enjoyed and celebrated as different". This could only be achieved by raising people's awareness for

threats of globalization. To this end, one should revive cultural heritage by showing pride in local cultures and traditions. Family, school, and government support all have a crucial role to play for the transmission of local social values, religious beliefs and language to the youth to contribute for the enhancement of their cultural identity as an ideal to be followed. The youth, can themselves participate for the enrichment of their own identity via media and the internet through the advertisement of their local habits and cultures to the whole world by showing their uniqueness and particularity. In sum, they have to "think global and act local".

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