

Globalization, Culture, and the Moroccan Identity

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Summary:

Culture differs from one nation to another. Each society has its own culture. It becomes, then, the characteristic that gathers a nation making of it a single entity. In this article, we will see the effects of globalization on culture and identity trying to involve Morocco in the process of facing and resisting, in a way or another, such a power of the global concept which considers culture as being local but tending to become global.

Keywords: Globalization, culture, identity, ethnicity, communication, media, transnationalization, geopolitics, migration, structuralization.

Résumé:

La culture diffère d'une nation à l'autre. Chaque société a sa propre culture. Cette dernière devient alors la caractéristique qui rassemble une nation et qui en fait une entité unique. Dans cet article, nous verrons les effets de la mondialisation sur la culture et essaierons d'impliquer le Maroc dans le processus de confrontation et de résistance, d'une manière ou d'une autre, à cette puissance du concept global qui considère la culture comme étant locale mais qui a tendance à devenir global.

Mots clés : Mondialisation, culture, identité, ethnicité, communication, médias, transnationalisation, géopolitique, migration, structuration.

المخلص:

تختلف تعاريف مفهوم العولمة وتتباين بين المفكرين، فإذا كان البعض يحددها من الجانب الاقتصادي، فإن البعض الآخر يركن في التعريف إلى جوانب عدة، ولعل أهمها في دراستنا الجانب الثقافي، فتوسع العولمة خلال الألفية الثالثة أثر بشكل ملحوظ على مجموعة من المفاهيم ومنها الثقافة عموماً، والهوية المغربية على وجه الخصوص، فكيف استطاع هذا النظام العالمي الكوني أن يؤثر على تلك المفاهيم تلك تساؤلات يحاول هذا المقال أن يجيب عليها من خلال ما تم بسطه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العولمة، الثقافة، الهوية، العرق، الاتصالات، وسائل الإعلام، العبر الوطنية، الجغرافيا السياسية، الهجرة، الهيكلة.

Identity is a question that may be expressed by an anxiety and a hope at the same time. The anxiety lies in the sense of the existence of our Moroccan identity in all its dimensions, Arabo-berber, Muslim negro-African and modern. It also lies in our existence in the world in different parts of the planet where we have decided, voluntarily or not, to assert our existence; a planet that has become a finished space, a global village, surrounded by all kinds of flows, economic, human, electronic, and cultural, which are aspects of globalization; a globalization that could not only be a kind of interdependence among the national spaces which existence is still alive but also an internal phenomenon in these spaces. The advantages and disadvantages of this multiform process can diverge from one partisan to another. Some see in it the chance of a new world and others see in it the risk of an incomparable oppression. How could this global system affect our culture and what are its implications on our identity. These are some questions that this article will try to answer through an analysis of different theories and schools.

The problem of the Arabo Islamic identity or Arab identity occupies the front of the scene. The Islamic world has never been so active in the sense of the expression of identity, maybe because of the more and more enigmatic character of this identity because as Dryush Shayagan reminds, more than the ethnic and the religious identities, we find a third one in addition that emerges from modernity. He adds that the three identities fit one into the other, create more and more complex fields of interference, and exploit territories that remain most of the time incompatible with each other. He goes on declaring that today, these identical cultures are situated between the “not yet” and the “never ever”: not yet modern and never ever traditional. These identities that live henceforth, in “between the two” are totally burst according to Dryush.¹

At first glance, this triple identity raises obstacles to communication, but on the condition of succeeding in fitting out their respective spaces, it offers on the other hand, new possibilities of communication.

The assertion of a reactive and massive Arabian Islamic identity was the adequate answer to the colonial dominion. Today, however, the reflection has to fit and adapt itself to the requirements of a situation namely, globalization, that orders that identity becomes seen as

open, diverse and it has to be attentive to pluralism in the internal as well as the external places.

We can think that the new network of information and communication will favour the emergence of new forms of citizenship susceptible to fill the current democratic deficit. Media permanently present information in the different parts of the world. With the means of information which the internet network prefigures today, the individual can have a more active role in the search for information. One can also contact a multitude of people of different nationalities, discuss problems of public interest, and express his/her opinions in public forums.

It is crucial to see globalization from an academic point of view as there is a strong link bounding globalization and culture. The global culture belongs to what Simon During calls "transnationalization."² This latter is the process by which cultural products extend their actual space to emerge in a global area. Cultural studies are a kind of reaction to this process. Going deeper in this perspective, we come across many points that may link globalization to culture if we consider that culture is a local issue that may be influenced by the global market, the global sight, or may itself influence the global sphere if it is considered as a tradition or a way of life. Culture, from another view, maybe considered as the basis of the construction of one's identity but once influenced by globalization, the identity may change and we may adopt some practices and beliefs that may be no more appropriate to the local culture. Education is another point where globalization and culture meet. Students nowadays, are no more interested by some issues tackling family or social events, but rather opt to get aware of the global economic and capitalistic changes that the actual world witnesses.

Culture is a part of our identity. If we change culture, we change our identity. Stewart Hall argues that in a changing history, identity should remain the same though it is far from being the case of the modern world we are living in and where identities are in a permanent process of change and transformation and this is the result of globalization. Always according to Hall, the construction of identity is made by the sight of the other. In other words, the negative view on the other makes of our identity a positive one. The process of constructing identity then is based on opposition. If the sight of the other makes of us who we really are,

we are then no more free to chose according to our own tastes but rather chose according to others' reactions³. This may seem ambiguous in a sense and annoying in another.

How can globalization affect our own sense of belonging? Belonging to a particular nation and adopting a specific culture is not a matter of choice, it is because we belong to a certain ethnic group that has its own tradition, culture and religion. Once we find ourselves involved in a pre-created world, the acceptance becomes an automatic reaction, but when our sense of belonging to a cultural space or another becomes guided by the global pressures, our identity gets hurt and our mind fragmented and confused between what is ours and what is theirs (what is local and what is global).

“The global popular” is the means of communication that occupies an important place in the projection of visual images to spread information (TV, satellite, internet...). If I insist on citing the global popular as one of the links between globalization and culture, it is because I judge it of a high importance and necessity to remind the idea that Simon During came with and which expresses the impossibility to separate the global popular from the global culture. He kept arguing that the reason was not only that both of them belong to a single globalizing system but also because the relation between various forms of cultural products are changing and transacting.⁴ Similarly, Arjun Appadurai cited in his essay “Modernity at Large” one of the most important means of the circulating forms which is the “mediascape”. Like the global popular, mediascapes allow any information to become local through all kinds of the modern media. By this way the local culture may be adopted by different societies and consequently be global.⁵

Today globalization arouses a number of controversies. The term by itself condenses anxieties: it evokes, quite at the same time, the shrinkage of the planet bound to technological innovations and the massive impact of the triumphant capitalism that imposes its extreme dominance.

Appadurai approaches, in a frontal way, the question of globalization. He put in the centre of his analysis the notion of flows. For him, what defines the contemporary world is much more circulation than structures and stable organizations. The proof is quite clear when we see people constantly moving from one place to another and the extraordinary

development of mass communication with images transited throughout the planet. Until then, the individual lived and conceived himself in certain limits. From a simple geopolitical point of view, the nation state was considered as a stable referent: within it, the dimension of the local used to have a great importance conferring to each individual in a given society their privileged points of anchoring. In this context, the identical constructions occur in a permanent game of opposition between the self and the other, between the inside and the outside. But migrations on the one hand, and the media flows on the other hand, disrupted the spreading order until then. What interests Appadurai is the way this situation not only alters the material life of people but also tends to give an incomparable role to imagination. This does not mean that previously societies have not abundantly, neither in their mythological, literary nor artistic productions, appealed to this faculty. Henceforth, imagination is no more limited in some specific domains of expression, but it changes the daily practices, notably the migratory situations where migrants find themselves obliged to create in their exile a world of them by using all the images that media allow them to receive.⁶

The cable and internet offer multiple means to reconstitute communities including migrants and those who stayed in their countries. When we come across globalization of communication we inevitably think of internet. Internet is considered to be the symbol of and, at the same time, a vehicle for the development of the future mediatised landscape. As a polymorphic tool spread everywhere, internet is actually inescapable in the study of the actual communication processes.

If we consider internet as a medum, we automatically notice that it is a quite particular one. Among modern mass media, internet is characterized by a potentially or at least virtually wide broadcasting. It is one of the facets of the internet ideology: everybody can have access to messages, everywhere and so to speak with no constraints, and at the same time, internet presents specific characteristics that make of it an exceptional medium. Unlike press or radio-television that necessitate material and financial means, licenses, and a diffusion and distribution network, by internet everything is easier. Everybody can be a transmitter and everybody is potentially provider of contents but not everybody can create his/her own television station contrary to internet by which each one –or almost– can create a web site with only an online computer. All this is almost free more than the accommodating of private individuals that is also, more or less, free.

If we consider internet as a medium, it is then the time in the history of mass communication when each citizen and each association has the ability to play in the same ground as that of the wide mediatised groups or the big companies. Yve Thiran states that from this point of view, internet is a means of communication par excellence and it is not surprising that the excluded traditional media were the first to use it.⁷

What seems to be new in the case of internet is not really the fact that it facilitates the emergence of multiple forms of sites and more or less alternative means of information, but rather the fact that the local structuralizations have voluntarily or not, reached the world as a whole. The neighbouring radio station's diffusion is limited in the neighbourhood, while the expression on the Net may give the impression to address the whole planet. A neighbouring radio station, once installed in the web, can be heard by the whole world.

Contrary to the press of radio-television, internet still looks for its place in the media landscape⁸ grouping sites together, contents, services and very (too) diverse possibilities to aspire to a real unit of speech (but it is not probably the purpose of internet neither), in a social gratitude other than the connotations that can be socially planned on the new technologies of information and communication in general. In other words, as we find everything on internet, it is still its strict technical dimension that allows an observer to apprehend it, to seize it mentally and conceptually and to succeed in defining it differently. What is internet then? It is a medium, a commercial space, a means of information, a shop window, and a place for exchange and expression; that is to say, so many activities where the interlocutors position themselves differently. The telephone is not a newspaper; nevertheless, internet can be at the same time a telephone and a newspaper, an advertisement hoarding and a room of debate.

Born Jamaican, the English cultural theorist Stuart Hall argued that identity must be understood in terms of politics of localization, of location and statement –not as a process of discovery of lost roots but as the construction of a new or emergent shape of ourselves, linked at the same time to the actual social relations and to the contemporary power relations–. While most of us clearly wish to respect most of the aspects of our tradition and history, Hall suggests that we also need, for speaking, to understand languages which we were not taught.

We need to understand and revalue the traditions and inheritances of cultural expressions in a new and creative way as the context in which they are produced evolves constantly.⁹

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- ⁸ Yve Thiran shows that the internet needs traditional media such as television to be able to claim the impact that it had notably during the Clinton-Lewinsky affaire. (Thiran, p. 43)
- ⁹ Stuart Hall, « Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities, » Culture, Globalization and the World System, Current Debates in Art History 3, State of New York: Binghamton, 1991, pp. 41-68.