

**Cultural and Religious Identities in Era of Information and Communications
Globalization**

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Information and communication revolution is one of the most important instruments in globalization. In fact , Information and Communications Globalization has changed people's relations and the meaning of time , space and have reduced distance and has demolished physical boundaries and has increased relations between people, governments and cultures . In recent years, culture globalization with rise of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT) has undoubtedly accelerated a uniform world culture and democracy and world modern values are proceeding strongly through various aspects of life: cultural industries ,international language, music, press, media and etc. In this increasingly globalized culture and modernity, south countries have little or no margin of action as they can to position themselves into the so called Global village. Therefore when we are talking about culture globalization by Information and Communications Technology, we confront with its negative effects as well. The first negative role of culture globalization is cultural, religious and identical conflict in national and international level that is enforced and carried out by the information and communication technology. In fact using of information and communication technology play an important role in the appearance of such conflicts.

Communication globalization has modified all political, economic, social and cultural aspects. Globalization which resulted from the use of ICT has increased the basic conflict among old and new cultures, between secularism and religion, between West and East. Hence in era of information and communication that ICT can approach cultures and civilizations, cultural and religious identities have become an increasing source of conflict among and within societies and have increased the conflicts of the present. Thus the fundamental challenge confronting to humanistic and cultural studies and specially in this article is that how in age of information and communication globalization , we can reconcile the conflict and the tension between cultural and religious identities with culture and civilization that want to be special and global.

In fact, in this article , we want to answer how can avoid of this real fear that through globalization of ICT ,cultures and identities of world are becoming fragmented and we can even foresee that a nightmarish scenario of cultural homogenization through western values and symbols. We try to say that in era of globalization, ICT should try to protect cultural liberty through expanding men's choices - with attention to cultures, values and identifies themselves.

Meaning of Globalization

Globalization has widely become one of the most powerful forces shaping the modern world and cannot be defined easily. In fact, globalization is a complex concept that involves both political-economic and socio-cultural orders and has created a new global belief. In other words, globalization is a multifaceted word that does not refer to a simple thought, but it can be characterized as a systematic decline in spheres of commercial, cultural, and technological. So there are different ideas about globalization and its role. Globalization is defined as "an intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa" (Giddens, 1990, p.64). In other words, globalization involves changes in the spatial reach of capital, financial activities, advanced producer services, and information that transcend the political state system and where, arguably, multinational corporations replace states and communities as the dominant actors in the global system. In theory, a globalized socioeconomic system would be freer, more efficient, economically rational, and unfettered by state-directed diversions of wealth into unproductive areas. As production is reorganized across time and space, industries interpenetrate across political borders, financial capital spreads across the globe, homogenized consumer goods diffuse to distant markets, and people flow to new areas of economic opportunity, the local and the global will become inextricably intertwined in a system of universal order (David J. Keeling ,Latin 2002)

According to Held and McGrew (2002) "globalization denotes the expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up and deepening impact of interregional flows and patterns of social interaction. It refers to a shift or transformation in the scale of human social organization that links distant communities and expands the reach of power relations across the world's major regions and continents." However, globalization is frequently associated with the liberal classical economic theory, and since the mid-1970s with neo-liberalism, which has its roots in the classical economic theory. More specifically, globalization is considered a reflection of the classical economic theory's principle of comparative advantage, which promotes an open economic system and free trade in order to achieve and realize the best chances of life (Miasami, 2003) It is evident that neo-liberal ideas are not so new and capitalism has grand history itself. In effect, the liberal school of economics that today has been dominated on other spheres of life such as culture, society, politic, arts and education; it became famous in Europe by Adam Smith with its book in 1776 called *The Wealth of Nations*. He and others advocated the abolition of government intervention in economic matters. No restrictions on manufacturing, no barriers to commerce, no tariffs, he said; free trade was the best way for a nation's economy to develop. Such ideas were "liberal" in the sense of no controls. This application of individualism encouraged "free" enterprise, "free" competition which came to mean, free for the capitalists to make huge profits as they wished (Martinez and Garcia, 1996). Neo-liberalism emerged full force in the 1980s with the right-wing Reagan and Thatcher regimes, but its influence has since spread across the political spectrum to encompass not only centrist political parties but even much of the traditional social-democratic left (Hudson, 1999).

Thus the ideology that has emerged at the end of the twentieth century for highlighting globalization real face is neo-liberalism. Neo-liberalism is a set of economic policies that has become widespread during the last 25 years or so. In fact, neo-liberalism is political economic paradigm in the era of globalization. Neo-liberalism idea refers to the policies and processes that their goals are to maximize personal profit. However, neo-liberal globalization theory is very vast and it is not only reduced to an integrated system of markets, but, it includes other spheres of social and politic life.

Neo- Liberal Theory and Culture Globalization

Globalization for neo-liberals is the creation of a global civil society. In this idea, globalization is a process that will inevitably lead to creating a global cultural identity and developing a unique model of economic, social and political order. The first effort of neo-liberals is limited to globalization of a method of thinking that is named liberal-capitalist modernity. For neo-liberals, universal history of mankind is in

the direction of liberal democracy. Therefore, when we discuss about neo-liberals, the following three major principals should be mentioned: (i) Rationalism, (ii) Individualism, and (iii) Secularism. (i) Rationality, (ii) Individuality, and (iii) Secularity. History of modernity and its cycle in the world show us that modernity just follow these principals to find the historical foundations of modernity, we need notably search in the works of Kant, Hegel, Marx and Weber. Neo-liberal modernity was associated with the development of industrial capitalism and its distinct social forms and includes two dimensions: (i) industrialism and (ii) capitalism. The idea of a universal history of mankind was first suggested by Immanuel Kant in his *An Idea for a Universal History of Mankind*. Kant suggested that history would have an end point or a final purpose that was implied in man's current potentialities and which made the whole of history intelligible. For Kant, as for Hegel and Marx after him, this end point was the realization of human freedom, defined as the universalization of a just civic constitution. Only when all states accept such a constitution, adopting a republican form of government, and join a *Foedus Pacificum*, a pacific federation or union guaranteeing , the Right of a foreigner not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else's territory, would there be an end to conflict and, therefore, perpetual peace . For Kant, belligerency was equated with the existence of tyranny – an assertion which has been resurrected in the post-Cold War period by international political theorists operating from the Liberal tradition. Kant argued in *Perpetual Peace* that if the decision to go to war was taken by the people rather than the sovereign, then the frequency of conflict would be drastically reduced.

Kant's project for a universal history of mankind was undertaken by Hegel in the generation following his death. The task of such a universal history was to provide the exhibition of Spirit in the process of working out the knowledge of that which it is potentially. History proceeds through a continual process of conflict, wherein societies and systems of thought based upon different ideas clash and then fall apart due to their own internal contradictions. This dialectic took place between different societies as successive systems of thought are replaced by less contradictory ones. For Hegel, the history of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of freedom. The consciousness of freedom was absent amongst the 'Orientals' living under despotic rule and first emerged amongst the Greeks.

For Marx liberal-capitalist modernity particularized as the ideology of the bourgeoisie, while Weber explored its cultural roots in Protestant asceticism. Following Marx and Weber, liberal-capitalist modernity may be seen as encompassing a specifically bourgeois, Protestant world-view. In fact, globalization of neo-liberals was a form of colonialism and imperialism. For Karl Marx mission globalization of neo-liberals in Asia has been destructive and regenerating, entailing the annihilation of old Asiatic society and the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia . (Barrillon ,michel, 2001)

However, we can consider that in the era of globalization, neo-liberal theory determines a belief that economical, technological and cultural systems are closely connected. In fact, "globalization refers to the process of the integration of economic, political, social and cultural relations across international boundaries" (Fafowora, 1998). Then in this theory, it would be impossible to imagine isolation between cultural systems and economical and political systems. In the other hand, in neo-liberal thought, culture globalization and realizing modernity are as hidden formulas for global or civil society. Then for discussing about place of cultural and religious identities and the role of globalization in neo-liberal philosophy, there is a powerful paradigm that is so important in discourse of culture globalization or global modernity theory. Therefore in this sense, globalization is principally aimed at the transcendental homogenization of Western theories in political, socio-economic and cultural spheres across the globe. In fact, it can be seen as "an evolution which is systematically restructuring interactive phases among global nations and civilizations by breaking down barriers in the areas of culture, commerce, communication and several other fields of endeavour" (Oluabunwa, 1999).

According to this view point, globalization and westernization produce different effects in the cultural and religious identities and it destroys cultural diversity in global level. In effect, what we cannot

regret the some positive benefits of globalization, such as the accelerating advances in science, engineering, medicine and technology resulting.

There are increasing opportunities for wealth creation from new combinations of resources and capacities, new economies of scale, and new opportunities to share the great variety this planet, emergence of a new awareness of our common humanity, with a set of universal values, extending beyond traditional boundaries of nations, races, classes or religions. We also cannot regret rapid technological and social changes done by economic globalization. So neo-liberal thought is creating a crisis of identity in certain parts of the world and a corresponding longing for traditional values, often embedded in religion. For example, Non-Western world, especially the Muslim world, has yet to come to grips with the notion of globalization. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the Muslim world faces many challenges, but none more formidable than the issue of how to strike a balance between maintaining cultural integrity and religious identity on the one hand, and absorbing changes associated with a globalizing world on the other. Broadly speaking, three reactions to globalization can be discerned in the Muslim world. Some Muslims view globalization as a power game from which great powers draw immense gains and to which the rest of the world is subjugated. To them, Muslims have two choices: either resist or be marginalized and integrated. The new era of transformation, so runs the argument, is an old wine in a new bottle. They argue that social movements, Islamic or otherwise, represent a collective form of resistance to globalization and that they are invariably intertwined with the rise of counter-hegemonic consciousness.(Mahmood Monshipouri, 2005)

Cultures and Identities Conflict

One of the most important instruments of liberal-capitalist modernity for its globalization, is information and communication revolution that has changed people's relations and meaning of time, space and have reduced distance and has demolished physical boundaries and has increased relationships between people, governments and cultures. Television and especially Radio now have reached to whole people in the deepest rural areas of Iran, China and India. From Brazilian music in Tokyo to African films in Bangkok all has become global. Through information and communication technologies (ICT), the people on earth are exposed to foreign identities and ideas and menace of losing their national and religious identities. In fact, information and communication technologies has be considered part of processes of liberal-capitalist modernity or Westernization and involves processes of unequal power, which brings old practices and religious identities into question raising the potential for conflict.

Therefore , the information and communication revolution is one of the most important instruments of liberal-capitalist modernity and globalization of west culture. Then domination of ICT is an account of economic domination via global operations of media industries and powerful multi-national corporations that control the flow of information and distribution of media products. Western information and communication and all of the media in the form of pop cultural exports promote a western thought and culture grounded in neo-liberal globalization. Then use of information and communication technology can be seen as result and a motor of neo-liberal ideology. In the other word, by ICT, philosophy of culture globalization can be summarised as a desire to formulate the western identity and culture. In fact, the most important feature of culture globalization is a 'global-village-ideology', which neglects political, cultural and social borders. Identities therefore be ignored and rendered virtually non-existent. On a cultural and identical level, it can be stated that the North maintain it's hegemonic power of its culture by way of this ideology.

Globalization of cultures and religious identities has become one of the most important roles of information and communication technologies. In fact, as social and political structures influence in the power relations, the information and communication technology can be freely articulated in destruction of the cultures and religious identities. The assumption of culture globalization is that if other societies want to become civilised, they must abandon their cultures and identities. Culture globalization with rise of

information and communications technologies in recent years has undoubtedly accelerated a uniform world culture. In this increasingly globalized culture and modernity, south countries have little or no margin of action as they can't position themselves into the so-called Global village. Thus in ICT age and in the world that we are living, cultures and identities can change or treat. In the other word, unknown cultures and identities or whose can not compete with grand power, they are in danger of disappearing. Because of competition in ICT setting and domination of western thoughts in cultural spheres, only the richest countries are able to produce and publish their culture.

So, when we speak about culture globalization, we confront with its negative effects. The first negative role of culture globalisation is cultural, religious and identical conflict in national and international level that is enforced and carried out by the information and communication technology. The use of information and communication technologies can play an important role in the appearance of such conflicts. Communication globalization has modified all political, economic, social and cultural aspects. Globalization which resulted from the use of ICT has increased the basic conflict between the old cultures and the new cultures, between secularism and religion, between the West and the East. Hence, in the era of information and communication that ICT can approach cultures and civilisations, cultural and religious identities have become an increasing source of conflict among and within societies and have increased the conflicts of the present. Therefore, today using of information and communication technology has played a central role in domination of west culture. In effect in the age of information and with capturing of neo-liberal thought in global level, cultures and identities that have not to media access or disconnected of ICT, so they have remained outside of system, invisible and disempowered.

How must reconcile the conflicts between cultures and identities

The fundamental challenge confronting to humanistic and cultural studies and the modern man in age of information and communication globalization is how to reconcile the conflict and tension between cultural identities with culture and civilisation that want to be special and global. In fact, the globalization of information and communication is disquieting and disempowering because it has been in service of capitalism. There are this real fear that with helping globalization of ICT, cultures and identities of world are becoming fragmented and we can even foresee a nightmarish scenario of cultural homogenization through western values and symbols. Thus global flows of information and communication can seem a threat to national identities in many ways. globalization of information and communication can lead to the abandonment of cultural values and practices and national identities disappear and cultures become homogeneous.

In fact, in the era of globalization and in according to role of information and communication technologies, relationships between cultures and identities are no longer mediated primarily by states or peoples. In the our days, they are submitted to market rules and to the goals of profitability and more and more oriented to the homogenization of informational products created in the few huge studios of west world. Today it is the media that are at the heart of issues about cultural pluralism, given their economic power and their influence on our symbolic order. "Technological development has made cultural exchanges continuous at planetary level with unprecedented rapidity and amplitude. There are vast new possibilities for the enrichment of different cultures in this. But these possibilities can not be realized in a situation where the imbalance in cultural exchanges is too large. Much of humanity is not yet caught up in these new cultural patterns, but unbalanced and unequal media flows could reduce cultures that cannot find their own places in cyberspace to a peripheral status. It is impossible to ignore the threat of cultural Darwinism promoted by a market controlled by a few groups operating on global level and which privilege the marketization of culture and for profit cultural products that use diversity as an exploitable resource in ways that might lead to domination by a globalizing hyper culture." (Jean Tardif 2002)

Globalization and the role that information and communication technologies play in our world, oblige us to find new responses to the fundamental cultural and religious issues of nations. In this position, we need a paradigm that can do something together locally, nationally and, more and more globally. In fact, we should redefine our vision of global changing and we need open our eyes on recent events. Today, countries must find new ways to manage relationships in the era of globalization. These are very important matters. Indeed, we know that information and communication technology can improve the capacity for genuine dialogue and understanding between people with diverse national, ethnic, and religious identities, but it is evidence also that without proper safeguards, information and communication technology can dramatically increase the cultural and identity tensions between the developed world and the developing world. In effect in the era of globalization, we need to find ways to ensure balanced exchanges between societies and cultures that are equal in dignity and able to reflect critically and honestly on their values, practices and adaptation to changing world conditions. With profiting of information and communication, we must find ways to respect identities as multiple ways of living with modernity and the human condition.

Then globalization of information and communication should seek approaches that recognise cultural differences and identities. In the era of globalization, ICT should try to protect cultural liberty through expanding men's choices - with attention to cultures, values and identifies them. In fact, globalization of culture is universal ethics based on universal human rights and respect for the freedom, equality and dignity of all individuals, non homogenization of Western values and culture. Therefore, ICT must respect to thousands of cultural and religious identities in the world . Although there are contradictions between some cultural identities and democracy but there is no objective evidence for claiming that some identities and cultures are "inferior" or "superior" for human progress and the expansion of human freedoms. We should respect the difference and diversity of cultures and identities should be an essential because cultural diversity does not leads to conflict but it reduces all conflicts and obstacles.

Moreover, in the era of globalization of information and communications technologies, developing countries need not only to develop their information and communication abilities but they also need to create an enabling environment for information and knowledge sharing with their own alphabet. Developing countries should pay particular attention to preserve and protect their heritages, civilizations, history and different kinds of their identity, such as national, social and cultural identity. In the other hand, for national and local identities, the age of communication and information technologies is a great opportunity to maintain their heritages and cultures.

Consequently, ICT globalization has advantages and disadvantages for all of the world. For avoiding of disadvantages, the information and communication technology should be used to communicate with other cultures. In spite of what Huntington believe that the culture is original problem in global communication, we believe that the conflict between civilizations is not a long historical but paying attention to one identity and culture and cancel whole traditional identities and old cultures is the origin of conflict. we should consider that globalization of information and communication can create the position of relation between different cultural identities and can prepare opportunities for intercultural interaction and between national and local identities . Such interactions often provide a new sense of communication.

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