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# Ups and Downs of Ethnic Identity in the Era of Globalization (Focusing on the Middle East Region)

Akbar Valadbigi and Shahab Ghobadi  
*Islamic Azad University, Sanandaj Branch, Kurdistan,  
Iran*

## 1. Introduction

In the 1990s, the phenomenon of globalization appeared one of the most controversial topics of the closing years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the social sciences and yet it has maintained this status in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Globalization has been approached with various perspectives, each one in its turn has strived to define it and suggest its possible challenges to, amongst others, politics, culture, economy, national states, identity, and ethnicities.

Cultural particularism, however, is supposed to be a process formed by globalization; such casual relationship, therefore, takes place when globalization hardens the process of identity-making in our era through changing the traditional conditions of identity-making and undermining the traditional compounds and sources of identity. This predicament, in its turn, can make grounds for most of the existing cultural particularisms. Speaking about the extensive growth of ethnocentrism in the light of globalization, that is the spread of ethnic identities within the national boundaries and the Third World countries in general, and across the countries of the Middle East in particular, and challenging national identity are not of a defensible nature neither theoretically nor practically.

It is dominantly agreed upon that resisting challenges of globalization has occurred mainly in the guise of national identities in the context of national states, rather than the growth of ethnic identities against national identity. (Ahmadi, 2003)

Thanks to the developments of industries in the second decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, people observed a dramatic change in their surroundings which Marshal McLuhan has suggested it as promising of the formation of the "global village", that is known for us as "globalization". Globalization transcends cultural, social, political, and economic borders and then paves the ways for the appearance of a new world order in the peripheral regions (e.g., the Middle East countries). The events have taken place in the recent decades in the Middle East indicate that the nations of this region are suffering from various internal and external crises; whatever the causes of these crises be, most of them have their origins in identity issues and conflicts.

The relatively rapid political changes of this region taking place in forms of revolution, coup d'états, unrests (e.g., the recent popular movements in the northern African countries), maintenance of the authoritarian political cultures, and lack of progress in democracy and civil society reveal that the peoples of the Middle East, and even their

elites, have not acquired a certain definition of themselves and their surroundings, such a definition which can be applied as a firm basis for arranging individual and collective identities.

It is allegedly believed that the transnational forces and developments are the vital elements in posing the ups and downs of identity across the Middle East. It has had always a direct relationship with the importance of the international system, at one hand, and decreased economic and managerial potentials of the Middle East countries, at the other hand. (Gahremanpoor, 2002)

Exploring the relationship between globalization and identity in the Middle East is of great importance, since the crisis of identity in this region hasn't been always the side-product of globalization; the political elites of the Middle East, however, have had a noticeable part in regulating the relationship between the internal and external events. Due to the weakness of social forces, therefore, these elites have been regarded as the most influential social forces in manipulating ethnic and identity challenges. (Zakeryan, 2003)

Unique the region may be, but its exceptional status is tested in its inability to manage the challenges posed by globalization. As Hinnebusch notes, Middle East responses to globalization should be seen as 'a function of a changing interaction between the systemic (inter-state) and state (domestic) levels'. At this level, the region faces seemingly insurmountable challenges. In other words, it is in the exploration of the interaction between the inter-state and domestic levels that we understand better the nature of state responses to globalization. (Ehteshami, 2007)

Among the hypotheses intended to be dealt with in this paper is the implication of a mental and cultural approach by the elites of the Middle East to the phenomenon of globalization; making effort to transfer this approach to social and individual levels, therefore, is argued to be the main cause of enduring identity problems in the region. There is no doubt that the discourse of globalization has added to the layers of identity; the citizens of this region accordingly have encountered a great deal of crisis and failure in their search to adopt these new layers, so it is natural that they resist against this trend.

At the other hand, however, according to the essentialists, identity is an essential element, then a force like globalization cannot make any crisis in which. One of our main approaches in this paper is addressing the different thought orientations in relation with the positions of globalization and its subsequent effects on issues as diverse as political and cultural affairs which enclose, among others, ethnicity and identity.

Some like Zbigniew Brzezinski argue that we will notice the formation of next to 400 new political units in the future, which revolve around ethnicity and different sects. Nevertheless, he articulates that the realization of the ethnic and sectarian fundamentalisms is inevitable, he also predicts that in the future, the world would be a forum for the political exchanges of ethnicities and political sects. Others such as Fukuyama suggest that certain values of sectarian fundamentalism will not be the background of future exchanges, rather some different aspects of power will make grounds for these essential exchanges at the international level. (Fukuyama, 2000)

Among the positive consequences of globalization what follows are noteworthy: increasing collaborations, interaction, exchange, balance, tolerance, regenerating human awareness, and promoting the meditational potentials of national identities. From the other hand, there are the negative consequences of this process, which contribute to undermining national identity. Increased structural conflicts and identity dichotomy, cultural assimilation, and promoting decentralist tendencies are some examples of these consequences.

Over the last 30 years, most of the Middle East countries have been engaged in some sort of war and unrest; it is why the process of globalization and its subsequent challenges in this region have always had a crucial value in the political and cultural studies conducted on this region. For example, three major approaches of the international geopolitics regard globalization through different points of view; first, the neo-liberal approach observes that the international markets create balance between the interests of all nations, and then decrease the possible challenges of identity. Second, the neo-real approach holds that government is the core of the international system while it underestimates the issues surrounding ethnicity and identity. And the third one, the neo-Marxist approach suggests that globalization is a new version of colonialism which not only increases vulnerability and interdependency of the developing world, but also widens the existing gaps between the rich and poor countries. This approach, therefore, warns about the domination of identity and ethnic crises across the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic context of the Middle East.

A probable reason why globalization faces so many pitfalls in the Middle East, as one of the world's challenging regions, is that it has failed to keep pace with the global economic race which in turn results from the current socio-political conflicts including the identity and ethnic crises and challenges which make obstacle in this region's path to achieve development.

The present paper attempts to evaluate the process of globalization as well as ethnic identity in the context of the Middle East while taking a critical sociological perspective; in doing so, it will take advantages of the attitudes of the protagonists and antagonists of globalization and ethnic identity, then, the internal and external forces that leverage these matters will be discussed in a parallel manner.

This introduction is followed by the section of definitions. In this section, we are going to provide the definitions of those essential terms applied afterwards. Following this part, several controversial and influential questions, which have weight in the geopolitical debates of the region, will appear to continue our discussion. Subsequent to these questions, our broad, yet flexible, theoretical perspective in relation with globalization and the identity and ethnic issues of the Middle East will be explained. We hold the opinion that the strength of our paper lies in its simultaneous addressing both the positive and negative consequences of globalization as a double-edged sword and their possible impacts on identity issues in general and ethnic identity in particular. After this section, however, the fears and hopes of this discussion will be presented while we shortly look at the mechanisms and challenges imposed by globalization to ethnic identity in the region. The conclusion of our debates will come afterwards. The paper's recommendations for developing the possibilities of solving the current structural conflicts flaming in the region will terminate the discussion. These recommendations seem to be what the civilized democracy-based strivings of the contemporary elites of the Middle East share.

## 2. Key questions

This paper poses several questions, which revolve around the process of globalization as well as its ensuing impacts on identity, especially ethnic identity, in the region under study. From now on, we take a double approach, and then discuss both the positive and negative consequences that globalization has brought for ethnic identity; yet we think it does not suffice and go on to explore the fears and hopes of this dominant process for ethnic identity in the Middle East.

The questions of this chapter are arranged as follows:

- Have the compounds of globalization penetrated the ethnic culture of the Middle East countries?
- How have the diverse ethnicities of this region reacted to the wave of globalization? Has globalization spurred the region's identity crises?
- What are the impacts of globalization on ethnicity in general and ethnic identity in particular? Do these impacts trigger ethnocentrism or make it weaker against the greater identities, nationality and national or regional identities, for instance?
- Can we argue that the cultural diversities in the era of globalization, which are laden with technological achievements, maintain along with the national identities?
- Can the globalization of culture influence the progress of cohesive cultural identities or it results in undermining the ethnic, racial, and local linkages?
- Finally, does globalization generally threaten the unity of the multi-ethnic countries and how is the influence of this process on the ethnicities of a given cohesive country?

### 3. Concepts

#### 3.1 Identity

In the social sciences, identity is a general concept that is free of a certain space and time. The correlation between identity and culture is the main cause of this limitation, and the diversity of the current societies is due to this fact. (Eyvazi, 2002)

In our era, due to the growth and spread of the communication technologies, different identities have been challenged, as across the modern communication spaces (e.g., the Internet), the special and temporal boundaries are transcended easier. The very question that rises here is that "What is the relationship between information and communication technologies and cultural achievements (ethnic identities, for instance) and can we suppose it as an independent variable? With respect to the artificial separations among the peoples which have appeared in form of limited geographical boundaries called "nation-states", it seems that the similarities and differences among the influential civilizations of the world have their roots in the culture and history of these civilizations, as a result, they are not the vintages of the fake and imposed distinctions of the colonial powers. (Wallerstein, 1997)

#### 3.2 Ethnicity

Ethnicity refers to a sometimes rather complex combination of racial, cultural, and historical characteristics by which human groups are sometimes divided into separate, and probably hostile, political families.

Ethnicity rises the whole socio-political question of national identity, which is why ethnic politics are often at their most virulent and important in Third World and other countries whose geographical definition owes, often, far more to European empire-builders than to any ethnic hegemony. It was precisely such problems, which led to conflict in Yugoslavia and the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s once the power of communism, which had maintained artificial boundaries, collapsed. (Robertson, 2004)

Ethnicity, however, is a term used to refer to the insights and methods of cultural interactions, which differentiates a certain community from the others. (Suizi, 2000) The common feature and function of all the ethnic communities has been development and

diversity at the level of human social cooperation. The sense of having a shared ethnicity by now has been a major core for individuals' identity-seeking. (Held, 2003)

Not only do ethnic phenomena differ in practical terms with each other, but also they are contradictory. At one hand, we are facing a losing respect, and at the other hand, however, we notice the rise of the new ethnicities, the decline of the older ones, and the mobile cultural developments happening for these ethnicities. (Fukuyama, 2000)

In the turn of the 21st century, we observed a widespread split among ethnicities and mobility in ethnic identity-seeking across the Middle East. The literature is abundant with samples of multiple identities, which not only include the peoples, but also other different classifications such as gender, region, religion, and class. (Ahmadi, 2003)

### **3.3 Ethnic Identity**

Ethnic identity is composed of some objective and subjective cultural, social, and political components that realize in a certain humane group (Burton, 2001) which distinguish it from other counterpart groups, as identity should be consistent with the reality of that given group.

Castles writes that ethnicity, as the source of identity, is becoming paler, not against the ethnicities, rather against nation and gender (2001). However, the concept of ethnic identity, in spite of its vanishing nature, reveals a series of imposed limitations on the roles one can apply for, and the parts that are eligible for making exchanges with.

### **3.4 International system**

Through its global aspects, the international system relates all the societies in form of a global social order. This can be simply considered as a "single global unit". (Giddens, 2002)

International system has been formed once the western societies experienced their extensive development that partly coincides with the seventeenth century, but at our era, the existence of an ever-connected system is amidst the compounds influencing people's life more than ever. (Wallerstein, 1997)

### **3.5 The Middle East**

The Middle East is a term of European, chiefly British origin, with a wide and rather inexact scope. Its maximum definition comprises the countries along the southern and eastern coastlines of the Mediterranean Sea, from Morocco to Turkey, plus Sudan, the countries of the Arabian Peninsula, Jordan, Iraq, and Iran. (Robertson, 2004)

In this paper, the term "the Middle East", has got a functional dimension in its broader meaning. The borders of the new countries characterize this region, and albeit they have share features, they are believed to be of basic socio-economic systems.

The end of the Cold War was thought to offer some hope for a more peaceful future in the region, and some progress was indeed made, but the region's internal sources of conflict proved sufficiently enduring for the Middle East to remain the world's principal source of insecurity. (Robertson, 2004) Putting these threats aside, still this region has had so much of rapid social, political, and cultural changes that have turned to a crucial opportunity for socio-political studies. Although this region has kept its various strategic significances, yet it should be regarded as a less-developed region. The deep-rooted decays which have afflicted this region for centuries, at one hand, and the recent revolutionary movements across the region for reviving the socio-political life, at the other hand, have situated this region at the core of the international debates.

### 3.6 Globalization

Globalization has proved to be one of the hardest concepts to define, however, in the literature, numerous definitions have been suggested to the term "globalization", among which we just point to those that cover the presented subjects of our paper.

Globalization- the ongoing process of greater interdependence among countries and their citizens- is complex and multi-faceted. Many of the problems the critics of globalization point to are real. Some of them relate to economics. Others relate to non-economic, but no less important, aspects of life. And while some of the problems do stem from the process of global integration, others do not. (Fischer, 2003)

Giddens, in his turn, tries to define the term as follow: " I would have no hesitation...in saying that globalization, as we are experiencing it, is in many aspects not only new, but also revolutionary... Globalization is political, technological, and cultural, as well as economic. (Ehteshami, 2007)

Others assert that globalization is mobility and transformation at the scale of human organizing (Held, 2003). Naderpoor defines the term as an ever-increasing coordination for solving the problems of human society. (2003) Still some consider globalization interchangeable with globalization of the international economy. In other words, globalization equals with Americanization of the international economy.(Miz, 2006)

Globalization, as a process, is assumed the continuation of the experiences of modernism. The developments that were made in thought and techniques in the preceding century joined hands with the extension of the communication systems as well as trying different economic systems and gave rise to this idea that globalization will determine the fate of every society; the cultural dimension of this fate is characterized by accepting the modern values (i.e., the American and European values), its political dimension consists of the formation of the national states(liberal-democratic ones), and its economic dimension requires the acceptance of market economy. Finally Martin et al (2006) have pointed out that, "To speak freely of globalization tends to show that, due to the expanded (economic, financial, informational, human) inflows, we are aiming at an integrated world, and that this evolution is new and unavoidable."

## 4. Theoretical framework and approaches

Every researcher of geopolitics and the socio-political issues takes a different approach to regional studies. Among the common approaches in regional studies, however, we adopt the theory of systems for our paper. First, we think it better to present a short definition for the terms region, region divisions, and the significance of regional studies.

### 4.1 Region

In strategic literature, region comprises several countries, which due to their shared geographical linkages or common interests are related to each other. Cantori and Spiegel observe region as containing several countries that are geographically close to each other while having interconnected foreign policies. (1970) Patrick Morgan (1972) suggests that region is a set of countries with some shared features (e.g., culture and political institutes).

### 4.2 Region's divisions

Regions have been divided in numerous different manners. A famous classification made of regions, for examples, suggests that the world is dividable into three categories:

- Central regions: The regions that are characterized with political stability, developed economy, and capability in intervening in the affairs of other regions( Europe and North America, for example);
- Middle regions: Regions with characteristics like close relationship with their central counterparts and rapid shift toward political stability and economic development (central Europe, East Asia, and Latin America, for example); and
- Sub-regions: The regions that are encountering political conflicts, developing economy, and widespread identity challenges (Balkan, south Asia, and the Middle East, for example).

#### 4.3 Significance of regional studies

It was believed for a while that the regional and national studies have lost their importance for the benefit of the continental and international studies; however, the recent developments and democracy-seeking movements of the Middle East which took place in search of more democracy and justice, proved that the regional studies, at least for the crisis-stricken region of the Middle East, have still maintained their strategic importance.

Establishment of the regional studies seems to be the result of the following cases:

- Regions are supposed to be an important aspect of the international politics. Since the end of the Cold War, however, the importance of regional relationships has grown and in light of that, nowadays we notice more regional conflicts and collaborations. (Morgan, 1972; Ja'afari, 2009)
- Regional systems will take a great part in the controversies of the future (for example, Persian Gulf Cooperation Council has taken the first steps in establishing a collective security system in the region). (Lake and Morgan, 1997)
- Making grounds for promoting regional collaborations: The recent initiatives made for inter-regional dialogues (for example, the dialogues held between Arabs and the Europeans or Europe talks with North Africa). The significance of such provisions has doubled in recent years in shaping the developments of the Middle East. (Spiegel, 1970)

#### 4.4 Regional studies in the theory of systems' point of view

Cantori and Spiegel propose three different systems: global system (the dominant system); subordinate system (regional); and internal system (nation-states). According to them, the regional systems are located between the global and internal systems. Moreover, each subordinate system consists of several interactive neighboring countries that have common cultural, social, historical, ethnical, and lingual characteristics. They add that the sentiments of assimilation and identity are sometimes triggered by the interventions from the side of external countries. Thompson (1996) identifies the following features for the subordinate systems: a) the presence of common historical, social, cultural, and lingual backgrounds for convergence; and b) active mutual interdependence among the members that provides the necessary sensitivity for the appearance of convergence among them.

In the process of formation of a given regional system, one can mention the following variables:

- a. Geographical status: with characteristics like borders and weather(e.g., the Mediterranean system).( Morgan, 1997; Ja'afari, 2009)

- b. Different political, ideological, and security factors.
- c. Historical, cultural, lingual, ethnic, religious, and racial connections; the oil-producer countries of the Middle East, for example, are extremely dependent on each other in oil production and its pricing.

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the world experienced, among others, two major phenomena: globalization and regionalism. An approach believes that globalization and regionalism are contradictory, because globalization removes the conventional borders. (Morgan, 1997; Ziegler, 2000) Another approach suggests, however, that these two phenomena bolster each other and accordingly, the efforts of this region's countries to get out of this deadlock and walking into the way of development are intellectual and rational. (Buzan, 2003)

The different approaches to globalization have their own followers in the intellectual circles, and with respect to the emphasis that cultural approaches put on cultural particularism against universal generalism of globalization, it has drawn the attentions of the protagonists of cultural particularism and ethnic identities. (Golmohammadi, 2002)

Regarding the attitudes of European researchers and some supporters of the flourishing and development of ethnic identity toward this cultural approach, there are some disagreements. Some researchers believe that the core of discussions on globalization in the Middle East is often the resistance of this region to this process (Ahmadi, 2003) which has showed itself mainly in the form of growing national identities within the national states instead of growing ethnic identities against national identity. As Mohamed El-Shibiny puts it: "There is real fear of globalization in this part of the world, and it is seen as a threatening force in many quarters." (Ehteshami, 2007)

In addition to make distinction between the current terms in this field, we should present different theoretical approaches to globalization and the way they are going to challenge ethnicity and ethnic groups in the Middle East. The following is a quadruplet classification of the common theoretical approaches regarding the interactions between globalization and ethnicity or ethnic identity:

- a. World system approach, which is based on the famous division of the world into center, periphery, and quasi-periphery. (Tomlinson, 2003);
- b. World culture approach, which emphasizes the globalization of culture and predominance of culture on economics and politics. (Featherstone, 1990);
- c. World comprehensive approach, which persists on the growing international awareness and its effects on society, government, and international security. (Robertson, 1992); and
- d. World capitalism approach, which assumes the dominant international forces in the structure of a universal capitalism. (Ross and Trachte, 1990)

The ways the abovementioned approaches and their views about the consequences of globalization on ethnicity and identity have been interpreted are very variable, that is, from one hand, some interpretations have emphasized the necessity of creating a single universal identity and from the other hand, some others have focused on the resistance of identity against the international culture which rises under the influence of globalization. Throughout the whole paper, we have taken these approaches and continue our discussion with our thought line being consistent with either. It is also worth to mention that issues like ethnicity and identity have a salient position in the theoretical considerations of globalization, and the ethnicities of the Middle East and their related issues are no exception.

## 5. Exploring the mechanisms of globalization in relation with ethnic identity in the Middle East

It is reasonable to suggest that the process of globalization and the ways in which it affects different spheres of social life in a peripheral region like the Middle East, serve as a double-edged sword. To put it differently, the present paper at one level specifies a pessimistic approach to this process according to which, globalization is understood as an imposed project. At the other, we clarify a positive approach to the very process based on that globalization is a generalized project, then the paper explores either positive and negative consequences of this project on ethnic identity.

Taking globalization as a historical trend and a conceptual evolution, which brings changes in perceptions, beliefs, thoughts, and tastes of people with its range covering culture and identity, one can pose this question: "Can globalization be applied as an alternative for local identities, and is this process in productive interaction with these identities?"

The way we are going to answer this question leads us to illustrate a clear spectrum on one end of which globalization is strongly believed to result in subverting all kinds of local identity, especially ethnic identities. On the other end of the spectrum, however, we are provided with this assumption that globalization generates ethnic differences and increases identity-seeking strivings. In hope of identifying the positive constructive impacts of globalization on cultural identities in general and ethnic identities in particular, we classify them into the below cases:

- Accelerating social mobility, knowledge achievements, increased communications, mutual cultural understanding, embracing plural cultural identities, promoting cultural regionalism, and cultural plurality (Robertson, 1992);
- Directing the international public opinion through communicational networks, launching dialogue among different ideas, cultivating common human values, directing cultural identities to acquire higher tolerance in considering others' opinions (Huntington, 1995), increasing the range of thought tolerance as a prerequisite in the cultural interactions of local identities, and considering inter-civilization mechanisms;
- Increasing diversity-seeking cultural identities and making them to accept criticism with more tolerance, creating contacts between the continental sub-cultures and the international culture, accepting human inter-mind values, promoting human self-awareness, and emphasizing the transnational and ethnic identities;
- Developing values like humanism, thinking universally, joining to the international thought community, and laying the dogmatic racial ethnic and racial prejudices away.

At the other hand, although the national borders and identities are becoming weaker under the influence of globalization, the cultural identities, which are dependent upon locality and localism, will gain more value. (Ardalan, 2000)

If the former theorists considered globalization to be the cause of ethnic groups' integration, their recent counterparts suggest this process to be the cause of rising awareness among the ethnic groups, an element which has provided them with ability to resist to national and international identities. (Maghsoodi, 2000) This approach proposes the ever-increasing trend of ethnic crises and cultural identity-seeking across the multi-ethnic regions (the Middle East, for instance). (Fukuyama, 2000) Increased levels of

exchange have been credited as the cause of expanding cultural awareness and ultimately ethnic movements. (Castles, 2001)

Through emphasizing this role and the influences on governments' one-sided efforts in culture assimilation, theorists like Conner, Park, and Castles argue that cultural penetration, hegemony and assimilation, imposing unequal cultural relations, and premium value in cultural exchanges through communications are more influential in generation ethnic challenges and crises than convergence and homogeneity. (2000)

## **6. Threats imposed by globalization to the perspective of ethnic identity**

Our second approach promises decreased ethnic conflicts. It has emphasized on the decreasing trend of ethnic conflicts by borrowing the ideas of Tunis and Girts and through evaluating the positive role of cultural and communicational developments in national-state building, establishing convergence, national unity, accelerating the flow of development, and creating a universal culture. (Maghsoodi, 2001)

The rationale behind this approach lies in the fact that the older identities, however, are declining in the process of globalization, and the newer identities, which form the universal culture are getting dominance. Tomlinson is one of the most celebrated holders of this approach. According to him, similar to a flood, globalization is destroying the cultural diversity of the world, declining the local identities, and demolishing the distinctions of the local cultures that form our identity. (2004)

By the dominance of the paradigm of reconstruction in the social sciences, the major approach in theory-making in the field of ethnic identity had been borrowed from the conceptions of Marx and Webber. That approach, however, had been arranged in a manner in which the process of social change had run from traditional to modern, simple to complex, and particularism to generalism. (Castles, 2001) In such context, therefore, ethnic issues are assumed as belonging to particularism or pre-modern, which are being evaded by the process of reconstruction. Therefore, if they get power again, their results will be as incomplete as those of reconstruction. Then, it is why the theorists do not consider them important. (Maghsoodi, 2001) The traditional theories about development and ethnic identity insist on this point that the economic and industrial backgrounds, lack of national investment, and lack of national coherent markets have made grounds for the maintenance of regional and local markets to continue their limited exchanges among their ethnicities. (Shayegan, 2000) To sum up our discussion about the key positive impacts of globalization on ethnic identity movements, the below items are noteworthy:

- Through the development of ethnic movements and fulfilling three approaches: declining the sovereignty of the central government; difficulties of suppressing ethnic identities by the government; and, intensifying ethnic sensitivities due to the subsequent opportunities of globalization (Shult, 2003);
- The grounds for identity-making are transformed during reconstruction (Giddens, 2002). So, the more the tradition gets paler, the more the individuals try to adopt creative lifestyles and succumb to the traditional tools of identity-making to get rid of the crises of identity. It is why, then, that these individuals are easily absorbed by the movements that promise reconstruction and renewal of such spaces through which their opposition strategies to globalization. The local identity movements, as a result, find an appropriate opportunity to appear, among which the ethnic movements are more noticeable. (Golmohammadi, 2002)

- Inability of the national states, especially those of the Middle East, in establishing security and order, increasing the level of transnational forces and the international institutes, and the shift of the international community from political identity to cultural identity are some examples of the elements, which have strengthened ethnic identity movements in the region. (Ghavam, 2004)
- The era of globalization coincides with the weakening role of national identities both at national and international level. It is the vintage of elements such as transnational companies and international groups that are the source of increasing ethnic awareness and ethnic conflicts. (Mawlaee, 2000) At the other hand, through the following patterns, globalization has undermined ethnic identities: collapsing local identities in the light of the international systems, international capitalism, powerful government supports of the local states and reinforcing them. (Castles, 2001)

## 7. Ethnic evolutions in the light of globalization's consequences to ethnic identity

In terms of the consequences of globalization to ethnicities in the multi-ethnic region of the Middle East, the appearance of major evolutions is common. The most noticeable evolutions in this regard being:

- Establishment of the virtual ethnic communities: ethnic communities have formed over time, while the virtual ones are the product of communication era. They divide such communities into centralized ethnic communities, scattered ethnic communities, and virtual ethnic communities. They stress that, however, the term "virtual" should not be understood as an approximate incomplete community, rather they are alive and active which defend their rights through appropriate pressure groups.
- Undermining the nation-states: due to inability in establishing order and security, economic welfare, and socio-political development in the Third World countries, the international community seeks to replace maximal governments with minimal ones, and then to reinforce ethnic identity-seeking movements.
- Reinforcing ethnic identity-seeking: based on the cultural features (language, religion, and historical traditions, for example) and under the influence of the shared experiences of injustice, exclusion, and ethnic identity-seeking, globalization has directly reinforced ethnic identity-seeking.

## 8. The Middle East and the historical challenges to identity

Theorists like Marx, Bernard, Small, and Park believe that conflict and tension is a positive non-conflicting function. They also argue that conflict not only results in group coherence, but also in generating group identity. (Coser, 1959) The Middle East is a region has been more than other points engaged in different conflicts during its history. Out of the occurred 150 conflicts of the recent conflicts in the world, some 30 cases have been more or less related to this part of the globe. (Ja'afari, 2009)

The origins of identity crisis, and particularly ethnic identity crisis, in most of the states of this region gradually developed and appeared as a primitive version of nationalism with two apparent dimensions: first, the rise of ethnic identity and second, growing tendencies toward autonomy. (Ja'afari, 2009)

In the preceding century, the Middle East encountered an era fraught with ups and downs and underdevelopment; in this situation, the region had no choice except for embracing modernity as a tool for getting out of that destructive status. Most of the region's states, in the new situation, failed to establish their native structures and patterns. Being dependent on oil economy and world capitalism, at the other hand, added to the dilemma and vanished the opportunities of this region in developing their native mechanisms. Still this correlation has diffused to other areas (identity, for example). (Ja'afari, 2009)

## **9. The continuation of identity crisis in the Middle East in the era of globalization**

In the literature, the term "globalization" has been understood in a sense with its economic dimension more salient (Wallerstein, 1997) and has continued to be so under the influences of neo-liberal policies of Reagan and Thatcher. With the collapse of the former Soviet Union, this situation developed and since the late 1990s, we have noticed its widespread socio-cultural outcomes.

Throughout the Middle East, the generic identities (e.g., ethnicity, language, and culture) have prevailed over other forms of identity. (Ghahremanpoor, 2002) Lack of harmony between ethnic and lingual borders with national borders of the countries of this region, at the other hand, has exacerbated this situation. Some conflicts resulting from having a one-sided definition of identity, among others, being: the Arab-Israel War of 1967, Egypt's interventions in Iran-Iraq War, and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990.

The globalization of culture requires free stream of information, ideas, and the knowledge, which allows subjectivity and objectivity to grow while encompassing every aspect of life. The importance of reconsidering ethnicity and ethnic identity in this era in the context of the Middle East lies in the fact that these characteristics are some useful instruments for reacting against globalization. (Giddens, 2002)

In most of the capitalist countries, sub-national identities are presently defined according to the political affairs of day (Robertson, 1992), gender (Buzan, 2003), or political reform (Wallerstein, 1997). Across the Middle East countries or even in the Third World, in contrast, ethnic identities are defined in terms of race, territory, and language and are always characterized with a hue of massacre, chaos, and bloody clashes. (Ghavami, 2004)

In this sense, no matter we understand globalization whether as the collapse of governments, sovereignty, or even world order which is based on the scattered local, individual, ethnic, and global identities (Buzan, 2003; Wallerstein, 1997), this problem remains that the identity borders of the Third World seem unprecedentedly bloody (Giddens, 1991) and asks for reconsidering nationalism, sub-nationalism, and ethnic identity. The recent unrests, which occurred in North Africa and still are flaming, can testify our claim.

## **10. Conclusions**

Globalization serves as a double-edged sword for ethnic identities and movements; in short-run, it entails the promotion of ethnic movements and identities, however, in long run, in the absence of some pivotal elements (e.g., government support, international potentials, rich written heritage, and non-monopoly in a certain country), the culture of these ethnic identities will collapse.

In the era of globalization, our globe tends to experience a new phase of evolutions which are essentially different with what has been experienced by now. There is no doubt that in

this situation, no country will be exempt from the outcomes globalization brings about. At this time, the governments of the Middle East cannot, without considering the world's economy, culture, and politics' requirements, make their decisions independently. In the light of globalization, the governments will be restricted in taking independent measures and establishing wayward policies, therefore, their control over the current of products and information will reduce. (Suizi, 2000)

Globalization has resulted in encouraging identity-seeking demands across the multi-ethnic regions. If such demands are not responded with intellectuality, one can consider them as some effective levers that can threaten central governments and draw on decreased authority and increased identity crises. If these crises are recognized, as a result, we can use them as appropriate potentials. (Shult, 2003)

However, finding a democratic solution for the issue of ethnicities in the Middle East is amongst the major paradigms of internal policies, and the international community has always called for such solution. Exclusion, murder, or cultural exploitation of the minorities cannot decrease from the predicament; the aggressive military reactions of internal groups in this region are the aftermath of power monopoly, military governments' iron fist policy, and lack of sufficient grounds for the rise of civil society. When masses, ethnicities, and minorities are deprived from their legitimate rights (individual and collective freedom for requesting political, social, and cultural rights, for example), what they will find is clenched fists, then it is why interaction and participation are replaced by de-empowerment, decentralization, and the current historic vengeances.

It stands to reason that globalization undermines national states and encourages ethnic identity-seeking; nevertheless, the final solution for this problem is through recognizing the identities and making decisions based on collective participation. Having easier access to the mass media, respecting human rights, and the dominance of democratic discourses have cheered demands for ethnic identity.

In the face of the taken efforts for establishing regional and world cultures in the Middle East, still ethnic identity tensions and conflicts exist in this region and continue to be. It is the efficiency of the ethnicities that promises their survival in the future. (Fukuyama, 2000)

Globalization of the economy and growing dependency of this region on oil has increased its vulnerability and this, at last, has led to increasing tendencies toward authoritarianism across the region. (Suizi, 2000) The interventions from the superpowers in the internal affairs of this region which sometimes has taken place in form of military invasions have deepened the roots of the existing conflicts. The declined economic power of these countries (Suizi, 2000) and their failures in international politics (Wallerstein, 1997) over the last two decades are two evidence for this claim.

Fukuyama (2000) and Huntington (2002) argue that in the globalization age, ethnic identities will preserve their authenticity and keep on living, while due to the rise of necessities in the world, new identities will emerge unavoidably. Currently, the threatening ambiguities and challenges of identity-seeking are still potent across this region. With respect to the spread of communication systems, however, the world is expected to be well-aware of the grievous situation the nations and ethnicities of the Middle East are suffering from.

## 11. Recommendations

For the purpose of our discussion, here we want to review the necessity and inevitability of globalization and pervasive mechanisms of ethnic identity-seeking. Resisting to these

trends, however, seems to be impossible. If we accept this supposition that the world tends to go toward democratic systems, the local collective identities are expected to co-exist with more harmony with the macro collective identities, as they are not in severe clash with each other, and it is the dominance of a given identity on others that cannot be tolerated.

From the other hand, globalization has created a competitive space in the Middle East that allows those communities which are more flexible, pluralist, tolerant, and respectful to the rights of other nations to join the new world order with less inconvenience.

What continues our discussion is a series of recommendations, which seem to us to be of great applicability in resolving the current pandemic tensions and challenges that have plagued this region:

- Recognizing the right of ethnicities in using their mother tongue and culture;
- Engaging the ethnic minorities in the collective communications and management;
- Avoiding dissuasive actions in relationships with local elites;
- Identifying, enriching, and promoting social capital;
- Reforming the structures of socio-cultural systems;
- Reforming education systems by considering cultural diversities;
- Allowing diverse ethnicities to take part in macro-level social planning; and
- Cultivating the rules of competition, opportunity-making, promoting public culture, and providing free political spaces.

Minorities and ethnicities of the Middle East, then, have no option but making grounds for cultural self-awareness as a prerequisite of human self-awareness. They should be also encouraged, from one hand, to promote their self-esteem, confidence, and readiness to react to the challenges imposed by globalization, and develop their cultural identity, from the other hand, in the plural democratic context of the world culture.

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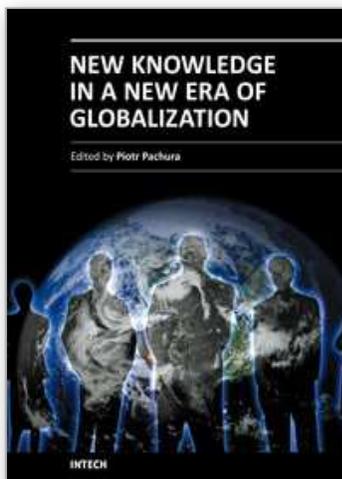
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Phone: +86-21-62489820  
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