

IMAGINED IDENTITIES

Identity Formation in the Age of Globalization

EDITED BY

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FOREWORD BY

NUR YALMAN



Syracuse University Press

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Syracuse, New York 13244-5290

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First Edition 2014

14 15 16 17 18 19 6 5 4 3 2 1

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of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1992.

For a listing of books published and distributed by Syracuse University Press,
visit www.SyracuseUniversityPress.syr.edu.

ISBN: 978-0-8156-3342-6 (paper) 978-0-8156-5259-5 (eBook)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Imagined identities : identity formation in the age of globalization / edited by
Gönül Pultar ; foreword by Nur Yalman. — First Edition.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8156-3342-6 (pbk. : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-8156-5259-5
(ebook) 1. Group identity. 2. Identity (Psychology) 3. Culture and
globalization. I. Pultar, Gönül, 1943— editor of compilation.

HM753.143 2014

305—dc23

2013051105

Manufactured in the United States of America

*To the memory of Kamile Rameeva Maksudi Arsal
(1892–1973)*

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Nation-State, National Identity, and National Culture in the Era of Globalization

GRIGOL UBIRIA

The world has witnessed in the last decades an unprecedented increase of worldwide social relations in all spheres of human activity, including politics, economy, and culture. This process has generally been conceptualized as *globalization*, broadly referring to "the intensification of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life."¹ The intensity of the phenomenon has prompted numerous scholars to assert that the process will ultimately result in nation-states finding their sovereign rights in relation to their domestic as well as foreign affairs significantly diminished.² According to this view, the power balance in the world will gradually shift from national to supranational institutions, such as the United Nations (UN), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the World Bank (WB). Furthermore, such a perspective on the effects of globalization assumes that revolutionary technological innovations such as the Internet, World Wide Web, and satellite systems will transform the world into a "global village," resulting in the creation of a global society with a single homogeneous culture.³

There is currently a heated debate in scholarship on globalization, centered on the following questions: Is globalization a prerequisite for the demise of nation-states? Will nation-states remain major political actors in world politics, or will they be heavily challenged by supranational political and economic institutions? Will national identity lose its significance in favor of either global or regional identities? Will national cultures survive, or will they be merged into one global culture—as is often asserted in Western "consumer-oriented" society—where English is the dominant language? There is no doubt that we live in a globalizing world, but does it necessarily

suggest the end of the era of the *national*? This chapter addresses these questions in two parts. In the first part, I examine the impact of the globalization process on the nation-state by looking at the issues of economic and political sovereignty. In the second part, I discuss the fate of national cultures and identities in the era of globalization. I examine in particular those aspects of globalization that are considered to be driving forces behind growing worldwide homogenization of societies (for example, media, film industry, tourism, and migration). I argue finally that the existing diversity of national interests, ideologies, cultures, and religions in the world renders unlikely the development of one global homogeneous society with universal values, shared and practiced by all.

The Nation-State

The Role of Nation-States in the Globalized World Economy

Theorists predicting the loss in the "globalized world" of the traditional functions and importance of the nation-state focus mainly on the effects of economic globalization.⁴ They believe that the emergence of new cross-border economic transactions has considerably weakened the role of the nation-states as economic agents. For them, modern nation-states lack the capacity to fully control the economic activities of transnational companies (TNCs), whose financial resources often exceed the totality of the budgets of dozens of poor countries. At present, the global financial market exerts a direct influence on the economic and social policies of sovereign nation-states. Transnational regulatory institutions such as the IMF and WB issue "directives" to national governments regarding economic policies to be adopted, threatening to withhold additional funds if the governments reject the economic/fiscal policies they recommend. Supranational institutions undermine in this manner, according to the proponents of this view, the sovereign rights of nation-states to decide independently which economic and social policies to pursue within their territories. As a result, writes R. J. Barry Jones, "Much of economic and social life is believed to be escaping from the effective control of established states . . . at the same time that the range and complexity of the problems facing such states are becoming overwhelming."⁵

The view that nation-states find themselves currently in a weak position vis-à-vis supranational institutions in controlling their economic and fiscal policies seems exaggerated, however. In fact, modern nation-states possess more than ever before the capacity to manage their internal and external

economies and have ample means to do so. As Michael Mann notes, "Nation-states . . . provide the vast majority of the political regulation that capitalism requires."⁶ Moreover, all the economic supranational institutions (IMF, WTO, and so on) were created by nation-states where the decision-making process is still mostly intergovernmental. Those organizations present effective institutional mechanisms through which nation-states seek to contain and respond to possible world financial and economic crises. If such crises still take place in the contemporary world, they hardly stem from the IMF and WB's "wrong" advisory policies or globalization in general, as what I call "leftist" scholarship would have us believe.⁷ Rather, they are caused by such factors as inadequate socioeconomic and fiscal policies, rampant corruption, and nepotism by some national government officials. There have always been rich and poor nations, and globalization can not be blamed solely for the impoverished state of Third World countries. TNCs, in turn, for their own benefit require not weak but "strong states and stable societies capable of defending property rights, securing the free flow of factors of production, and legitimizing capitalist social relations" as Alberto Martinelli puts it.⁸

According to Mann, there is nothing special about growing world economic transactions in the era of globalization. He asserts that the transaction growth of capitalism has now risen to the high levels achieved before World War I, and that anyway, "80 per cent of the world's production is currently traded within national boundaries." He furthermore indicates that it is incorrect to refer to a "globalized" economy: there are a lot of countries and regions that are not at all affected by global capital as they are too risky for investment. For Mann, globalization occurs mostly in the "North," while the "South" is still underdeveloped and very poor. He argues that globalization is not a new phenomenon at all: its roots may be traced far back into human history.⁹ Although Mann's argument has a certain logical validity, he seems to be equating "globalization" with the process of "internationalization." The two phenomena are interlinked in many ways; however, they should in no way be interpreted as being identical: globalization (as we understand it today) is a new phenomenon that has existed for just a few decades, while internationalization has been taking place for centuries among nations/peoples and states.¹⁰

Nation-State Sovereignty under Globalization

A number of scholars have argued that because of globalization, modern nation-states are currently challenged from "below" by regional movements

(for example, nationalist and separatist movements and civil societies) and from "above" by supranational institutions (for example, the UN, TNCs, and regional organizations such as the EU and the Arab League).¹¹ In the first case, the argument generally is that because globalization weakens central governments, it automatically encourages subnational regions to demand more autonomy from a center, or even to secede. I wish to advance that this is not a valid argument for a number of reasons. First, regional movements aiming to achieve greater sovereignty from the center have existed since the emergence of the first centralized states in ancient times. Secondly, the motivations behind current separatist movements are not due to globalization; in fact, most of these movements occur in areas of the world that are poorly integrated into the global economy. As for separatist movements in the "globalized" West (in Catalonia, Northern Ireland, Quebec, and so forth), they emerged long before globalization. Thirdly, those striving for independence are far from being against nation-states; on the contrary, their main objective is to establish their own nation-states.

The second argument—that nation-states are undermined from above—rests on the contention that nation-states lose their sovereignty by delegating some decision-making powers to supranational institutions such as the UN or the EU. Such a formulation of the issue is misleading. Sovereignty implies "the legal capacity of national decision-makers to take decisions without being subject to external restraints," affirms Neill Nugent.¹² If nation-states are losing those rights envisaged by sovereignty because of globalization, it means that there was a "golden age" before globalization when nation-states enjoyed and practiced absolute sovereignty. In fact, the idea of the absolute sovereignty of states has largely been an exaggeration of the reality or, put in another way, a myth. Robert Holton rightly observes that "national sovereignty, as it has evolved over the past 300 years or so, has always been more conditional than the myth implies."¹³ In fact, as John Hutchinson notes, "Modern nations and nation-states from their very beginnings have operated in alliance or contest with the transnational institutions of empires, the great religions, revolutionary internationals and capitalism."¹⁴ Thus, there is nothing unique in states being part of political and economic processes taking place beyond their territorial boundaries.

Nation-states have created supranational institutions to serve their national interests, as mentioned above, and they retain the right to reject any resolutions adopted by these institutions that would prove to be contrary to their national interests. As UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan stated in 2002 (in the keynote address to the Conference on Globalization and International

Relations in the Twenty-first Century), "Some people imagine that the UN, as a global institution, is itself one of those global forces that are eroding the authority of states. But that is a misunderstanding. The United Nations, as its name implies, is primarily an association of nation states."¹⁵

The EU integration process (involving abolishing borders, adopting single currency, and so forth) is often mistakenly interpreted as a prerequisite for the loss of sovereignty of the twenty-eight EU member states. The decision to join the EU community is made by each European nation-state based on its national interests. Gaining membership in the EU is one of the ways for a nation-state to ensure stability, security, and better standards of living for its citizens. The European integration "polity echoes the Aristotelian prescription of politics as the foundation of the good life," as Jones puts it.¹⁶ That is the main purpose of the European integration process. This does not mean, however, that EU member states abolish their statehoods in return for economic and political benefits. EU member states are mostly integrated in economic spheres, in which the most important decision-making actors are still national governments and intergovernmental institutions of the EU (such as the European Council). The extension of this integration into other spheres (such as common foreign and security policy) did not have much success. In other words, joining supranational institutions and delegating to them some prerogatives do not necessarily bring about the weakening of the nation-states' sovereignty. Rather, the nation-states acquire new functions and roles in order to deal with new challenges, whether global or internal.

Moreover, thanks to the existence of international law, nation-state sovereignty is much better defended in the modern, globalized world than it was ever before. At present, even small nation-states are able to have a say in world politics (for example, each member state has a voice at the UN), although they may not be as influential as superpowers—but then, they never were. To illustrate, the occupation of other countries was a regular practice for strong nation-states in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and even during the first decades of the twentieth century. At that time of history (the supposed golden age of sovereignty), nobody mentioned, and what's more cared about, the violation of nation-state sovereignty. In contrast, the current international order creates for all states (relatively speaking) better conditions of protection from foreign aggression. There is no doubt that, for example, the sovereignty and independence of Nepal or the Baltic states are better guaranteed in the modern world than they were in the mainly fictitious golden age of sovereignty. There are certainly instances of violations of nation-state sovereignty even today (such as the 2008 Russian invasion of

Georgia), but it is no longer a regular practice in interstate relations as it was a couple of centuries ago.

The Globalization of the Western Political System

Some scholars have even asserted that the process of globalization would result in the spread of a single political model around the world. For example, William Robinson argues that "by breaking down the autonomy of national political systems and civil societies, globalization is increasingly making it impossible to sustain distinct political systems. Economic globalization thus generates pressures for integration into a single 'political regime.'"¹⁷ As a rule, scholars associate the "single political model" with democracy, as advocated by the West (or the "North" in Mann's terminology). In reality, attempts at the "universalization of democracy" proved no easy task. There are a number of political regimes (such as Iran, North Korea, and Saudi Arabia) and ideologies (like Juche and Islamism) in the world that are or appear to be strongly opposed to the spreading of democracy and liberal values. The United States, probably the biggest champion of democracy proliferation worldwide, is considered to be the strongest military superpower in the world, but it does not have either sufficient resources or means to establish a single democratic political order in the world. There are other strong regional powers (China, India, Pakistan, and Russia) over which the United States has little control.¹⁸ Those states are strong enough to resist democracy and are, moreover, willing to replace it with their own ideologies.

Globalization versus the National

The Power of National Identity

Another assumption made about the effects of globalization is that (one) global identity will replace (all) national ones. How grounded is such a prediction? According to Montserrat Guibernau, "National identity is based upon the sentiment of belonging to a specific nation, endowed with its own symbols, traditions, sacred places, ceremonies, heroes, culture and territory."¹⁹ The pride of belonging to a particular nation has not diminished at all in the "globalized" world. People still go to war for the sake of their nations and die for national causes. Thanks to modern technology, nation-states are better equipped now to mobilize the nation and foster nationalistic sentiments. International sports events are a good illustration of the sense

of national pride that has not vanished. The Olympic Games are without doubt the glory and praise of nations and nation-states and an expression of nationalism: one can observe thousands of people crying when their national anthem is played and national flag is raised during the Olympic medal ceremonies.

The establishment of a global identity, on the other hand, implies the abolition of national distinctions. In other words, people around the world would have to deny their past, national characteristics, cultures, and traditions in order to become culturally homogenized. Simply, this is mission impossible. For example, what kind of *common* national identity can be offered to Jews and Palestinians? No global identity can erase national identities because of its inability to offer people shared values, common myths and memories, history, or culture.²⁰

Religion as an Element of National Identity

Those who predict the advent of global society often forget the strength of religions, which constitute one of the major obstacles for the globalization process. Historically, religion has been one of the main causes of interstate conflicts; in many of these, atrocities and mass cleansings have been conducted on the grounds of religious differences. Globalization has not been able to mitigate the radicalization of religious movements in the modern world. The existing religious diversity itself points to the cultural variety of humankind. Besides, in many countries, religion is considered to be one of the main characteristics of national identity. The Russian Orthodox Church (which professes to be superior to all other Orthodox Churches in the world), for example, systematically makes anti-Western statements and hosts anti-globalization conferences under the pretext of "defending" Russian Orthodox identity. It seeks to undermine in this way the ecumenical movement that calls for worldwide Christian unity and cooperation. The United States, often accused of promoting Western and particularly American values within globalization, is one of the most religious countries on the planet. An appeal to God has been a regular practice for many American politicians both during elections and in speechmaking in ordinary times, and it may be advanced that support from religious groups was one of the key factors that enabled George W. Bush to be reelected as president in 2004.

The process of Westernization has frequently caused anti-Western reactions in many parts of the world, especially among Muslims. What is termed "Islamic fundamentalism" is often explained as a response to Western politics

and values. For example, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, who tried to modernize Iran according to the Western model, was ousted from power by "Islamists" who professed to defend what they regarded as "true" Islamic values in the country. Samuel Huntington in his groundbreaking "Clash of Civilizations?" essay describes the process of "de-Westernization" and "indigenization" taking place in many non-Western countries. Huntington argues that in the future, although nation-states will remain key political actors in world affairs, major conflicts based on culture rather than on economy will occur between civilizations.²¹ It should not be forgotten that almost 40 percent of the world population lives in Confucian China and Hindu India²² and that their values are quite different from those of Western societies.

Globalization and Cultural Homogenization

Media—It is generally believed that the strongest driving forces behind rapid cultural homogenization are mass media, Hollywood movies, sports, Western pop music, tourism, and information technologies.²³ There is no doubt that by means of the media people in every corner of the modern world today know much more about the world and each other than they did, for instance, fifty years ago. It is possible nowadays for an Australian farmer, for example, to watch live on TV an antiterrorist operation in Mumbai in India or the latest incident in the ongoing war in Afghanistan. Hollywood movies are watched and Western pop music stars are listened to in every part of the world. Millions of tourists travel around the world. Any information can be obtained from Internet sources. Yet although, thanks to technological progress, knowledge about everyone and everything has increased tremendously worldwide, there is no reason to believe that this development will lead to the establishment of global culture and global identity.

Western media companies are the most influential and richest in the world, but this does not mean that others cannot create niches for themselves. For instance, although CNN, the best-known American news channel, is watched predominantly in the United States, people around the world prefer to follow local news channels in their native languages: CNN or BBC (with its "Prime" or "World News" channels) cannot compete with regional TV channels (such as *Al Jazeera* in the Arabic world). American TV soap operas, such as *Dallas* and *Dynasty*, are watched in many parts of the world; however, they are not understood in the same way (when it comes to gay relationships, for example) as in the United States, and Latin American soap

operas seem to be much more popular than the Northern American ones in many areas. Many successful Western TV shows have been indigenized rather than being copied in countries other than where they were originally produced.²⁴ Moreover, the governments of most nation-states restrict the importation of foreign TV programs into the country and try rather to promote national ones. Every nation-state, no matter how democratic or undemocratic, widely uses different media to spread its (national) ideologies and further its interests.

Film industry—Hollywood's success in the world film market is an undeniable fact. However, it would be a mistake to accuse Hollywood of attempting to bring about cultural homogenization in the world. Firstly, beside Hollywood there are other successful film producers in the world, such as in France, Hong Kong, India, and Italy. Thus, there is no monopoly over the film market, and attempts by Hollywood, for example, to capture success in the vast Indian market have largely been a failure. "Bollywood" products remain the most popular movies not only in India but in the whole of South-east Asia.²⁵

Secondly, Hollywood blockbusters do not always promote the Western (American) style of life, as it is often presumed. For example, a well-known Hollywood box-office hit, *Braveheart* (1995), made Scottish history known worldwide and promoted tourism in Scotland rather than in California: movie fans travel to Stirling, a small town in Scotland, to see the William Wallace monument and museum, dedicated to the thirteenth-century Scottish national hero portrayed in the movie, rather than to Los Angeles in the hope of being photographed with Mel Gibson, who directed, produced, and starred in the title role of the movie. In another realm, how does George W. Lucas's worldwide-watched *Star Wars* movie series endanger, for example, either Tanzanian or Bolivian national cultures? The fictional *Star Wars* universe should in no way be regarded as a tool for forced acculturation of non-Western cultures.

Thirdly, many European nation-states (for example, France, Italy, and Spain) impose high tariffs on goods, including films, imported from the United States. More dramatic measures are in place in other states: "For political reasons Burma, China, and North Korea monitor and seek to control incoming Western images and goods, while a stringent ban on satellite dishes still operates in Iran."²⁶

Poetry, novels, and other literary fiction have no less power than movies in influencing societies and cultures, although, luckily, no one as yet has

accused great American writers such as Mark Twain, F. Scott Fitzgerald, or Ernest Hemingway of an attempt of cultural Americanization of the world.

Tourism—The lucrative tourism industry in the contemporary world leads nation-states to compete with each other in order to attract tourists, especially from the prosperous Western countries. Millions of people travel around the globe to explore new and interesting sites and witness firsthand diversity in cultures. Therefore, the tourism industry is concerned with making sure that the diversity of national cultures is maintained: it is what renders tourism both attractive and profitable. For example, Americans do not usually go to Thailand or Peru to have lunch in McDonald's and dinner in KFC; rather, they want to explore different national cultures, traditions, and sites. UNESCO was established within the UN system not to erode national cultures but to preserve them.

"*McDonaldization*"—The idea that with globalization the world has been "McDonaldized" is also groundless. There are indeed many McDonald's restaurants outside the United States; however, nowhere are they the most popular restaurants for dining. Moreover, in many countries, McDonald's restaurants are still too expensive for the majority of the population, especially compared to local fast food restaurants. I would like to remind the reader that there are numerous Oriental restaurants in the West that are very popular; however, nobody talks about the "noodle-ization," "sushization," or "curry-ization" of the West.

Migration—Neither do the increased levels of migration in the world, and especially to the West, I suggest, result in the homogenization of cultures. Modern nation-states strictly control and even try to restrict the number of immigrants arriving in their countries. There are growing anti-immigration sentiments in nearly all major migrant-recipient states. In addition, borders between various nation-states have never been as firmly controlled as they are today. It was much easier for both people and goods to cross borders, for example, in the nineteenth century than it is in the current "globalized" world.

Westernization—Globalization is often associated with the West in general, as mentioned above. Perhaps there is a common Western culture (incorporating the cultures of Europe, United States, Canada, and Australia), but this culture is a composition of distinctive individual national cultures. The

French government's policy to restrict American cultural influence in Europe and specifically in France is a well-known effort. Western national cultures are characterized additionally by regional and sometimes by religious diversity within themselves. Despite one common national culture, there can be observed visible regional cultural diversities in France, Germany, and Italy. In the United States, one can frequently distinguish a New Yorker from a Montanan or a Texan.

Language

Since the end of World War II, English has become the dominant language in the international arena. Nowadays, it is often treated as a lingua franca of globalization. However, there is nothing special about the success of English: different languages (Greek, Latin, and French) have been dominant in the international (read Western) arena throughout history. Besides, there are influential regional languages that have not been and probably will not be replaced (at least in the immediate future) by English as a second language (such as Russian in the former Soviet Central Asian republics). As a comparison, English is a native language for 327 million people, while Mandarin in China is for more than 900 million. Although English is used broadly in modern technology, for example, in computer programs, the producers of these programs usually translate them into other languages as well; new programs will enable everyone to translate texts into all languages in the future.²⁷ In addition, many nation-states spend significant funds to promote and defend their national languages. As Mann notes, "While many use the [English] language to do business, they do not tell jokes or make love in it. Nor do their social movements mobilize in English, either peacefully or in battle."²⁸

Conclusion

Predictions concerning the death of nation-states in the globalizing world have not become a reality. On the contrary, the world witnessed a mushrooming of nation-states during the twentieth century. In 1945, the UN was founded by fifty nation-states; currently, the number of member states in the UN reaches almost 200. Nation-states remain the primary actors of world politics, and their sovereignties are today much better secured than before the process of globalization started. Supranational political institutions are tools of nation-states, used to achieve their national interests. TNCs are for their part definitely *not* digging graveyards for nation-states, as supposed

by many; on the contrary, they have a vested interest in strong nation-states that can provide a stable business environment for their activities. Modern technologies enable nation-states to promote their national ideologies, cultures, and identities. Finally, globalization creates both political and economic benefits for nation-states. Nation-states have more opportunities for development in the era of globalization than they had in earlier periods.

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