

*in the name of Allah*

**Reviewing National, Polar and Global Identities in Relation to Formation of  
Polarization and Globalization**

Presented at Global Communication Association Conference

Muscat, Sultanate of OMAN

October 20-21, 2008.

Ardeshir Entezari (PhD)

Director of Population Studies and Research in Asia and Pacific

&

Faculty member of Allameh Tabatabaei University

*Abstract: the aim of this topic is to find out whether the formation of global identity is possible or not. I discuss of two trends working against formation of global identity. The first is related to unreal comparison supposed to be necessary for formation of global identity. The second is the polar nature of what is called global in three economic, political and cultural dimensions. Two kinds of respondents were compared applying a new method named “Comparative Real and Virtual Survey” (CRVS). The respondents in virtual space enjoying more internet show higher global tendency and the real respondents show more polar and local tendencies.*

Globalization is a unique phenomenon by itself. It hasn't been happen till now and has evolved the human relationships profoundly in different aspects of life. Whether calling it globalization or as Manuel Castells suggests “information society” are different representation

of understanding a basic change in human life; A change that has evolved the human relationships generally and has brought about changes in economic, political and cultural formulations.

In spite of different approaches to the nature of globalization and its quality, there exists a common perception that a new event is going on and still is going to be more elaborated. Whether on the side of skeptics suggest only the amount of international relationships have increased and the nature of them has not been changed basically, or on the side of hyper-globalists who believe in the very globalization has already happened and now it is developing and on the side of transformationalists suggest that some has happened and some is still on the way to become globalized, Almost all of the sociologist agree upon the profound and general change not only within but between national societies.

Globalization would be realized as one of the influential factors of formation of new identities and reference groups. In fact, the impact of globalization on formation of identity is not the same as other determinants that have been discussed by most of the scholars; the globalization brings about the possibility of influencing of alternative factors.

There are different definitions for globalization as receding the geographical constraints and awareness of people of that (Waters 2005); as extending and increasing the relationships in different economic, political and cultural aspects (Giddens 1990) and as a world coming together and getting small with subjective and objective interdependence (Robertson 1992). Besides these definitions there are other aspects to globalization as realizing local and global spontaneously. In this latter approach there is some attention for locality beside globality. The concept of glocalization that has been suggested by Robertson emphasizes the integration and not reciprocity of globality and locality. In this side or better saying beside pure globalization tendencies, this new theoretical tendency has been appeared in order to emphasize on locality along with globality. Robertson in his works accentuates both of them. In fact he is interested

in convergent and not divergent local and global identity. The essence of this approach in spite of paying attention to locality is globality. The difference in that is the mechanism accessing a better globality realizing the constraints and conditions of locality.

The main question in this article is related to the possibility of formation of global identity. If the global identity is possible what kind would it be? And if it is not possible what is the outcome of identity in a world with new trends of systematizing and structuring of societies?

Group members develop a kind of identity through process of socialization. This is the image of self as a person. Sociologists discriminate two kinds of personal and social identities. Social identity refers to public selves and is developed around general characteristics devoted to a person as a member of a given group. This could be ethnic, neighborhood, gender, national, occupational and so on. Personal identity refers to unique characteristics that differentiate a member from other members of the same group. These ones do not make groups of persons sharing them with each other and are dispersed in the society. (Gosling & Taylor 2005: 33-39).

There are also two general perspectives paying attention to the concept of identity. The first realizes formation of identity in the process of role taking and internalization of social norms and values in socialization (Parsons). The second realizes it as a product of negotiation of individual and society in an active status (Mead & Goffman).

It is obvious that individual born within family and gains the most internalized features of his or her identity through family. Family is very influential in individual's identity both in personal and social aspects. As long as the fact that identity is related to the identifying oneself to a group other than other groups, comparison is the key element in its formation. In the process of social identity, in which is closer to our discussion, family is more important

because of possibility of comparison. Individual feels belonging to a family when he or she is able to compare his or her own with others.

Peer and neighborhood groups also bring about the sense of comparison and competition with others. School, media and nowadays multi-media systems such as web and other networks are able to internalize a sense of belonging to and finally an image of self. These socialization agents are attempting to develop an image of self for each individual.

In all these stages of socialization, the development and variation of identity happens in different levels of local, regional and global level. Local refers to a wide range from family to nation. Regional refers to different economic, political, cultural and ideological linkages that bring about identity.

The main question in this article is based on this fact that the formation of identity at different levels and stages urgently needs a sense of comparison and competition with others. These others define the domain of individual's image of self.

The others at the local level are other local and national groups, such as other families, peer and neighborhood groups, other schools, other cities and countries. The others at regional level are other religious, political, economic and cultural groups beyond national level.

Again, the main question in this article is concentrated on the issue that while identity needs comparison and competition with others for formation, how can global identity be developed in a space where there is no other global to be compared to. It sounds that those who have benefited from globalization and globality, have attempted to prepare some kind of imaginary and fanciful while unreal and "falsiful" other global groups. The pretended global enemy in TV serials such as "Star Treck" and very welcomed and influential movies such as "The Independence Day" are not rare.

It is certainly an important question whether the path for formation of globalization, on the basis of these fictional and untrue comparisons and competitions, have been paved or not?

In this aspect, local in the global context refers to a range from neighborhood to the whole nation. Notional identity is not necessarily in tension and reciprocity with local identity and would be realized in the frame of local identity.

Those theorists fond of globalization generally write about the local and national identity from an up-down dominant position. In this term, it is inevitable for them that the world should be globalized in the way it is going on and every tendency in front of this roaring flood is obtrusive and necessarily will be perished. As far as epistemological approach is realized, this up-down attitude is the outcome of ruling power status. That's why Lechner suggests that "Jihad" in Islamic groups is an attempt for local identity in which is a series of common personal characteristics against neutralizing and anesthetizing (making non-sense) uniformity of industrial mobilization and colonizing culture of the "mac-world" (Boli & Lechner 2003: 32). In this aspect military activities of dominant powers of the world would be explained and justified as an attempt to strengthen of forming the global order.

### **Global identity**

Global identity is one of the subjects and issues in which a group of writers have described it, not on the basis of objective and explanatory evidences, but as a result of normal theories. As Ward suggests, since nationalism and fundamentalism is a reaction toward "de-traditionalization" from identity, we need a global space as a constraint for a more tolerable patterns of contacts between civilizations in order to confront with less problems in globalization process. (Ward 2003: 400). The same as civil culture determined for national citizenship there is a need for a series of global virtues for global identity.

Positive attitude toward globalization is mostly based upon economic context and linkages, but it has been diffused to other areas as well. Some writers suggest commercial companies will be successful, if they plan and act at the global level and artists are searching a global identity for more popularity (Mathews 2000: 61). Realizing the competitiveness characteristics of capitalism, it cannot last within national borders. National financial supports will not continue very long. Searching for global identity by commercial companies is in fact paying attention to customers' styles and sound and appropriate utilizing of material and human resources, based upon global cost and benefit formulation. Therefore, production relationships and forces are becoming global. These conditions will turn other aspects of social life.

### **Polarization and polar identity**

Although some researchers believe that globalization doesn't interfere emphasize on national and local identity (Yiannakis & Melnick 2001: 447), the question that is put out here is what happens if the condition for formation of global identity is not prepared. In other words, in the first stages of globalization, the stimulating factor for formation and strengthening national identity was tendency toward independence and support of political power, and that's why the states had an important role in formation of it. All of states have attempted to build a sense of national competition for their people since the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was very useful for formation of nation unity and solidarity (Robertson 2000: 224).

Now, there is no such a sense of competition and comparison in order to form the global identity unless the global power in its cultural, political and economic feature does the same

as what the states did at the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, not of course on the basis of a real comparison but on false and unreal ones.

In fact such an identity is not a real global, and as a result, the comparison is not real and all these attempts is concluding in formation of polar identity. Polar identity is the result of polarization instead of globalization of the world. While there were little chances for formation of global identity, the polarization has so many chances for formation of polar identity.

There is another falsiful trend hoping for formation of global in the shadow of globalization as a process or program. It is presented theoretically that the process of globalization is going on in its three dimensions. While the global culture is global as far as there is no other global culture. It is the same with political and economic culture. In fact what is presented as global is mostly American and Western rather than global.

In conclusion, it seems in the shadow of ICT development and globalizing attempts as process or program, the conditions are ready for formation of polar identity rather than global identity. Resistance towards globalizing programs specially in its cultural and political feature, beside the lack of necessary conditions for formation of global identity are some determinants of this trend.

### **Methodology**

In order to make a survey comparing two groups of people in Iran and measuring their attitude toward global, local and polar trends, 300 electronic questionnaires were filled by Iranians internet users and 350 questionnaires were filled by the students of Allame Tabatabaei University. The methodology for this research is named "Comparative Real and

Virtual Survey” (CRVS) method. CRVS method helps us to have a plumb line to check those information prepared in virtual space.

Applying the synthetic method of CRVS was performed in order to compare the data in two virtual and real area and two groups of internet users and non-users. In this way, beside verification of the data correctness and reliability, the difference of responses in these two areas would be discovered. Besides, performing this kind of research and applying electronic questionnaire doesn’t last very long in the world and Iranian academic areas as well (Entezari 2005).

**Results**

The following table is a summary of all of the data that has been gathered through a wider research (Entezari & Panahi 2008).

Table 1. level of space according to real and virtual space

Space	Tendency	Low	Medium	High
real	Global	36.1	43.0	20.9
	Local	10.6	21.5	67.5
	Polar	8.9	21.2	69.9
virtual	Global	15.2	35.3	49.5
	Local	43.2	36.1	20.7
	Polar	44.5	33.1	22.4

Table 1 presents different levels of respondents’ tendencies towards global, local and polar issues in two real and virtual spaces. The global tendency in real space in 36.1 percent of the respondents is low in 43 percent is medium and in almost 21 percent is high. This tendency is



low in 15.2, medium in 35.3 and high in 49.5 percent of respondents in the virtual space. The polar tendency is low in 8.9, medium in 21.2 and high in 69.9 percent of real space respondents. This polar tendency is low in 44.5, medium in 33.1 and high in 22.4 percent of virtual space respondents.

It is apparent that the global tendency in real space is lower than local and polar tendencies. In spite of real space in virtual space we observe more tendencies toward global rather than local and polar. Global tendency includes opinion about global issues such as “All UN and other international resolutions are necessary and should be carried out”. Local tendency includes opinion about local issues such as respondents’ tendencies toward the necessity of realizing local traditions and customs. Global one also includes opinions towards issues such as the necessity for formation of some poles against the superpower poles such as the Islamic associations.

### **Conclusion**

Living in virtual space has prepared a situation that the respondents express more tendency toward global rather than local and polar, while living in real space have made respondents to express more tendency toward local and polar rather than global. But what can be observed from the table 1, is the reciprocity of global tendency on the one side and local and polar tendency on the other side. Internet could be interpreted as a media in which its operators are more fond of global rather than local and polar. It could be the result of the preferences of internet users who seek to connect to the other parts of the world and also the kind of media products produced in the web for its users of all kinds.

**References:**

- Ashforth, Adam (2000), *Madumo : a man bewitched*, University of Chicago Press
- Boli, John & Frank J. Lechner (2003), *The Globalization Reader*, Blackwell Publishing
- Entezari Ardeshir & Mohammad H. Panahi (2008), structural openness perception and tendency toward non local reference groups, *Fasnameh Oloom Ejtemaei*, University of Allameh Tabatabaei, spring 2008 (farsi version)
- Entezari Ardeshir (2005), *Youth Reference Groups: Theoretical and methodological implications*. Presented at IRFD prior to World Summit on Information Society, Tunisia, Tunis, 2005  
([http://www.irfd.org/events/wf2005/abstracts\\_t13.htm](http://www.irfd.org/events/wf2005/abstracts_t13.htm))
- Epstein, S. (1980), *The self-concept: A review and the proposal of an integrated theory of personality*, *Personality: Basic aspects and current research*
- Giddens, Anthony (2001), *Sociology*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK.
- Goffman, E. (1971), *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Gosling R. (ed.) & S. Taylor (2005), *Principles of sociology*, Department of Sociology, LSE, UK.
- Mead, George Herbert (1934), *Mind, self & society from the standpoint of a social behaviorist*, The University of Chicago press, Chicago
- Parsons, T. *The Social System*, New York: Free Press.
- Robertson, Roland (2000), *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, Sage Publications Inc
- Ward, Churchill (2003), *On the Justice of Roosting Chickens: Reflections on the Consequences of U.S ...*, AK Press
- Waters, M. (2001), *Globalization*, London: Routledge.
- Yiannakis, Andrew & Merrill J. Melnick (2001), *Contemporary Issues in Sociology of Sport*, Human Kinetics