

## Historiography and Identity Challenges in the Globalization Epoch

Dr. Moussem Abdelhafid\*

University of SAIDA. Dr Moulay Tahar -Algeria

Laboratory of Maghrebian Studies: Elites and the Construction  
of the National

abdelhafid.moussem@univ-saida.dz

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9327-5297>

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### Abstract:

This paper critically examines the vital role of historiography in upholding national identity components amidst the complexities of the globalization era. It underscores the necessity of historiography and historical knowledge in comprehending and confronting the realities and challenges posed by globalization. The study advocates for a strategic preservation of the core aspects and constants of identity through a well-developed historical epistemological approach. This approach is deemed essential for the intellectual development and resilience of future generations, equipping them to navigate the challenges presented by an age defined by digital cognition and the information revolution. The aim is to reinforce their identity, providing a bulwark against its dilution in the face of globalizing influences.

**Keywords:** Historiography; Identity; Globalization; Challenges ; Historical knowledge, informatics, electronic mind.

\* **Dr. Moussem Abdelhafid**

**Introduction:**

This study examines the role of historiography in safeguarding the components of national identity in the context of an increasingly globalized world. Recognizing that the foundation of any nation's distinct values and identity is deeply rooted in its historical narrative, this research underscores the imperative role of historical scholarship in safeguarding identity markers against the backdrop of contemporary global influences. In an era marked by pronounced cultural diversity and dominated by the phenomena of globalization, history stands as a vital bastion against the encroachment of foreign ideologies and trends, transcending political, geographical, and cultural boundaries.

The objective of this study is to articulate the critical importance of historiography and historical knowledge in navigating the multifaceted realities and challenges brought forth by globalization. It advocates for the strategic maintenance and reinforcement of identity's core aspects, positing the development of a historical knowledge framework as essential for the informed development of future generations. These generations are confronted with an era characterized by digital cognizance and an information revolution, necessitating a robust historical foundation to safeguard their identity from potential erosion. Central to this discourse are two pivotal inquiries: Firstly, how can historiography effectively contribute to the preservation and fortification of a nation's identity? Secondly, what is its capacity to align with and respond to the demands of an era increasingly defined by the tenets of globalization?

**1. Conceptual Framework of the Study:**

This research incorporates a range of pivotal concepts integral to the formulation and analysis of its central problem. Precise definition of these concepts is key to streamlining the research process and effectively conveying its scholarly value. The foremost among these are :

**1.1. Historiography:**

The definition of historiography encounters diverse interpretations from historians, particularly those engaged in the philosophy of history. Views range from historiography as "the discipline primarily focused on the study of past events or occurrences," to "a science endeavoring to construct a chronological sequence of actual happenings, "and "a field dedicated to organizing and examining human conduct through bygone eras." Some even consider it "a written chronicle of past events"<sup>(1)</sup>.

It is pertinent to reference the definitions provided by eminent historians on historiography. For instance, Abd al-Rahman ibn Khaldun, in his seminal work, delineates historiography as an autonomous science, its subject being human civilization and societal structures, and its concerns revolving around the various conditions and occurrences affecting these. He articulates, "Historiography is an

art that acquaints us with the past states of nations in their ethics, prophets in their missions, and kings in their realms and governance, providing guidance for emulation in religious and worldly spheres. It is devoted to the study of human civilization and societal assembly"<sup>(2)</sup>. Ibn Khaldun positions history as both an academic discipline and an art form, involving the scholarly exploration of past nations' conditions and the artistic craft of historical narration<sup>(3)</sup>

Al-Sakhawi, in his book "Condemnation of Those Who Criticize History," presents a technical definition of historiography. He describes it as the science of chronologically identifying events and the life milestones of key historical figures, including their intellectual and physical states, travels, and contributions to knowledge preservation and accuracy. This science also encompasses significant historical events and developments. It extends to encompass major events and occurrences... and often broadens to include narratives of creation, prophet stories, and other bygone matters, as well as eschatological conditions... Fundamentally, it is an art focused on researching time-bound events with precise identification and timing"<sup>(4)</sup>

Ahmad ibn Yusuf Al-Qarmani conceptualizes historiography as the science of reporting on past existences, a gateway to the histories of bygone civilizations<sup>(5)</sup>.

In a succinct and clear manner, historiography can be characterized as a traditional academic discipline that examines human progression throughout history since the creation of humankind. It encapsulates the continuum of human existence through time, spotlighting political, social, economic, and intellectual achievements, and their profound influence on civilizational evolution from past to present, thus underscoring its significant value and purpose<sup>(6)</sup>.

### **1.2. Identity:**

The exploration of identity in academic research presents a complex array of theoretical frameworks, due to the diversity in analytical perspectives, interpretive approaches, defining characteristics, and various influencing factors that shape it. This diversity necessitates a multitude of definitions to comprehensively capture the essence of identity. Al-Hamd Al-Turki, for instance, conceptualizes identity as an amalgam of referential, material, and subjective elements that collectively define the uniqueness of social interactions. He likens identity to an evolving individual, constantly changing yet fundamentally remaining the same<sup>(7)</sup>.

In the same vein, Al-Jabri describes identity as a constellation of attributes unique to a nation, distinguishing it from others and reflecting its unique civilizational persona<sup>(8)</sup> From the perspective of Hussein Ibrahim, identity is seen as a unique cultural and civilizational signature, inclusive of customs, traditions, behavioral patterns, value systems, and worldviews<sup>(9)</sup>.

Synthesizing these viewpoints, a comprehensive definition of identity can be posited as the unique collective consciousness of a human group. This

definition specifically encompasses the specific values, traditions, and core beliefs that fundamentally shape and characterize a community's sense of self. Such a construct is crucial not only for preserving the group's distinctive identity but also for fostering a coherent and unified sense of purpose and belonging among its members<sup>(10)</sup>. Scholars concur that a people's identity is inherently linked to their freedom of self-expression<sup>(11)</sup>, encompassing a gamut of cultural, religious, customary, linguistic, and social specifics that define a nation's essence and autonomous identity<sup>(12)</sup>. Elements such as national language, local dialects, religious and national values formed over time, and customs and traditions springing from these values, all provide resilience against cultural assimilation. Additionally, the historical narrative of a people's struggle to preserve their identity in terms of land, values, customs, and norms is integral to this concept<sup>(13)</sup>.

### **1.3. Definition of Globalization:**

The academic discourse surrounding globalization is replete with diverse definitions, reflecting the complexity of its conceptualization. For instance, Mohammed Al-Jabri defines globalization as the process of disseminating a specific civilizational model, notably that of the United States, across the globe. This interpretation posits globalization as an ideological strategy for American hegemony in world affairs<sup>(14)</sup>. Whereas, Burhan Ghalion, drawing on Ahmed Sadik's perspective, views globalization as a dynamic shift within international relations, characterized by the accelerated exchange of information, and the rapid spread of technological and scientific advancements. This process increases the influence of external scientific knowledge on the destinies of national entities within this interconnected global sphere<sup>(15)</sup>.

Dr. Hassan Hanafi conceptualizes globalization as an omnipresent phenomenon, as ancient as history itself, and integral to civilizational progress across eras and diverse societies. He argues that globalization transcends the 21st century, representing a historical trend rather than being confined to economic, political, or informational dimensions<sup>(16)</sup>. Moreover, Ismail Sabri describes globalization as the convergence of economic, political, cultural, and behavioral elements, which effectively diminishes the relevance of political boundaries and national allegiances. According to this view, globalization facilitates the transition of societies from a state of division to one of increasing unification and integration<sup>(17)</sup>.

In summary, globalization can be defined as the ideological orchestration of Western civilization in its intellectual, cultural, economic, and political facets, aimed at achieving global dominance. This orchestration is carried out through the use of media and multinational corporations to disseminate and universalize Western civilization.

## **2. The Identity Crisis in the Face of Globalization**

Since its emergence within the modern epistemological framework, globalization has presented a substantial challenge to societal identities. Its capitalist structures and institutions promote a specific cultural model, leading to the assimilation of distinct societal identities and the erosion of diverse cultures<sup>(18)</sup>. In the era of globalization, the world has transformed into a metaphorical village where temporal and spatial constraints are significantly reduced. This phenomenon has manifested itself across various aspects of life, permeating intellectual forums and social systems, thus becoming a pervasive force that influences and dominates human consciousness, often at the expense of cultural distinctiveness<sup>(19)</sup>.

Thus, Globalization poses an ongoing challenge to the identities and cultural specificities of societies and peoples. It represents an external 'other' that threatens particularly the Arab-Islamic cultural and civilizational identity. This necessitates an acute awareness of globalization's intent to sideline and confront these unique cultural traits<sup>(20)</sup>.

If identity is anchored in the unique civilizational traits that distinguish one nation from another, globalization seeks to transcend these traits, aiming for a homogenization that overlooks individual specificities. This transition is facilitated by a strategy of intense external penetration that disregards traditional boundaries and regional distinctions<sup>(21)</sup>. Globalization challenges the concept of sovereignty associated with borders, using various methods to infringe upon the uniqueness of locations and their inhabitants, thereby diluting national and ethnic affiliations and leading to the fragmentation of societal identities<sup>(22)</sup>. The cultural and social domains have been significantly impacted by globalization, leading to a heightened awareness of the dichotomy between 'us' and 'them' and prompting a reevaluation of identity in the context of global changes brought about by globalization. This has sparked discussions on the potential risks and challenges globalization poses to the cultural specificity of local communities<sup>(23)</sup>.

Under globalization, there is a looming threat of cultural homogenization, particularly affecting Arab culture. The cultural aspect, being a major defining element of identity, encompasses the intellectual, artistic, and civilizational makeup of a nation's character. The rapid pace of globalization raises concerns about the integrity of Arab history and its associated identity, as globalization tends to promote a homogenized view of human history, neglecting the diverse histories of tribal structures, states, and nations. This perspective contravenes the divine principle of diversity in creation<sup>(24)</sup>, as affirmed in the Quran: "To each among you, We have prescribed a law and a clear way. If Allah willed, He would have made you one nation"<sup>(25)</sup>.

In this line of argument, Hassan Hanafi perceives the impact of globalization on cultural identity as a precursor to more significant threats to national sovereignty, independence, international will, and national culture. Globalization

fosters a dependency dynamic, consolidating the power of central forces (America and the West) at the expense of peripheral entities (national states) <sup>(26)</sup>. This dynamic weakens the role of the nation-state, leading to a resurgence of pre-state entities and exacerbating sectarian and ethnic divisions, thereby fragmenting societal identities<sup>(27)</sup>. Moreover, Islamic culture is increasingly vulnerable to globalization's influences, particularly in light of the United States' strategy to globally propagate its culture, which often shows little regard for Islamic values<sup>(28)</sup>. By extension, Arabic language, as the medium of the Quran and a vessel of a rich cultural and historical legacy, faces unique challenges in the age of globalization<sup>(29)</sup>.

In summary, globalization represents a real and pressing challenge to the authenticity of identities and the cultural heritage of peoples and societies. It essentially promotes a model of Western culture seeking to impose itself globally, in clear contradiction to the divine principle of diversity among nations and communities.

### **3. The Nexus between Historiography and Identity:**

Historiography stands as a foundational element in the discourse on identity. It acts as a robust custodian of the cumulative elements that constitute a civilization's distinctiveness, both in its historical and contemporary contexts. Historiography is not merely a chronicle of events but a dynamic interplay of the past within the present, shaping a cultural consciousness that reflects a nation's ideological and intellectual lineage through its historical trajectory<sup>(30)</sup>. It encapsulates the essence of a nation's identity, making history not just a recount of past events, but a continuous flow influencing present and future perceptions<sup>(31)</sup>.

Given its critical role, nations often rely on historical understanding to navigate and affirm their national identity through the depths of time. In periods of uncertainty or identity shifts, history serves as a compass to recalibrate a nation's sense of self, reestablishing a coherent narrative in times of flux<sup>(32)</sup>.

Highlighting the role of history in identity formation, scholars like Alex emphasize its integral function in reinforcing a sense of belonging and pride within a nation. It offers a comprehensive perspective on the nuances that forge a national identity<sup>(33)</sup>. Furthermore, Historian Abdul Rahman Al-Jilali underscores the profound impact of historiography on the national spirit, positing that the identity of a nation is inextricably linked to its history, with each reflecting the other<sup>(34)</sup>.

In this vein, historiography is recognized as the cornerstone in the construction and preservation of community identity. Thinker Shakib Arslan eloquently states that a nation's awareness and preservation of its historical journey are crucial to its self-realization and identity. The understanding of history

bridges past experiences with future aspirations, thereby maintaining the continuity and uniqueness of a nation's identity<sup>(35)</sup>.

Therefore, it is indisputable that a community's identity is deeply intertwined with its historical narrative. Without incorporating history, our understanding of identity remains incomplete. History is pivotal in guiding a community's conduct and shaping its identity markers. This shaping is influenced by the intellectual and ideological references found within its historical record. Zaki Al-Bahri emphasizes the significance of history as a component of cultural heritage and identity. He notes its crucial role in chronicling a people's development, achievements, and experiences<sup>(36)</sup>.

Historiography, therefore, extends beyond mere academic pursuit; it is a critical tool for understanding and preserving a people's identity. In an era increasingly influenced by globalization, emphasizing historical study becomes essential. It serves as a counterbalance to the homogenizing forces of contemporary global dynamics<sup>(37)</sup>. The subsequent sections of this study will delve deeper into the vital role of historiography in confronting the challenges globalization poses to national and cultural identities<sup>(38)</sup>.

#### **4. The Role of Historiography in Consolidating Identity Amidst Globalization**

In the contemporary era, characterized by the rapid advance of the third millennium, globalization has brought forth an onslaught of electronic dominance, rapid communication technologies, and versatile mass media. This global phenomenon poses a significant threat to collective psychologies, eradicating shared cultural elements within a nation, leading to the dissolution of unique identities and the homogenization of societal constructs<sup>(39)</sup>.

In the midst of the dynamic interplay between globalization and cultural identity, historiography stands out as a vital field of epistemology. It is pivotal in addressing these challenges and in preserving cultural identities. Owing to its broad and thorough approach across various fields of knowledge, historiography can offer a humanistic perspective. This perspective serves as a counterbalance to the often-impersonal nature of technological advancement driven by globalization. Historiography plays a crucial role in guiding human progress and adaptation within our complex, globalized world, underscoring the need for increased inspiration, awareness, and understanding<sup>(40)</sup>. As a science and an art, historiography significantly contributes to constructing and preserving identity, highlighting civilizational and cultural specifics and historical authenticity. This becomes particularly vital in an era where intellectual contribution has diminished, and civilizational dialogue has regressed, allowing the logic of globalization to dominate on multiple fronts<sup>(41)</sup>.

Undoubtedly, the civilizational transgressions imposed by globalization demand a coherent, rational methodology and integrated knowledge frameworks.

These frameworks must aim to root individual and collective identities through history, providing an intellectual armamentarium to overcome spiritual dislocations and material disillusionments that threaten national identities<sup>(42)</sup>.

Identity, which includes both individual and collective aspects, whether rooted in civilization or history, serves as both a symbol and a unifying force for the members of a nation. It is anchored in a shared historical and cultural context<sup>(43)</sup>. This concept underscores how historical factors, deeply embedded in a nation's civilizational journey, reinforce identity. It highlights that identity maintains the continuous existence of individual and collective selves within the historical narrative, thereby providing a defense against the external, imperialistic challenges often associated with globalization<sup>(44)</sup>.

Moreover, identity encapsulates the distinctive traits that unify a community, encompassing their lifestyles, interactions with their environment, and the cultural continuity expressed through various artistic and narrative forms. The erosion of these integral elements can significantly impact the identity of a community or nation. This underscores the critical role of historiography in preserving the rich and diverse heritages of nations, safeguarding these unique cultural identities against loss or dilution<sup>(45)</sup>. Therefore, historiography is essential in creating an intellectual framework focused on analysis, interpretation, criticism, and renewal, crucial for adapting to contemporary advancements and safeguarding identities. This involves developing a historical project centered on productive awareness to preserve Arab identities<sup>(46)</sup>.

To mitigate globalization's impact on identity, which often undermines societal cohesion, it is imperative to cultivate a culture grounded in historical knowledge. This involves reevaluating historical concepts, reviving values diminished by destructive ideologies, and reformulating identity components, such as religion, language, and shared belonging. Additionally, it necessitates incorporating prominent figures from Arab-Islamic thought into educational curricula and focusing study programs on the spiritual dimensions of identity is crucial. These efforts aim to protect cultural identity from the risks of globalization<sup>(47)</sup>.

In summary, leveraging historiography and historical knowledge as strategies to counteract globalization's threats to national identities necessitates the development of multidisciplinary Arab historians. They should possess the ability to assimilate the positives of globalization to confront its challenges, studying Arab history through lenses that merge tradition with contemporaneity. This approach should not be about mimicking Western models but about fostering modernity from within our historical heritage, while remaining open to insights from both Western and Eastern methodologies. This entails engaging with the concept of globality based on mutual exchange and respect, facilitating



constructive interactions between historical discourse and the challenges of the human societal fabric<sup>(48)</sup>.

In the context of globalization, history serves as the fundamental repository of collective memory, crucial for maintaining the identity of individuals and societies. This identity is increasingly under threat from the countervailing values propagated by globalization<sup>(49)</sup>. To bolster the role of historiography in safeguarding identity, a critical examination and clarification of historical concepts are imperative, particularly those shrouded in ambiguity or subject to unwarranted reverence. It is vital to rejuvenate values eroded by destructive ideologies and realign their foundational principles.

An essential aspect of this approach involves redefining the core components of identity, primarily encompassing religion, language, and communal belonging. Strategic efforts must be directed towards reintegrating and prioritizing the contributions of eminent Arab-Islamic thinkers within educational frameworks. These thinkers, who have historically championed optimal ideals, should be central to educational curricula. This approach would entail emphasizing the spiritual dimension of identity in educational programs across various levels, including the university. The focus should be on nurturing a connection to one's heritage, pride in historical legacies, comprehension of contemporary realities, and engagement with modernity through critical and ethical reasoning<sup>(50)</sup>.

Moreover, mitigating the influence of external media and limiting the influx of foreign content is crucial. The pervasive nature of foreign media in the era of globalization often leads to the dilution of collective identity, replacing it with a sense of marginalization and loss. This erosion manifests in the diminishing significance of national consciousness and belonging, gradually weakening statehood and individuality concepts. Such erosion aligns with globalization's hegemonic and civilizational subjugation goals<sup>(51)</sup>.

### **Conclusion:**

To sum up, it is pertinent to recognize that although globalization presents significant challenges to the identities of nations, it is not an insurmountable destiny. Effective adaptation and alleviation of its impacts are achievable through a strategic approach that harmonizes global openness with the extraction of beneficial elements, all while steadfastly maintaining cultural roots. This equilibrium can be successfully navigated by anchoring in historical knowledge, a foundational pillar for the formation and preservation of national and societal identities.

The role of historical discourse is indispensable in countering the sense of disorientation and apprehension that globalization often incites. Historiography, as an educational instrument, a scholarly discipline, and a reservoir of knowledge, offers a comprehensive safeguard for identity components. Our collective history is not merely a dormant force; it possesses the potential to be reinvigorated,

channeling life, dynamism, innovation, and progress in a manner that fortifies our identity. This revitalization equips us to confront and navigate the myriad challenges imposed by the globalizing world, ensuring the preservation and resilience of our cultural and national identities.

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