

GLOBALIZATION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY: AZERBAIJAN'S CASE

Gunel Kerimova
(*Khazar University, Azerbaijan*)

INTRODUCTION

During the Cold War the world was divided into two confronting poles: capitalist and communist. States and nations from each pole shared distinct values, had different political and socio-economic structures, ideologies and life styles. Interactions between peoples from opposing poles were restricted; movements were rare and controlled by political authorities.

The end of XX century was marked by the breakdown of USSR and emerging of a new world order. Collapse of Iron Curtain and opening up of borders in the post Soviet republics, as well as considerable increase in human activity world wide led to intensification of interactions between people of different nationalities and cultures. People started to cross borders and move around the world with fewer obstacles and restrictions. This contributed to prompt and free circulation of ideas, commodities and values around the globe. Thus the world in which political and ideological differences had been dominated over the minds and actions of people have disappeared given up its place to a single globe.

The integration process that we observe from the late XX century is called globalization and is considered to be a final stage of integration, the highest level of rapprochement among institutions and processes. Globalization cannot be perceived as a single process; it is a range of processes interconnected with each other that are manifested in cross-border movements. With every year passed it becomes evident that globalization process cannot be stopped or reverted. The main issue of nations, thus, is to adapt to general rules of globalization at the same time preserving and developing their own originality.

In this research I investigate globalization's impact on cultural identity using the Azerbaijani case. Because it is written little about globalization and Azerbaijani identity issues it became interesting for me to search this field and fill flaws in this topic to some extent. Due to the fact that Azerbaijani cultural identity historically has been exposed to considerable cultural infusion from outside and moreover this infusion has increased since globalization started I see

Azerbaijani case as an ideal subject for research. In a sense, this research is directed to investigation and highlighting the processes between globalization and cultural identity of Azerbaijanis, examining globalization's effects on Azerbaijani cultural identity as well as to revealing institutions that should have a regulative position between globalization process and cultural identity issues and influence on both of them.

Research question and hypothesis

This research aims at revealing and explaining the existing interactions between globalization process and cultural identity. Accepting globalization as a cultural penetration process I have observed the likelihood of partial or full westernization of Azerbaijani culture. Therefore the research question I picked up is: "Does globalization change the authentic nature of Azerbaijani culture and does it change the cultural identity of Azerbaijanis?" Consequently, the hypothesis of this research is: "Globalization changes (absorbs) the Azerbaijani cultural identity".

Concept of globalization. Defining Globalization

Recently the pace of human contacts has dramatically increased. New technologies, airplanes, telephone service, computers, email, fax, capital flows led to huge intensification of human interactions and made the world more interdependent than ever. Free movement of money, technology, products as well as ideas and cultures resulted in formation of movements, legislations, and economics at the international level. All above processes have been designated by the term "globalization". Academics and politicians welcome it, but for billions of people they are likely to sweep away their life styles and threaten to their cultures.

In a larger range globalization is defined as intensification of world social relations, which brings together the most distant places and events.¹

Globalization is also understood as a world's compression and increased comprehension of a world as a whole (R. Robertson, 1992).

In a popular discourse globalization is often perceived as a synonym for one or more of the following phenomena: the pursuit of classical liberal (or "free market") policies in the world economy ("economic liberalization"), the growing dominance of western forms of political, economic and cultural life (westernization), the proliferation of new information technologies (the "Internet Revolution") as well as the notion that humanity stands at the

threshold of realizing one single unified community in which major sources of social conflict have vanished (“globalization integration”).

Social theorists endorse the view that globalization refers to fundamental changes in the spatial and temporal contours of social existence, according to which the significance of space or territory undergoes shifts in the face of acceleration in the temporal structure of crucial forms of human activity. Geographical distance as a rule is measured in time is reduced, distance undergoes compression.

What is true about all above mentioned definitions of globalization is that globalization means interconnectedness between diverse elements of the whole world. There are economic, political, cultural environmental and other forms of globalization.

Cultural Globalization

“I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any.” Mahatma Gandy

Culture constitutes an inalienable part of human life. Human communities create cultures and interact with them; they live in a space encompassed by cultural goods and services. Cultural goods consist of a variety of products such as books, newspapers, CDs, films and fashion designs. Cultural services include libraries, museums, theatres, operas, circuses, press, etc.

Globalization in the context of culture can be summarized as the increased intensified and penetrating contacts among a variety of different cultures and identities in which the word penetrating refers to an acceptance of the cultural values previously viewed as “foreign” and adoption of them as “owned” as a result of cross-border cultural flows.¹⁰

Globalization of culture has been addressed by many as emergence of a single global culture. In the era of advanced technologies the likelihood of a global culture seems fantastic, because cable TV, satellites, internet are eliminating cultural boundaries. The spread of values, norms and culture tends to promote western ideals of life and behavior. Therefore very often cultural globalization is associated with westernization or even Americanization of local cultures.

The anxiety of peoples, both European and non-European, caused by overwhelming domination of American culture over other cultures is

understandable. Anti-globalization movements world wide protest treating cultural goods in the same manner as it is done with any other commodity in global trade and agreements. What these protesters have in common is the fear of losing their cultural identity.

“The US has become the most powerful, significant world force in terms of cultural imperialism and expansion, said Ian Ralston, American Studies Director at Liverpool John Moores University.” “The areas that spring to minds are Hollywood, popular music and even literature.”¹¹As the only unrivaled superpower USA exports its culture on an unprecedented scale. The American ideas and ideals manifested in American music, movies, fast food, sport and language are being spread inexorably across the world (see table 2), they reach every tiny part of planet, they conquer hearts and minds, they influence people’s livelihood, way of thinking and behavior, this eclipsing local images, lifestyles and philosophies that have been formulated and retained over centuries.

Table 1. McDonalds Restaurants: Number by Region¹² 1991 and 1996

| Region | 1991 | 1996 |
|----------------------|--------|--------|
| Latin America | 212 | 837 |
| South America | 0 | 3 |
| South East Asia | 113 | 409 |
| East Asia | 123 | 489 |
| Arab States | 0 | 69 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa | 0 | 17 |
| Developing countries | 448 | 1,824 |
| Industrial countries | 11,970 | 19,198 |
| World | 12,418 | 21,022 |

The modern time has granted US with feasible advantages and superiority that empires of ancient or medieval centuries did not have at their disposal. “The main difference now in favor of American culture is the importance of technology – telephone, internet, and films, all that did not exist in ancient Greece or the Mongol Empire. American influence is growing, it’s so easy to get access to US culture, and there are no barriers. Disney is known world wide,

Plato is more and more unknown, even in Greece".¹³ If it took two millenniums for Plato's "Republic" to reach North America, the latest hit from American pop-star can be found in Greek (Japanese) stores within days. Films and music are among the US's largest exports. Today 85% of movies seen in the world are made in Hollywood. Such indicator has proven that nowadays in closely economically interdependent world culture has become an object of business.

Rich and powerful countries manufacture cultural goods; easily conquer all worlds markets, thus pushing people and cultures in other countries at a disadvantages state, because the latter are incapable to compete due to the fact that they have troubles to present their own cultural goods and services to the world market. In order to protect domestic culture from foreign cultural products, from foreign competition and preserve cultural heritage, European and other states- members of UNESCO have been undertaking serious measures. One of them was the approval of international treaty designed to protect movies, music and other cultural treasures from US dominating influence and competition. The document called Convention on the "Protection and Promotion of Diversity of Cultural Expressions" declares the rights of countries to "maintain, adopt and implement policies and measures that they deem appropriate for the protection and promotion of the diversity of the cultural expressions on their territory".¹⁴ Cultural expressions are defined as including music, art, language and ideas as well as "cultural activities, goods and services".

IDENTITY AND CULTURE. WHAT IS IDENTITY?

For better comprehension of interactions between globalization process and cultural identity in Azerbaijan this chapter presents basic background information on the concept of identity, its different forms, especially considering national identity, as it has huge impact on shaping nation's cultural identity.

Under identity one should understand a process through which an individual forms an idea of self, of his/her place in the world and own relations with groups.

Identity is attached to a sense of self and thus developing this sense is an important part of every man when he becomes a mature person. The simplistic answer to the question "what is identity?" is that identity is a set of personal or behavioral characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of group. Each person's self comprehension and acceptance can encompass lots

of identifications. Some of the many identities individuals have are located within each other and usually they do not confront, to the contrary, they are compatible. This is most possible about geographical location. For instance, a person can identify him/herself both with the city and the country of his/her residence. However this doesn't exclude the possibility that various identities can and do compete with one another. As an illustration to this argument can serve the following example: in the 1950s and 1960s many people living in what was then Yugoslavia felt pride in having stood up to the Soviet Union in 1948 and in creating a new economic system. Yet in 1990s, most people in Yugoslavia felt that their identities as Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Muslims or Bosnians were more salient than their identity as Yugoslavs.¹⁸

There are various forms of identity: ethnic, national, political, cultural etc.

INTERACTION OF AZERBAIJANI CULTURE AND GLOBALIZATION. EXCLUSIVE AZERBAIJANI CULTURE

Azerbaijan is one of the places of human civilization. Two millions years ago favorable conditions for human living were formed here. People settled in this place and by creating their material as well as moral (spiritual) culture has become known as one of the most ancient and cultural communities.

Presumably the name Azerbaijan comes from Persia and means "the land of fires" which could either be a reference to the burning surface oil deposits or the oil fueled fires in the temples of the once – dominant Zoroastrian religion.²⁴ Azerbaijani culture as well as the society has always been marked with inclusiveness and openness. Since ancient times peoples living in the territory of Azerbaijan have not been developing in the first places in a detached way. Azerbaijan had close commercial and cultural ties with neighboring and even distant countries. At different historical periods Azerbaijan was a compound part of powerful empires. In ancient period Azerbaijan was conquered by the Romans, but between the VII and XI centuries, Arabs controlled Azerbaijan and during that time Islamic concepts strengthened. In mid XI century Turkic groups ended the Arab control and asserted their own political dominance in Azerbaijan, bringing with them the Turkish language and customs. So, the basic characteristics of the Azerbaijani nation largely resembled those of the Arab and Turkic peoples. These characteristics continue to exist today in Azerbaijan, which consists mostly of Turkic Muslims.

Historical monuments of material culture in Azerbaijan can be grouped chronologically in the following way: Historical monuments of Ancient Times

and Medieval Centuries; Monuments of Revolutionary struggle period; Historical monuments of Azerbaijan SSR; Monuments of Independent Azerbaijan's struggle period.

These monuments are differentiated by the following types: places of ancient living; cemeteries; rock drawings; treasures; city and village ruins of medieval centuries; tombs; mengers (straight stones) etc.

One of the prominent monuments related to ancient times is Gobustan, located 60 km south from the capital Baku. Big Stone, Small Stone, Drawing Peak and other rock chains are rising in Gobustan. There are a lot of drawings over these rocks; some of them illustrate scenes of religious rituals or animals whose existence ended more than 2 thousand years ago; others contain pictures of hunting and primitive clothes.

The famous monument of Medieval centuries is a Maiden Tower built in XII century by the architect Masud Davud.²⁵ Maiden Tower is usual place of foreign tourists, guests as well as of country citizens. The name of the building derives from the legend in which a king incarcerated his daughter into the tower, punishing her for love to a poor fellow. The girl threw down herself from the top of the tower into the Caspian Sea that was surrounding the tower at the period of happenings. Whether or not this and many other legends of Tower have something common with reality this does not diminish people's interest and delight with it.

Historical monuments of Independent Azerbaijan include Martyr's Avenue, monuments of national heroes, who died for Azerbaijan's independence, etc.

Written monuments

In one of the rich cultural centers of Azerbaijan the Azerbaijan Manuscripts Institute thousand of manuscripts are being kept. One of such written monuments is Avesta. It is the most ancient monument of Azerbaijan and at the same time of the Near East. This script served as a legal code for Zoroastrians and contains principles and views of ancient people living in Azerbaijan, Iran and neighboring states regarding the world and the universe as a whole.²⁶ "Avesta" became known in Europe in XVIII century when French scientist Anketil du-Perron translated it into the French. The book is divided into 3 parts, each composed of seven books. Following topics among many others are described in "Avesta": religious rituals; religion Mazdayasna and its doctrine; history of world's genesis, the day of resurrection, hereafter; astronomy; life of monks; legal recommendations etc.

Religion

Religious ideology has deep, complex socio-economic, cultural and historical roots in human society due to the fact that religion is connected with peoples' customs, traditions and household. Traditionally there have been three confessions in Azerbaijan: Islam, Judaism and Orthodox Christianity. New non-traditional for Azerbaijan confessions and their branches also appeared in the recent past: Catholicism, Bakhaism, Salafism (Vahabbism), Krishnaism.

The dominant religion in contemporary Azerbaijan is Islam. At present about 93% out of more than 8 million Azerbaijanis have Muslim background and 65% to 75% out of that majority are connected with Shi'ite traditions. Although religious knowledge is for the most part, very poor, the inhabitants of different regions of the country have preserved a memory of their Shi'ite or Sunni background on various levels. The "search for identity" is a common feature of ex-Socialist societies in transition. Dissolution of the Soviet Union left societies in an unexpected economic and human catastrophe. Therefore, Islam could, and according to many local intellectuals, should play an important role in the formation of the Azerbaijani nation. People showed increasing interest in their Islamic roots, prohibited for decades, they turned towards religion, even joined religious networks in order to find spiritual as well as material relief in their hard times.²⁸ While most Azerbaijanis regard Islam as being part of their national identity, meaning Islamic traditions and beliefs are primarily seen as national, not religious traditions any intermingling of religion with the political sphere is rejected by the vast majority of the population.

Azerbaijani state leadership tries to use religion to strengthen its legitimacy. This is demonstrated by ex-President Aliyev's celebrated hajj, Qur'an recitations during political celebrations and the incorporation of religious holidays unto the official calendar. Besides, both governmental and oppositional parties emphasize that Islam as religion is part of national identity of Azerbaijani Turks. Main components of this identity are the Azeri-Turkish language and the idea of a common history as well as a set of cultural norms, stemming from the Islamic background. Thus, Islam is closely linked with the idea of Azerbaijani nation which is a part of the Turkish and Islamic world.

STATE'S ROLE IN RELATIONS BETWEEN GLOBALIZATION AND AZERBAIJANI CULTURE

The globalization is going on and with every passed year life realities show this phenomenal process is accelerating its rate. World processes, states and

organizations, economies and institutions, civilizations and cultures are becoming more intermingled and interdependent. Globalization has reached Azerbaijan Republic and the country is now involved in this multifaceted process. Giving Azerbaijan, a small country an increased degree of political activity in international arena, allowing it to enhance its political influence in the world and promising welfare for its citizens and prosperous future for the whole country through grand economic projects and partnerships with international financial institutions, globalization, nevertheless threatens the most fragile/vulnerable point of Azerbaijani nation, namely, threatening its culture. At least the majority of respondents of the survey conducted in the framework of the current research share this opinion. The results of the survey as well as the observations of modern Azerbaijani society, enables to assert that Azerbaijani cultural identity is under the attack of globalization impact.

The countries, where the influence of globalization on local cultures is the strongest, are those, where the government is relatively or absolutely weak not only to confront the tendencies of globalization, but also to undertake measures to strengthen the local culture, to care of and protect cultural monuments and develop cultural heritage.

The role of state in the development of culture is enormous. It carries out different activities for the progress of science, enlightenment and arts. Besides state's theoretic, organizational and physical activity in the cultural field is directed towards creation of equal opportunities for harmonious development of every member of society and providing people with chance to utilize cultural achievements. The state as a major institution which regulates all processes taking place within it, creates conditions for citizens' esthetic education, their moral promotion, protection, enlargement and use of cultural wealth. Through increasing number of published products (books, newspapers, journals), radio stations and TV channels, state can influence on million of people, on their intellectual and moral development as well as on enhanced sense of citizenship and social responsibility.

Because cultural objects are the property of every citizen state is empowered and authorized to protect and retain them. The aim in protection of cultural wealth is not only to prevent it from being physically spoiled, but also to pass it to younger generations and to create opportunities for people to be acquainted with moral pearls of culture.

However in the modern Azerbaijan protection of cultural heritage, establishment of a network of institutions, preparing specialists in cultural field,

protection of cultural wealth and traditions is not on good level. Variety of factors can be mentioned to explain this situation.

First of all, Azerbaijan is a young country with independence history of nearly 15 years. In XXI century Azerbaijan Republic is aspiring to endorse its independence, to establish democratic state and create a civil society with free market economy. At the same time the country is experiencing transitional period and hence it faces a lot of problems in various fields that both directly and indirectly impacts on Azeri culture.

The level of corruption in the republic is one of the highest in the world; the criminal elements such as abduction, murder, human trafficking and blackmail are vastly spread among different social strata, including the high-ranking officials in governmental apparatus. Besides, Azerbaijan has been in the state of undeclared war with Armenia over the Mountainous Qarabagh for more than 10 years. Refugees' problem and many other concerns have weakened government's preoccupation with the state of culture.

The government's attempts to build a uniform strong society have failed as contemporary Azerbaijani society looks segmented, partitioned and there is no unity and understanding between its various segments. "Yerlibazliq" (localism) but not a sole national unity is dominating over the Azerbaijani society.

Factors mentioned above have specific influence on Azerbaijani society's current condition. Respondents agreed that Azerbaijani society has not been formed yet and to the question: "how do you see modern Azerbaijani society?" they replied with following characteristics: passive, corrupted, lost, illegitimate, not united, vulgar and non-educated. 55% of the respondents evaluated Azerbaijani society negatively.

The other important factor contributing to weakening of local culture is low level of education in Azerbaijan. Spread of moral/cultural wealth is fulfilled through educational system, mass media and cultural institutions such as museums, archives and libraries. Consequently, the level of moral life of society depends on the number of educational institutions and the quality of education.

It is very well known that Soviet educational system was the most effective in the world. However after the dissolution of USSR a lot of educated secondary school teachers and university instructors emigrated from Azerbaijan to countries of Western Europe and US seeking better life and conditions to work.

People in Azerbaijan now, mostly are not well-educated, except for the small part concentrated in the capital. Faced with major problems and hardships in the social sphere (low salary, unemployment and poverty), most Azerbaijanis, and particularly, the youth have to think about the daily sustenance and things of primary concern, such as food, cloths, bills for communal services, etc. Consequently, if people are not fed, dressed well, they cannot devote themselves to education or think about enhancing their professional background and skills. Thus, Azerbaijanis faced with vital problems in their lives the main of which is low income cannot get qualified education abroad or simply have little time for devoting themselves to sound education and they have lost interest in reading the masterpieces of their own writers and poets, such as Nizami Ganjavi or Hussein Javid, or listen to operas of Fikrat Amirov or Uzeyir Hajibayov and this leads to forgetting authentic Azerbaijani culture.

By raising its economy, creating new job places the government can encourage people to meet their basic needs to improve life standards which undoubtedly entail increase of interest in public cultural activity.

On the other hand, intensive propagation of western culture from radio via hit songs, from TV through blockbusters and soap operas make it attractive to youth to be interested in modern western culture, with the life in the west, with ideals and problems of western people.

State/governmental care of historical, religious architectural monuments is weak. A lot of architectural monuments have not been repaired for years.

Governmental control over modern constructions in the capital Baku is considerably low, but for the most part is absolutely absent. City is changing rapidly; old buildings of historical importance are being destroyed and this destruction carries not accidental but general effect. New constructions are built on the place of buildings of historical importance. One of the signs of globalization can be viewed in the activity of foreign construction companies in Azerbaijan. The buildings constructed by these companies are alien to authentic Azerbaijan architectural style. 66 % of respondents complained that their attitude towards modern constructions in Baku is negative as they do not contain Azerbaijani traditional cultural elements, they are built exceptionally in western style, lack quality and thus the city loses its "face".

Perhaps the most evident manifestation of globalization's power in Azerbaijan is felt in the culture of dressing of the modern Azeris. Since independence in 1991 a lot of European and American cloth brands have arrived in Azerbaijan and opened their fashionable shops attracting clients with jeans and bright

dresses. Basically urban residents buy such clothes which are popular among people of almost all ages.

However not everybody supports this kind of dress. Old people and particularly religious inspired youth do not like the exaggerated westernization of clothes of Azerbaijani people claiming that such kind of dresses is contrary to authentic Azerbaijani culture, mentality and tradition. This idea is proven by respondents who participated in the survey. More than half of all respondents (59%) to the question “how do they assess the clothes of modern Azeris”, answered-“bad, disgusting”, implying the very tight and excessively naked clothed worn mostly by women.

CONCLUSION

Interrelations between globalization and its influence on Azerbaijani cultural identity represent very complicated process. Studying this field requires not only good knowledge of globali-zation process but also of Azerbaijani culture, its exclusiveness and specific traits. The openness and flexibility of Azerbaijani culture makes easier for cultural globalization to recruit number of its advocators in Azerbaijan.

The results of the survey conducted have proved that Azeri people are considerably occupied with globalization’s impact on their culture, have great anxiety regarding its present and future and see state as most responsible for the current issues, meaning adoption of western life style which is alien to authentic Azerbaijani culture. However the evidence show that the majority of Azerbaijan’s population is rather indifferent and neglectful about losing/ forgetting national Azeri culture.

The role of state in maintaining and protection of cultural heritage is enormous. However the Azerbaijani government has showed little interest in this regard. Most probably it is because of huge problems faced by Azerbaijan since re-gaining its independence. Despite of that I still claim that Mountainous Garabagh Conflict, economic backwardness in all spheres except oil industry and many other related issues cannot serve as justification for the government. Both citizens and the government have to feel and understand their responsibility before the Azerbaijani culture. A range of issues must be conducted in order to preserve Azerbaijani cultural identity. Among them are following ones:

- The Ministry of Tourism and Culture together with the Ministry of Education has to conduct reforms, actively propagate authentic Azerbaijani culture via TV, radio and internet;
- Azerbaijani Parliament has to discuss and adopt laws in the field of culture to protect historical monuments, books, etc.;
- level of national education must be raised, both through attracting highly-qualified specialists from abroad and fostering local ones;
- number of Azerbaijani cultural programs on radio and TV has to be increased;
- secondary school and university instructors have pay particular attention on propagation of Azerbaijani cultural values, discussing Azeri literature, arts, history and music with the representatives of younger generation;
- works of modern writers, journals and newspapers on Azerbaijani history as well as books describing the achievements of former and present people of culture should be written and published.
- amount of modern constructions in Baku city have to be managed and should contain Azeri architectural features in order the city could preserve its “face”.

Globalization has negative impact on Azerbaijani cultural identity; it absorbs the Azerbaijani cultural identity as a lot of people accept what they observe from media and therefore live under the constant influence of western-oriented culture.

The most effective and the only true way to compete with fruits of globalization are to protect and develop local culture. National culture is a national face of any individual. If Azerbaijanis do not want to be “face off”, to lose their cultural heritage, values and traditions they have to apply all efforts to preserve and develop their culture at the same time adapting to foreign cultural traits without damaging their own culture. They have enough potential, strength and energy for achieving this vital task.

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*Summary***GLOBALIZATION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY:
AZERBAIJAN'S CASE**

Gunel Kerimova
(*Khazar University, Azerbaijan*)

This research is dedicated to investigation the relationship between one of the complicated, multi-faceted and currently ongoing processes, namely, globalization and cultural identity exploring the Azerbaijani case. The research's main objective is to find out whether there is a positive or negative relationship between Azerbaijani cultural identity and globalization, whether globalization changes the authentic nature of Azerbaijani culture or it contributes to its preservation and free public expression.

Since the advocators of globalization assert that it does not absorb local cultures into the global western culture and quite contrary, it provides different nations and cultures with opportunities to express themselves, it has become challenging for me to examine changes in Azerbaijani cultural patterns under the impact of globalization.

Azerbaijani culture represents an outstanding example of mixture of various cultures' of peoples (ethnic groups) living in Azerbaijan. Besides it has been exposed to huge influence and inflows from other cultures outside of Azerbaijan Republic. This is due to Azerbaijan's geopolitical disposition, as it is located on the cross-roads of Europe and Asia and historically had as its border neighbors two great empires namely, Russian and Persian Empires with distinct cultural backgrounds.

Since globalization's effects extend on many other spheres of human activity, such as politics, economics and social life, state cannot remain neutral or passive in the processes which globalization impacts on. The underlying assumption of this research is that the state is perceived to be an interested actor in and manager of interactions between globalization process and cultural identity.