



# **Cultural Independence at the Age of Globalization: Challenges and Opportunities in the Eyes of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Founder**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Globalization has made the world so interwoven and interlocked that all social institutions have to be inevitably open to the global networks and flows of wealth, power, and information. Moreover, since the values and lifestyles of the developing countries are the focus of the globalization waves, these waves pound the cultures of these countries in the first place. In fact, globalization has posed numerous challenges to the autonomy of the developing countries. Hence, cultural independence can function as a strong barrier to globalization. Moreover, globalization provides all countries with proper opportunities, and various cultures can grow through mutual interactions and cultural synergies when time and space are downscaled and geographical boundaries are overstepped. Therefore, analyzing the globalization-induced challenges and opportunities of cultural independence with regard to the remarks of the Islamic Republic of Iran's founder was the aim of this research. The descriptive-analytical approach was adopted to answer the question about the globalization-driven opportunities and challenges of cultural independence on Parsons' structural functionalism. The research findings suggested that culture is a dominant system according to Parsons, while the Islamic Republic's founder believed in the determining role of culture. Globalization targets a country's cultural independence as a challenge and sets the scene for cultural interactions and synergies as an opportunity.

**Keywords:** Cultural Independence, Globalization, Challenge, Opportunity

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Every nation's culture is a set of beliefs, customs, values, techniques, manners and behaviors that govern the personal and social relationships in its society. People's attachment to their shared cultural values and historical backgrounds enables them to take a path in life and achieve progress and growth. Cultural values are rooted in the language, religion, nationality, ethnicity, history, and geography of a nation, and

societies manage to forge an identity different from the other societies through the fusion of these areas. Besides, a brief analysis of globalization reveals some of its characteristics. Firstly, globalization is not a one-dimensional limited economic or cultural phenomenon. Rather, it has influenced all social areas. In other words, globalization can never be limited to one area or dimension (e.g. economic or political globalization) as it is all-inclusive. Secondly, globalization is a challenging phenomenon that covers many significant concepts such as security, identity, order, governance, authority, culture, and even sovereignty. It offers various insights into the aforesaid notions. To wit, globalization is no longer limited a state and an effective and suitable range of current events and incidents. Thirdly, globalization is an evolving phenomenon and process rather than a fixed and definitive process. This process entails “becoming”, which surpasses valuable factors and forces such as global communication and international organizations and changes them fundamentally. This process is a movement rather than a fixed state (which is inevitable). It is constantly going through a new phase, and perhaps it is correctly called “global integration”.

Intellectual and cultural dependence is the main disaster spelled for Muslim nations. Dependent states create a negative image on the nations’ minds to set the scene for their ego death, and eventually deprive them of their identity and intellectual independence. Muslims’ major problem is their cultural ego death, and the only solution to ego death and creation of a genuine identity involves cultural evolution and attainment of cultural independence. Islamic Republic of Iran’s founder believes culture is the basis for the corruption or integrity of a society, and believes cultural development paves the way for continuous and repeated national achievements. He believes all types of economic, political, and military dependencies of nations on authoritarian powers originate from their intellectual and cultural dependence. He adds: If the culture of a society is dependent on and originates from an opposing culture, the other dimensions of that society will be inevitably attracted to the opposing culture, merging with that culture and losing their entities in every respect (Khomeini, 1981).

In fact, cultural independence sets the scene for fighting globalization, and it is even possible to take advantage of globalization for the cultural growth and evolution of nations. Since culture and cultural independence had a fundamental role in the thoughts of Ruhollah Khomeini, the former leader of Iran, the solutions proposed by him for protecting cultural independence and integrity against foreign cultures, especially globalization, are analyzed and described, and this is the innovation of this research. The descriptive-analytical approach was employed with Parsons’ structural functionalism to answer the following question: What cultural independence challenges and opportunities does globalization offer?

## Globalization

The concept of globalization refers to the compression of the world and increased awareness about the world, as a whole. The processes and actions subjected to the notion of globalization have been known for centuries, but the use of the term “globalization” is recent. The term globalization was first introduced to the science of economics and different areas of international economics, and then found its way into sociology, politics, and international affairs. Its semantic value was also altered and grew in complexity, hence the evolvment of the pertinent words and concepts (Robertson and Robertson, 1995; Khondker, 1998; Hirst and Thompson, 2002; Robertson and White, 2003; Dreher, 2006; Dreher *et al.*, 2008; 2010; Figge and Martens, 2014; Potrafke, 2014; Martens *et al.*, 2015).

Globalization refers to the intensification of social relations around the globe, because it connects distant areas. Consequently, local incidents are the fruits of accidents that occur miles away. In other words,

globalization is the genesis of a network society that slips across political and economic borders, expands communications, and improves the cultural discourse. In fact, globalization reflects a form of spherical distribution (thoughts, commodities, etc.). Robertson (1992) defines globalization as the process of compressing the world and converting it into a universal space. This phenomenon is both a process and a conceptual framework that is based on a universal concept or order. In this regard, Harvey (1995) believes globalization is conceived through the compression of space and time.

According to Waters (2001), globalization is a social process whereby the geographical constraints governing social and cultural relations are overcome and nations are increasingly informed of relaxation of these constraints.

The main figures that have discussed this concept so far are Ronald Robertson and Anthony Giddens. In “The Consequences of Modernity”, Giddens (1990) defines globalization by discussing the global relationship as a consequence of modernity, which intensifies social relations: Hence, globalization can be defined as the intensification of global social relations, which connect long distances so perfectly that local incidents originate from other events that occur miles away, vice versa. This is a dialectic process, because these local events may unfold in the direction opposite to the distant relationships that give birth to them. Moreover, local transformation as an extension of social relationships in the domains of time and space is, in fact, part of the globalization process. Hence, whoever studies modern cities all around the globe knows that whatever happens in a city neighborhood is definitely shaped by factors such as the performance of the global monetary and commodity markets, which function remotely.

In the most common public use of globalization it is described as internationalization, because they believe in the increased interaction and mutual dependencies of different nations. Therefore, given the increased number of foreign transactions, many people define globalization as internationalization. However, internationalization was not the equivalent of globalization in the past and only referred to international relationships. In fact, the growing mutual dependences and correlations among countries led to this definition.

The definition proposed by the International Committee in 1995, which encompasses all definitions, is perhaps the most inclusive definition: Globalization refers to the integration of economics, sociology, politics, culture, and behaviors through the negation of borders, national connections, and state actions.

Based on the definitions proposed in this research, globalization is defined as follows: Globalization is the intensification of social relations around the globe, which connects distant areas so strongly that the incidents in one neighborhood originate from incidents that occur miles away. To wit, globalization is the genesis of a network society that slips across the political and economic borders, expands communications, and improves cultural interaction.

## **Cultural Independence**

Pre-globalization cultural independence was described as all of the customs, traditions, and exclusive characteristics of a country. However, with the dawn of globalization and elimination of the roles of time and space in this process, the concept of cultural independence underwent a semantic evolution as a result of the communications revolution and the interaction and introduction of different cultures. At the age of globalization, the top political powers seek to export their culture to the other nations and try to undermine the national states, identities, and local cultures by controlling the media and different

communication bridges. As a result, the state/nation gradually loses its function as an undisputed territory with clear cultural boundaries, while sovereignty over cultural boundaries calls for new mechanisms. The relationship between the citizens and the state changes, nationalism fades away, and citizenship becomes only one of the several possible identities. There are also identities that can compete with the citizenship of national government, which are the non-territorial concepts of the political space. Hence, the boundaries are not solely political as cultural, ethnical, and economic boundaries result in new cultural, ethnical and economical identities.

“Culture is a complicated combination of material objects and ideas, is fostered by the public or group members, and is used for the organization of their social life. This definition stresses several points: 1) a culture is a human creation; 2) a culture is a complicated entity; 3) objects and ideas constitute a culture; 4) a culture is determined by the circumstances; 5) a culture is a means of organizing humans’ lives on the personal and social levels.

People, social groups, and several generations use each other’s experiences to foster and promote their culture. The future generations are also enabled to change the culture inherited from the previous generations and present their perception of their cultural background with regard to the environmental circumstances.

In his famous definition of culture, Edward Burnett Tylor (1971), the well-known British anthropologist, suggests that this concept is synonymous and associated with the concept of civilization. He describes the manifestation of culture as follows: A culture or civilization is generally a complicated ethnologic concept that includes the understandings, beliefs, arts, moralities, rights, customs, traditions and other features or habits acquired by a human as a member of the society. The important aspect of Tylor’s definition is that it is not normative. In Tylor’s eyes, culture covers the entirety of human’s social life. Hence, his definition is not limiting and exclusive. In other words, he believes culture is not owned by certain societies and only a part of humanity. The distinctive characteristic of this definition is its collective aspect. Moreover, under Tylor’s definition, culture is acquisitive and cannot be deemed hereditary.

According to Parsons (1951), culture requires a technology which is generally a combination of empirical knowledge and scientific techniques. In addition, culture is a set of society-specific values and beliefs, and protection of culture plays a determining role in the survival of a society.

In another definition of cultural independence, it could be stated that cultural independence refers to the lack of intellectual and value-related dependences on foreign countries, which enables the nation to live with its own thoughts, tendencies, and intellectual properties. In another definition, cultural independence is described as the protection of culture and national identity against cultural invasions.

The accurate explanation of the notion of cultural independence and its dimensions calls for an accurate understanding of the notion of culture and different dimensions of culture. Tylor (1994) argues that beliefs, arts, mortalities, rights, customs, traditions, and other competencies or habits are acquired by humans from society. He does not generally classify them as norms and describes them as features acquired by will and determination. In other words, he assumes a complementary role for culture, which refers to a form of education for humans’ minds. This type of education is provided unconsciously to people under the influence of an internal culture, creating their identity. When a nation shares the same mentalities, thoughts, beliefs, customs, habits and intellectual capitals as well as the same perceptions of the related concepts, it has a special culture that is different from the culture of other nations and societies. In the discussions of cultural independence and its dimensions, the goal is to unveil the cultural and value-

related beliefs of a nation. These values are not influenced by other societies and it is exclusive only to one nation. All of these reflect the shared history and background of a society with a specific geography, which account for its distinction and identity.

Today, ultramodern colonialism and globalization focus on a deeper and more fundamental factor, which is culture, instead of military occupation or clear political dominance. The goal is to change the genuine culture of societies by creating a culture. In this regard, dominators use acceptable and non-acceptable cultural and advertising instruments and the media to dominate the weak countries. Invasion and alteration of the culture and values of other societies is also on the agenda of ultramodern colonialism. The other dimensions of independence are rooted in cultural independence, and cultural dominance is the true form of dominance that is exerted. To wit, if a nation can influence another nation by its culture, beliefs, customs, and values, and deprive that nation of its culture, customs, traditions, and values, it has gained true dominance over that nation. Cultural independence results in the institutionalization of values and norms, which eventually leads to resistance to a foreign culture. Hence, the values and culture of each society is the key to its independence.

### **Parsons' Structural Functionalism**

The structural functionalism theory not only explores the functions and outcomes of social phenomena but also governs the sustainable continuous relationship between the elements of a society and the entire social system. Every structure that is composed of sustainable fixed relations corresponds to a series of social functions. Therefore, structural functionalism has two sources of inspiration: a form of functionalism that views society as a combination of elements that function properly and are necessary for the entire system; it defines a function as a group of activities performed to meet one or several social needs. The other source is a form of structuralism in which social phenomena are analyzed with regard to the society's structural quality.

In this case, there is a hidden continuous relationship among different elements in the set. In structural functionalism, the requisite for survival of a social system is the delivery of the fundamental social functions, and each structure is formed of the functional necessities of the social system. The functional necessities and demands of a social system are stressed in this approach. Every social system tends to fulfill duties to survive, and social structures are responsible for these needs. Parsons defines social life as a special living creature. The idea of social life as a system (a network of different elements) explains the structural component of this theory, while the idea of a biological system explains the functional dimension. Hence, Parsons uses the term "structural functionalism" to define his theory. A social action system such as human body has needs that have to be met in order for the system to survive. It also has components that work to meet those needs. All living systems tend to establish a balance or a sustainable balanced relationship among different components and survive regardless the other systems. The most pivotal notion in the functionalism theory is the notion of "function", which represents an outcome or effect that allows for the conformity of a certain structure or its components to the related environment.

Hence, in functionalism, a function is an outcome or consequence of a phenomenon in the process of stabilization, survival, and integration of a social system. In other words, it explores every social phenomenon or institution based on its relationships with an entire society (which includes that phenomenon or institution). Parsons has defined four functional duties for the action system, which are as follows: adaptation (economics); attainment of goals (politics); integrity (law), and protection of patterns

(culture). Every action system refers to a set of action elements serving to motivate the actors. Parsons describes this dimension of the action system as the retention of cultural models. Every system must renovate the personal motivations and cultural patterns that create and protect these motives (Parsons, 1951; 1971).

Parsons (1951) believes in the determining role of culture in society and suggests any change in a culture triggers evolutions in other dimensions. Every society revolves around some established norms, values, and beliefs. Parsons defined culture as a major force that connects the various elements of every social system. Culture mediates the mutual interaction between actors by fusing the social identity and system. Culture can be a part of other systems, and Parsons defines culture as an organized patterned system of symbols, which include the actors' orientations, the established dimensions of the identity system, and the institutionalized social system patterns. The possibility of transfer of a culture from one system to another originates from the mental and symbolic nature of culture. Parsons concluded that moral criteria and measures are the "integrating tactics governing the action system". In Parsons' theory, culture is a dominant system and thus he calls himself a cultural determinist.

According to Parsons' definition, a culture is a dominant system, and thus the view point of Ruhollah Khomeini, the founder of Islamic Republic of Iran, on cultural independence can be analyzed within the framework of this theory, because he believed in the pivotal role of culture.

## **The Place of Cultural Independence in the Viewpoint of the Islamic Republic of Iran's Founder**

The founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran favored a fundamental and infrastructural approach to the notion of "culture", and believed the development of this important element could bring about continuous repeated success to mankind, who is tired of the polarity driven by gold and coercion. It can also enable humans to utilize their assets in line with their advancement goals and interests. This is because in his view, the economic, political, and military dependence of nations on authoritarian powers is rooted in their cultural and intellectual dependence and this important factor must be valued at the beginning of any reformist movement. The founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran also believes that national survival must be pursued through the channels of culture and universities. Besides, cultural reform is the mother of all reforms. He believed cultural independence has such a great role in the destiny of societies regardless of their religion and nationality that it is the origin of independence and the existence of every society. Therefore, he believed the assumption about the attainment of independence in other dimensions despite cultural dependence was naïve.

He believed culture has such a major role in the political and social lives of societies that it can bring maximum dignity or power as well as downfall to a nation (Khomeini, 1981).

The political independence and lives of societies are contingent upon a native independent culture, without which nations may be easily dominated by others. Dominance is triggered when a society has a weak dependent culture. Preservation of independence in other areas is impossible without a strong rooted culture that functions as a firm barrier to the intellectual, economic, and political dominance and the influence of other societies, and paves the way for the dominance of stronger societies over the weaker societies. Furthermore, cultural independence results in other forms of dependence, because culture forges the identity and existence of a nation, and a dependent personal identity and existence are manifested in

all dimensions. Khomeini stresses the preservation and protection of the culture and identity of societies from foreigners to enable them to experience material and eternal bliss. In his view, a desirable culture is an independent culture for he believes cultural independence is the basis for national freedom and independence. One way of achieving cultural independence and protecting the nation's existence is by valuing the divine culture that raises committed individuals, who refuse the foreigners' dominance and do not let their culture, which is the identity of their society, be influenced by foreign norms and values (Khomeini, 1981).

Khomeini was among the very first intellectuals that used the word "culture" in Iran and significantly valued it. He believed culture is the source of any success in a country. In numerous speeches, he repeatedly asserted that culture is the origin of progress and reform in every country. He believed colonial countries prevent the growth of culture in their colonies as well as the intellectual and cultural independence of the human capitals of their colonies, i.e. the youth. From the beginning, they try to separate the human capitals of their colonies from their religious and national values. In his view, culture influences every dimension as the root of all. It must also be independent and in line with the national, religious, and specific roots of the nation, because culture forges the identity of the nation. Hence, if colonialists impose their western culture on Islamic and non-Islamic colonies, those nations have to inevitably imitate the foreign culture because they are convinced their national and religious culture is the cause of their poverty and inferiority, whereas the foreign culture is the cause of development and growth.

## **Globalization Challenges to Cultural Independence**

Concerning the imposed cultures and the powers imposing those cultures, the founder of Islamic Republic of Iran says that the independent and correct cultures of the colonies are harmful to the colonialists because the colonies become aware of their colonial actions and fight them. Hence, they prevent the influence of Islam and clericalism as well as the education of the nation by Islam and clericalism. He believed if the politicians are educated by the noble Islam rather than the innovated Islam promoted by colonialists, the hidden desires of these colonialists and their goals are ruined. Hence, they have no choice other than introducing innovations to Islam and promoting the innovated religion until they can use the innovations to create a colonial culture, which is a deviated dependent culture that is untouched by the intellectuals and thinkers. They do not seek the opinion of their own scholars such as physicians, politicians, and clergies to only pursue their own interests.

He believed there were local advocates of these colonial cultures, who tried to suppress their people and their opposition. They introduced Reza Shah as one of these actors, who received the kingdom from them but they exiled him to Agaléga or what they called "hell" only for one act of disobedience, because the colonial culture grants no independence or right. The king's title is also fake and Reza Shah and other kings like him only have the mission of meeting the western colonialists' demands as traitors to their own countries. They have no right to oppose or make any remark. They also believed the Iranian nation had a rich old culture on account of their very long history of building schools, hospitals, and universities, educating skilled physicians and professors, who were mentioned in the historical books. "Why should the Iranian nation, who was leading many western countries in the past, bring physicians, engineers, etc. from abroad to perform the simplest activities?" He raised such questions to challenge the public and make them think deeply about the importance of culture and cultural independence versus the colonial

and dependent cultures. He adopted the same approach to all dimensions even in social, economic, and military areas but he believed culture and cultural roots were the most important factors (Khomeini, 1981).

## **Globalization Opportunities to Cultural Independence**

Ruhollah Khomeini approved of some of the positive dimensions of the western culture and civilization but also asserted that the west keeps the advantages for itself and rarely shares them with other countries. Even if it does offer the advantages to the other countries, it is definitely pursuing certain goals. He believed the most important positive dimension of the western civilization is composed of scientific, technological, and industrial advances and stressed his approval of this positive dimension. In addition, he suggested that Islam admires specialty and expertise and invites Muslims to acquire knowledge. Islam encourages Muslims to learn sciences even from pagans to serve their country and Islam. He also described other positive dimensions of the western civilization and utilized them in line with his Islamic viewpoints. Some of these advantages are the new institutions such as the election system, the parliament, the power division system, and parties. Given the importance of expediency, the necessity of adapting to contemporary needs, and governance efficiency in his school of thought, he put many political and governmental structures and new western notions into play. He believed also these structures had positive beneficial advantages (Khomeini, 1981).

## **CONCLUSION**

The overarching goal of this study was to analyze the post-globalization challenges and opportunities of cultural independence with regard to the viewpoints of the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran. To this end, the descriptive-analytical approach was employed along with Parsons' structural functionalism. As Parsons believes a culture is a dominant system, Ruhollah Khomeini also believes in the determining role of culture. To wit, the challenging aspect of globalization targets a country's cultural independence, whereas it can set the scene for cultural interactions and synergies (opportunities). In Khomeini's eyes, the western culture is not a whole and its strengths can be summoned at the age of globalization. In sum, the thoughts and remarks of the former leader of Iran suggest that political independence must originate from cultural independence.

In other words, even if the attainment of political independence is not impossible without the attainment of cultural independence and struggles, it is at least highly improbable. The research findings suggest that culture is a dominant system according to Parsons, while the Islamic Republic's founder believed in the determining role of culture. Globalization targets a country's cultural independence as a challenge and sets the scene for cultural interactions and synergies as an opportunity.

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