From National to Post-national: Cultural Identity in a Globalized World

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Résumé: *Dans le nouveau contexte mondial de la globalisation, l'identité culturelle revêt une importance capitale du fait du mélange entre les peuples. Partout, les intellectuels sont appelés à réfléchir sur la nouvelle dimension à donner à cette notion. En effet, parce que le monde est devenu aujourd'hui un village planétaire où les barrières culturelles qui autrefois distinguaient les peuples et les nations et fixaient leurs limites sont progressivement abaissées au profit d'une culture de masse, l'identité culturelle semble ne plus avoir de sens. Les idéologies protectionnistes jadis utilisées pour défendre les identités culturelles nationales sont menacées, bouleversées voire remplacées par des identités globales. Comme un résultat, la culture ou l'identité culturelle traverse les frontières nationales pour devenir post-nationales. C'est dans cette sorte de « crise identitaire » que cet article explore la problématique de l'identité culturelle en montrant ce passage du national au post-national, de l'individuel au collectif.*
Mots-clés: *globalisation, l'identité culturelle, les barrières culturelles*

Since the 1980s, when the term globalization became more and more used in world vocabulary, one of the leading concerns of the international community is the melting of cultures. Mass production, which brings with it an ideology of competition and rapid exchange of goods and consequently the rush for commercial outlets, calls for a reshaping of the diverse national cultures. Today, to conquer a market, one must adopt a policy based mostly on consumer culture. This greatly impacts the production policy and helps efficiently meet clients' needs. As such, culture acts as a crux in the new international relations. From different parts of the globe, several summits are held that focus on apprehending the world as a unique body or making national cultures fuse into one huge universal mass culture. But this does not mean that national cultures no longer exist or must be totally swallowed up. On the contrary, while continuing to exist independently, they must create a unity that takes into account their differences. Clearly, each of these individual and different cultures, while keeping its specificity, must feed the other cultures and borrow from them in turn. In so doing, they create a climate of interexchange based on mutual feeding. Each culture leaves its area of influence to inter that of the other. By choosing cultural identity in a globalized world as the focus of this paper, we intend to analyze this interexchange, this movement from inside to the outside.

Culture is what defines and differentiates peoples, communities, and nations. It consists of characteristics in spirit, knowledge, and sentiment, as well as in the material conditions of a society or a group of societies. It is not only expressed through literature and art, but also as lifestyles, systems of values, traditions, and beliefs. Every people, community or nation has its own culture that evolves in time and space. Does a community or a group lack it then it appears as a rootless tree. Traditionally, culture served as a typifying matrix to distinguish a people from another. At that time, populations acted not only in terms of what was common to their group, but also in terms of what made them different from their neighbours. To define their distinction, motifs, symbols, languages, among other things, were used as specific identification markers that codified their behaviour while determining their ways of living. Moving from one group or region to another made one notice the cultural diversities.

But today, with the push of globalization, these markers are destabilized and moulded in a universal single pattern wherein identification is questioned not as individuality but as togetherness, wholeness and belonging. In its course, globalization tends to shift away the then uniqueness and individual cultural assumption and consumption. The growth of cross-cultural contacts, result of new categories of *consciousness* and identities which embodies cultural diffusion, the desire to increase and improve one's standard of living and enjoy foreign products and ideas, adopt new technology and practices, and participate in a "world culture." As Pham Duy Duc (2006, 26) painstakingly puts it:

The boom in information technology has stimulated the spread of communications systems beyond geographical borders. Interactive relations among nations are at a much higher level than previously. Communications media, the key tools of globalization, have become the main factor for cultural diversification. The fact that cultures have been turned into cultural industries stimulates "cultural capitalism" to impose rules on the cultural market that resemble the rules for ordinary trading of goods. Cultural industries, with their increasing sales, are attracting investors for huge profit.

It turns out that in global context, cultural identity does not stress the diversity of cultures, but how this diversity creates commonality. As such, global context urges the unification of the diversified world cultures in a macrocosm of cultural production, practice and consumption. Cultural diversity brushes away the ancient protection of isolationism and the preservation of national cultural traits no longer serve the maintenance of isolation or conservationism. On the other hand, cultural diversity must not be a conflict between foreign and national cultures. It must be a field of respect for global values and protection of the rights of individuals.

The global context of cultural identity, as we seek to analyze it, focuses on the mutual recognition or respect for cultural diversity expressed through tolerance and dialogue. In these circumstances, it refers to what Robert Holton (2000, 141) calls in his discussion of the cultural consequences of globalization, "the hybridization or syncretism thesis" that is, the approach in which globalization "encourages the blending of the diverse set of cultural repertoires made available through cross-border exchange." Holton's thesis is greatly nurtured by the movement between cultures through such mechanisms as migration, cross-border employment and colonization. All these phenomena influence the melting of cultures and feed the notion of globalization.

There are many opportunities for cultural exchange, thence for cultural melting and for the creation of hybrid cultural identities. For instance, the migration of workers as in the case of the staff of international organizations such as the United Nations (UN) or officers appointed in foreign countries, are interesting sources of cultural melting insofar as once in their new work places, these workers realize that the success of their mission depends on their adaptation to their new environments. In the same way, political exiles or refugees, intermarriages between people from different cultures also constitute important sources of cultural exchange. In all these situations, the concerned people lose in some way their cultural identity for a hybrid one that serves as mediation between their native culture and that of their "new" community. Should they deny this fact they will fail to integrate this new community.

Cultural melting or exchange is also achieved through international sport meetings such as the Olympic Games, the World Athletic Championship, the Soccer World Cup, etc. Here, too, hybridization reaches a peak during the period of the competition for the athletes as well as for their fans. Usually, at the opening of the competition, a flag heading the parade of the competing countries always symbolizes the spirit of fair-play the organizers expect. It invites the athletes to respect the game and consider it as a means of international union and integration, tolerance, and brotherhood among people and nations. And whilst athletes, on the play grounds compete despite the challenges (medals, cups, and trophies), fans in the stadiums and those in many parts of the world, in front of their television sets, share their joy. Former adversities are sacrificed on the altar of the game if only for the duration of the competition, to give place to cheerfulness and amusement. Also, sport can help two countries with a long-term division to renew their relations. For instance, during the Beijing Olympic Games, North and South Korean leaders agreed to operate the railway linking the two countries to allow people from South Korea to travel to Beijing by train.

To the above examples, we can add the intercultural exchange between developed countries and their former colonies. A good example is found in francophone or Anglophone

African countries that are influenced by the cultures of their former colonizers. This is almost the same situation in the other colonized societies worldwide. Today, in light of globalization, we see in these former colonies a sort of melting between local cultures and those of the colonizers through language, food, etc. and even intermarriages. Another interesting point that is gaining popularity is the shift from multiculturalism to a form of monoculture in which no distinction exists as everyone shifts between various lifestyles in terms of music, cloth and other aspects firmly attached to a single culture. What happens thus is that there is not mere cultural assimilation but the obliteration of cultures. As such, globalization acts as a vehicle for cultural transformation and serves to break the former cultural fortresses.

Cultural identity under globalization exemplifies a postcolonial reading of culture. In fact, as a process intended to combat the residual effects of colonialism on cultures, post-colonialism is concerned with how the world can move toward mutual respect. As such, the former individual cultural systems must be rethought, reorganized, and recontextualized in such a way as to integrate those that have long been marginalized. This calls into play the clearing of space for multiple voices, those voices that have been previously silenced by dominant ideologies. The world has long evolved as a place where dominant ideologies and their subsequent cultures have always been imposed as norms. As such, weaker cultures have been put under the influence of powerful ones. And the fact that this has widespread consequences for the nature and scale of global cultural unity makes the project of the reorganization of the new world system all the more urgent. According to David Slater (1998, 653), "the post-colonial can be deployed to foreground the mutually constructive role played by colonizer and colonized, or centre and periphery – in other words, rather than remain within a frame that only sees a one-way power relation between the dominant and the dominated or the exploiter and the exploited, the post-colonial turn recognizes that in these dynamic interactions both entities in the relation are affected, albeit in different ways." The new world cultural system must combat the hegemonies and create an environment of self-recognition and respect among the cultures. By exposing and deconstructing their racist, imperialist nature, the dominant cultural ideologies lose their power of persuasion and coercion. Henceforth, the cultures act as mutually feeding elements and help create a place where we recover ourselves, where we meet in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer and otherness. This is what D. Paul Schafer (1996, 286) accurately points out when he talks about the "need for a new world system":

> If a more effective world system is to be created in the future, much will depend on humanity's ability to size up the present system and assess its strengths and shortcomings. While this is an exceedingly difficult task and can only be attended to here in an all-too-brief and cursory manner, it simply must be done if humanity is to make informed and intelligent choices about the future courses of planetary civilization. While many forces have shaped the present world system, clearly economics and economies, in general, and technology, development, specialization and science, in particular, have played a central role. Not only are relations between individuals, institutions, governments, countries, continents, the human species, other species and nature as a whole conducted largely in terms of these forces, but also these forces play the pivotal role in keeping the world system functioning and intact.

Much debate has taken place regarding how to effectively and fairly incorporate the subaltern voice into planetary mass-culture. With such a huge endeavour, globalization embarks in its course, cultures and/or cultural changes in a sense of imbrications and interconnections. The idea of "otherness" and strict cultural frontier is finally pushed backward as people more and more cluster and group, national or transnational systems become more integrated. Unquestionably, the frame of the new world system and the demands of populations impose such a new attitude. This does not depend on the will of policy makers but rather on how the world itself is growing and how demanding individuals

and societies are being constructed. The new frame of the world also includes transformation of cultures.

In fact, cultural transformation or cultural change refers to the dynamic process whereby living cultures are influenced by external or internal forces. This is occurring within all the cultures of the world. Among these forces, there is *globalization*. The question is not simply the need for a new world system but a viable one for the future. Cultures around the world are undergoing change due to environmental stresses, such as climate change, and other forces. All the same, the push of global systems and increased consumerism threaten national cultures to the point that they are progressively swallowed up. In such circumstances, many populations are losing their cultural identities dear to them. This explains why some of the communities really oppose when it comes to open their frontiers to foreign world even if they praise the merits of globalization. As political scientist Samuel Huntington (1996) has well stated in his book: *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, "people's cultures and religious identities will be the primary source of conflict in the post-Cold War world." The current clash between the west and the Islamic worlds is an example of this. Also, the huge tax imposed by the United States on Chinese textile entering American market is a good example as this textile flow greatly threatens local production. However, this must not be a hindrance to the melting of cultures.

Today the perspective of cultural identity embraces all human activities as "art, social, political, educational, religious, spiritual, economic and technological activities." (D. Paul Schafer, 289) This sheds light on the development of cultures as wholes and invites to view culture from a holistic standpoint that is, this "tendency in nature to form wholes that are greater than the sum of the parts through creative evolution." Because it is undeniable to imagine a culture that has not contributed to the evolution of humankind in every part of the world, humanity needs to construct a more viable world system. On the other hand, the necessity to apprehend culture under globalization in a holistic perspective is that globalization itself, as it is conceived and expected to rule the world, is holistic. And even though many anti-globalization advocates argue that it exacerbates or deepens the divide between the haves and the haves not, the rich and the poor, or the developed and the underdeveloped worlds, one must acknowledge its important role in the international relations today. It has framed the world system and continues to do so as a process of unification. It greatly contributes to reduce disparities (even if in theory because a careful scrutiny helps understand that it mostly benefits to developed countries with their giant multinationals and communication systems against which underdeveloped and developing countries cannot resist). It reduces fragmentations and chaos in a world that is more turned toward specialization. It therefore delineates the study of culture as a unitary process rather than a divisive one. This process has a great deal to do with the cultural interpretation of history in so far as the past combines with the present to construct the future. Studying the history of a culture inevitably calls for the analysis of the history of the communities that produce this culture. The more a community evolves the more its culture is subject to transformation. New elements are brought in and others removed through exchange with other cultures and communities. Like a human being who transforms while growing up, a culture needs transformation to adapt and adjust the need of its population.

We are not much concerned with a new world cultural system wherein all the cultures will equate. On the contrary, the new world cultural system we encourage must be a platform where the different cultures, instead of evolving as opposing, conflicting or equal forces, nourish each other. This is where the notion of holism takes all its meaning and trenchant assertion. And the world of sport offers very good examples. The flag of the Olympic Games, for instance, with its five interlocking rings demonstrates this:
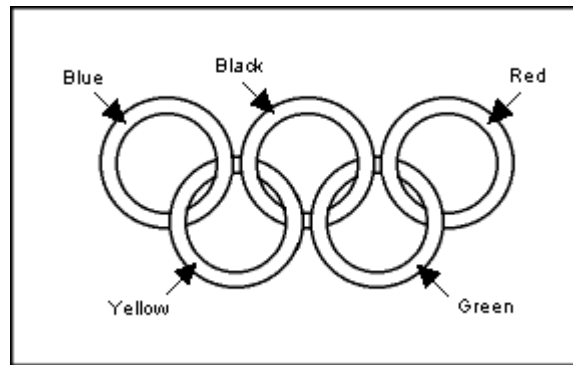
In fact, designed by the Frenchman Baron Pierre de Coubertin in 1912, the Olympic Rings is very symbolic. Its five interlocking rings (blue, yellow, black, green, and red) on a white ground represent the five continents of the world that are joined together in the Olympic movement: Africa, America, Asia, Australia and Europe including the Middle East which is now geopolitically referred to as if it were a separate continent. The symbolism of the interlocking rings is to show that the Olympic Games are intended for all nations to come and compete against one another in unity. The five rings colours and the white background contain at least one colour of every nation's flag in them (*http://www.enchantedlearning.com/olympics/printouts/ Flag.shtml*). Their interlinking together evidences the idea of togetherness, of unity that the organizers constantly seek during each Games. Also, the motto of the Olympic Games, "faster, higher, stronger" has a symbolic significance. It may suggest an invitation to all the nations partaking in the competition to help build the world in an elevated and a stronger spirit for it is through unity that the world will be strong. And considering all the sources of tension, we can say that there is actually emergency for such a unity.

The cultural fabric of the new world system to create must vehicle a similar spirit and ideology. Cultures must be interlocked in a sense of unity and not as individual entities. But at the same time, contrary to the spirit of competition underlining the Olympic Games, they must feed each other since in their interaction there must be no winner, no looser or no superior/inferior hierarchy. The particularity of their interrelation lies in the fact that they all gain something. Because globalization is marked by the hollowing out of national cultural spaces, such an approach is fundamentally important. This highlights what Kevin Archer and Al (2007, 4) term the "'Global Turn' in Cultural Studies." According to them,

> One reason for the global turn in cultural studies is that scholars in this school of thought have typically studied mass-mediated forms of culture, including music, television, film and advertisements, fast foods and fashion – cultural forms that are relatively easily produced, circulated, adopted, recoded and recontextalized in multiple locations – as evidence and examples of the globalization theory of culture.

This is all the more evident as in the world today, films, food, music, television, and fashion constitute important material sources for cultural construction. Through them, a sort of universal culture is set up. Today, Arnold Schwarzenegger's achievements in film emulate people around the world. Those of Batman and Harry Potter captivate the attention of young children. Fashion shows are the occasion of great meetings where people not only come to celebrate the expertise of designers and pattern makers but mostly with the hope of discovering dressing novelties. We also remember how Michael Jackson drew the attention of young people to the point that in every corner of the world, there are doubles trying to sing and/or dance like him. Many are younger generations who dream of becoming like Kristiano Ronaldo, Lionel Messi, Zinedine Zidane, Kaká and other great planetary soccer players. Advertisements are also a good source of influence and of cultural production. A good

advertisement can entice people to buy even the worst product. And while urging them to buy a product, it creates a sort of cultural spirit. We have the case of Coca Cola during the Soccer World Cup and Apple's "iphone new generation" in the field of mobile phone. It is not that the products of these firms are bad. But because their advertisements are well done, a great number of people are eager to buy them. All this testifies to the idea that cultural studies need to be recontextualized and readjusted according to the evolution and the needs of populations. New forms of cultures or of cultural productions are being created which are not based on the traditional practice. Culture therefore is no longer something typical to an individual, a people or a community but a grass-root network or movement of cultural consumption tiding people together in a universal set. For in the above examples, one need not belong to a specific cultural area or community to partake in the production of the culture. As such, the notion of culture crosses national borders. Culture then becomes aggressive but in its aggressiveness, it remains constructive and unifying.

Another interesting field of production of global culture is the communicative network. Through the production of new cultural spaces, the non-state system is de-centered through the proliferation of global flows and disjuncture in a transnational or de-territorialized fashion. This situation is highly perceptible in the field of communication where formerly long and inaccessible distances are now made shorter and easily accessible through technologies. As Angela M. Crack (2007, 346) points out, "temporal and spatial barriers to distanced communication have been eradicated by ICTs[7], opening up deliberate spaces that may hold emancipator potential. A precondition of transnational public sphere is communicative networks that enable broad participation across state borders," which David Harvey (1989) also refers to as "time-space compression." Indeed, a cultural identity can be developed through communication. A country may have its specific communication brand through which it develops its cultural identity. By using this brand, the user consciously or unconsciously consumes this culture, a kind of symbolic cannibalism one must say. For instance, when we decide to send a package at the international level through UPS or DHL, we certainly consume the American vision of sending packages. And this vision is an aspect of their culture, their way of conquering world market. This is all the same with the internet that almost tends to supplant all the other modes of communication due to its speed, its saving of time, and reliability.

Today, we can speak of a culture of internet. Through this communication network, a customer may remain in his or her office and by a simple click, purchase a product from a supplier in another part of the world regardless of the distance, without wasting time and also without spending much money and paperwork as if he or she used the traditional mode of order which consists in sending letters, facsimiles and giving endless telephone calls. We can also communicate with people from all over the world. Traditionally, African populations living in villages used to vehicle messages by means of drums or through messengers; most of the times on foot. By drums, messages are passed from a given village to the next till the whole region concerned got the news. This process usually took a lot of time to reach the addressee. Sometimes, when it is from word to mouth, they did not reach the addressee or they underwent progressive transformation on the way. It may therefore be said that at that time, communicative culture was too disparate as each region managed its network as it could.

But in this global context, this former process and many other old fashioned conceptions or practices have greatly changed. There is actually a necessity for the creation of a new cultural world system which addresses a reorganization of world cultural cartography. For Kevin and al. (2007, 121), this move means "to recognize that the modernist

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[7] Information and Communication Technologies.

territorial state, which hitherto has provided the framework for some groups to construct cultural power over others, is now under siege as a result of globalization." As we said earlier, in terms of global culture, the world is concerned with how to construct a cultural framework that is beyond nation-state. This supposes that the conception of culture and cultural spaces is an unfinished project and must be re-imagined, renegotiated, and reinvented. This is all the more obvious as cultures and cultural spaces are open to transformation with the continuous transformations of human relations. Recognizing the nation-state as an unfinished project implies a reconsideration of other cultural facts salient for understanding a post-nation-state cultural world (Ibid). This is synonymous with drawing culture from national to post-national.

In the same way as the internet, world politics can also produce global culture through international organizations such as the UN. This organization is expected to regulate and harmonize world politics. In so doing, it produces integrated global governance networks. Global governance, for Angela M. Crack (op.cit., 349), "does not mean that the distinction between international and domestic is being eroded, nor does it translate into the retreat of the state. On the contrary, the state has considerable powers and exclusive competencies. Most significantly, states retain nominal sovereignty in terms on entitlement to rule, which is a strong tool of negotiation. They occupy a privileged position in the network as a node of strategic importance." But she further states that global governance compromises state sovereignty in terms of autonomy to act independently and to deliver policy programs. Also, decision-making and policy formation are shaped by different actors.

The contradiction in Crack's idea exposes the difficulties of the above organization to implement effective policies and to create global context. For at the same time states have considerable competencies and powers in global governance, they lose their autonomy to deliver policy programs. Thus, as a way of expressing that they have control of their authority, many countries violate or do not respect the decisions of this organization, compromising the global governance policy. Finally, instead of being an instrument for the promotion of dialogue and mobilization by insuring the member countries to remain in the dynamic of global context, it is rather manipulated by the latter. Many examples illustrate this situation. We have the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which appears now as an ordinary dispute between neighbours. Several international treaties or resolutions have been signed which have never been respected by either party. And the UN is unable to find a solution. All the same, in other parts of the world, it shows its inefficiency and its manipulation by some member countries. For example, it cannot solve the problem between Russia and the Chechen separatists, those of Tibet, Iran, to quote the few. In the same vein, it could not dissuade the United States to attack Iraq. In the Ivorian conflict, it has always let France decide on all the resolutions on the pretext that this country better knows Côte d'Ivoire. It is clear, far from settling world disputes and harmonizing world politics, the UN is either manipulated by rich countries to put pressure on poor ones or defied by some non developed countries such as Iran as a defence of their national sovereignty or identity. Nevertheless, despite the weaknesses and failures noted here and there due to the defiance or the bad faith of some member countries, it remains a key instrument in conflict resolution and peace maintenance in the world; which constitutes an essential element in the creation of global context and the production of mass culture.

Cultural identity is a permanent social construction. As such, it has greatly been mobilized in the street and has led to so many bloody conflicts as national identity groups conflict among themselves or against foreign ones. In many cases, these conflicts occur as a result of some people's refusal to recognize other people's identities or cultures or else, as an after effect of mutual excluding situations. Thus, one of the main theses – real or not – of the attack against the World Trade Center in September 2001 was that the authors were

protesting against America's alleged oppression of Muslims and lack of consideration for their religion. By perpetrating this act and killing innocent people, they drew the attention of the world on their situation and also claimed reparation for being segregated against. Through their act, we see a desire to construct a cultural identity which appears as a cultural resistance even though not done in a recommended way.

A careful scrutiny of the reasons of this attack gives way to two possible interpretations. On the one hand, if we suppose that the argument of the authors is true that is, they acted in response to their being culturally discriminated against, then, we may say that the new world project and consequently the global system to construct is compromised by America that pretends to be one of the greatest defenders of globalization ideology. But on the other hand, if that is not the case, then the assailants might have acted on pure fundamentalism, compromising in turn the same project. And knowing that fundamentalism always thwarts any constructive project whatever the domain, we may conclude that anyone acting on its behalf hinders the evolution of the world. In the particular case of this analysis, this act constitutes a hindrance to the construction of a world global cultural system.

In the global system, there is no place for group identification. The claim for cultural identities must be an enterprise which aims to eliminate individual consideration of culture and cultural fixity must progressively disappear. New opportunities for self-determination based on new codifications of belonging must be erected. The key to the nation-state project is to construct collective identity that is, "a sense of 'belonging,' among individuals increasingly being individuated as competing beings by primitive accumulation, the division of social and factory labour, market competition, reformed Christianity through secularism, democratic citizenry, utilitarian-rational bureaucracy, and so on." (Ibid, 124) While being constructed at the level of the nation, collective identity must at the global level be reinforced through openness, fluidity, and hybridity. This recalls Robert Holton's thesis of hybridization or syncretism we referred to earlier namely, the slow but sure mechanism of cultural construction through migration and cross-border exchange.

The transformation of the nation-state cultural project in the global context must open up the possibility for a true, universalizing cohabitation between cultures. The recognition of the other voices or else, the suppression of extreme otherness must lead to a post-nation-state imaginary of cultural identities for the emergence of greater and emerging global society based on mutual respect and tolerance of the cultural other. Indeed, the evolution of populations and the reconfiguration of world cultural spaces create promiscuity that populations cannot deny. No one can therefore live isolated. This social situation has no connection with personal or communal will but it is the result of the new world reality that forces one to take into account one's neighbors. One cannot construct one's cultural identity independently to that of the neighbour. The new cultural system then, if we are to live in a peaceful and homogenous world, must operate according to this state of affairs. Cultural melting remains therefore the basement of the future global society.

The need for a new world cultural system today is an essential concern. Face to the multiple crises occurring as the expression of individual or collective cultural identities, debates are held on how to conciliate the divergent positions into a unifying global prospective. The former ideologies of domination and positioning that have led to misunderstanding and so many tragic situations are still rampant. Today, some of these ideologies are so astringent that it is almost impossible to think of a "cultural compromise." At the international level, superpowers continue to impose their views and their cultures by influencing world decisions to preserve or guarantee their interests. Conversely, poor countries are forced into submission; which maintains them as subordinates to this cultural

"dictatorship" and sometimes provokes the slow and progressive disintegration of their cultures. This situation puts the world into a sort of "world-pessimism."

Does this mean that thinking of a global world cultural project is a utopia? The answer is no. The evolution of the human species and populations' needs calls for a negative response. As people increase and become melted through cross-border exchange, migration due to various factors and inter-group marriages, cultures and cultural identities also follow this change. Subsequently, the necessity for a reorganization of world cultural system is required. The global context of culture, therefore, is not a matter of creating one huge culture but rather a cultural cartography that takes into account the new exigencies of world populations that have become so composite that no culture can develop in solitary.

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