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THE FUTURE OF CULTURAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITIES

AUTHORED BY - TARSISIUS GAHADZIKWA

“Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and the test of our civilisation”, as it was propagated by the great Mahatma Gandhi, the modern day world is also slowly drifting to a unified globalised world where the major point of identity is the human race aspect. National identity refers to how one sees himself as a member of a nation. Cultural identity alludes to a person’s sense of belonging to a certain group of people which provides a sense of security and allows for the formation of relationships. In previous centuries of hyper-powers, like the Roman Empire or ancient Persia or the Mongol Empire, the concepts of cultural and national identity were not ignored in the conquests, formation and function of the hyper-power states but rather they were tolerated and this led to the success of the hyper-powers in their expansion. These hyper-powers realised that to create a successful empire the most important thing was to acquire the best and the brightest regardless of ethnicity, religion or background. This paper seeks to review how globalisation and migration are likely to affect the concepts of cultural and national identity. The supposition being that it is likely that the world, aided by technological advancements, globalisation and migration, is integrating into an ultimate borderless supranational state in which cultural and national identity are secondary to the human race identity. The study has taken a global scope to fully appreciate the true future of cultural and national identity. To further understand the situation an intensive doctrinal study of world history, current trends and the modern statutes has been employed in the construction of this research paper. An empirical study was also conducted with the help of a questionnaire to have a brief understanding of cultural and national identity.

Keywords: hyper-power, tolerance, globalisation, supranational

INTRODUCTION

Identity is the single most important aspect that individuals carry around and identify each other. Identity is the seed from which all connections, relationships and interactions revolve around. However, with the progression of time identity has continuously evolved as well. From all of the

various historical theories of the evolution of man, one key feature seems to run in all the stories, which is identity growth or evolution. Charles Darwin was of the view that human beings in their first form were characterised with, by then, appropriate features such as complete fur and long arms. Charles Darwin's work promoted the idea that species change over time and thus, give rise to new species who share a common ancestor.¹ In other schools human kind is believed to have evolved from the Stone Age to present day which also supported for the evolution of man's identity. In biblical perspective, after humans were created and the whole scene in the Garden of Eden, identity of man started to evolve as the children of Adam and Eve started to branch out.

Ethnic groups were born were people identified themselves by the language and practices (culture) which they followed. These groups would live simultaneously but separately on a given area. In other parts of the world, mainly Africa, Asia and parts of America, colonialism gave them new identities as it introduced religion and other western practices which again shifted the definition of identity. However, nationalism, which tied the people of certain territories under one definition with one enemy, also created another definition of identity. In this instance people moved from their ethnic identities to national identities.

Improvements in transportation, mass media and other technologies brought down the national boundaries and sought to create a global village where news is shared from all ends of the world and one can easily move from one nation to another. This globalisation is now creating another new form of identity.

Understanding National and Cultural identity

National identity in layman's terms is recognition based on a defined sovereign territory with a certain boundaries and a defined population. National identity is how we see ourselves as members of a nation of people. It creates a feeling of belonging to a particular nation which denotes that whatever that nation stands for is by default what the individual of that nation also stands for. In most cases it has been outlined that national identity dictates the nation to be an extension of an individual thus, whatever affects the nation affects the individual directly. National identity ties individuals to identify themselves with certain colours, i.e the ones on their nations flag, symbols or songs (National symbol and national anthem respectively).² In this

¹ <https://www.khanacademy.org/science/ap-biology/natural-selection/natural-selection-ap/a/darwin-evolution-natural-selection#:~:text=Key%20points%3A,and%20share%20a%20common%20ancestor.>

² [https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Political_Science_and_Civics/Introduction_to_Comparative_Government_and_Politics_\(Bozonelos_et_al.\)/07%3A_Political_Identity-](https://socialsci.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Political_Science_and_Civics/Introduction_to_Comparative_Government_and_Politics_(Bozonelos_et_al.)/07%3A_Political_Identity-)

instance people identify with the colours of their flag, national anthem or even national animal. Thus, national identity refers to the identification which is tied to a political state. In other words, national identity is the political part of identity of any man. In the case of *Jadhav vs Pakistan*, Mr Jadhav, an Indian, was protected by India from the punishment which he had been subjected to in Pakistan. It is clear that, yes Mr Jadhav had committed a crime but by being an Indian in Pakistan, given the subjection of both countries to the Vienna Convention (Article 36), was supposed to get home representation which he had not received.³ This is an indication of how Mr Jadhav's national identity came to his rescue. National identity can be presented differently from country to country, for example, Canada has a broad inclusive definition of national identity which comprises of different people including immigrants who make up the nation of Canada. Some South Asian countries practice an exclusionary form of national identity. In America an individual might have a racial and/or ethnic national identity, eg African American.

Cultural identity in layman's terms is recognition based of off traditional values, language or practices. Cultural identity is a fluid process influenced by a variety of social, cultural and historical events. Cultural identity acts as a way to preserve history and provide individuals a place where they feel they belong due to their practices or linguistics skills. Cultural identity gives an individual a sense of belonging to a certain distinct group, which provides a sense of security and allows for the formation of relationships. For example in a country like Zimbabwe, one might identify as a Zimbabwean, through national identity, and also as a Ndebele, through cultural identity. Thus, in most cases cultural identity would be more of a secondary identification after the national identity.

However, globalisation has ever since been threatening to wipe of these two forms of identity. Globalisation has improved trade, not only of goods and services but of cultures, ideologies and even social norms. In modern times it is common for one to wake up and read news from a different part of the globe and have a meal of a different nation while working or residing in a different nation to the one he was born in. Such has been the impact of globalisation.

National and Cultural identity in present times

In present times national identity is still standing strong as compared to cultural identity. National

_Nationalism_Religion_Class/7.02%3A_What_is_National_Identity#:~:text=Symbols%20are%20commonly%20used%20to,those%20symbols%2C%20colors%20and%20words.

³ *Jadhav v Pakistan 2017 ICJ*

identity, in former colonies mostly, has been supported by the recent nationalism. In most of the countries which underwent colonialism, nationalism played a major role in shaping up their future as it brought independence. During the trials and tribulations of colonialism the people were in desperate times and a hero in the form of nationalism emerged and gave them not only renewed hope but an improved identity. Nationalism gave people a national identity which was enough to get people to die for their nations.⁴ National identity changes our reality, we are experiencing what happens to our nation as if it happened to us eg the movie “Rocky V”.⁵ The common American indicated a sense of excitement and felt triumphant when Rocky, the American, beat his Russian opponent. The same Americans indicated rage and anger when the same scene was altered to make it appear as though Rocky has been defeated by his Russian opponent. Thus, this indicates how national identity is playing an important role in present times.

Also, despite globalisation breaking down borders, national identity still remains strong and the complete annihilation of national identity is not foreseeable. This can be attributed to the works of great scholars such as Anthony Smith in his conclusion in *Nation and Nationalism in the Global Era* (1995) where he propagated the view that predictions, that the world will become largely supranational, are too optimistic and supranational identities (global identities), will not replace national identity any time soon.⁶ This view highlights that indeed globalisation is breaking down borders and creating supranational identity, but in so doing globalisation is actually reinforcing nationalism by improving self reflective and self celebration when mixing with other nations. This further supports the notion that in current times the concept of national identity is still considerably fresh and its extermination is still not in sight.

However, the same can not be said for cultural identity. Cultural identity has, ever since the introduction of national identity, taken the back seat. The shift from ethnic bounds to national boundaries to globalisation is one which has proven to be tough for cultural identity to handle. Modern times have seen a rise in multi-cultural identity, for example the Sikh (an Indian ethnic group) in Canada and UK seemed exemption from wearing helmets while driving motorcycles, arguing that helmets would require them to remove their turbans which are a major factor in their culture. They also sought exemption to carry their ceremonial daggers, which again are a major factor in their cultural identity, they argued that removing the ceremonial daggers would result in

⁴ *How Nations make up National Identity | NTT – The Interpreter*

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ *Gal Ariely, 2020, Nationalism and Globalisation*

alienation of their culture. They, however, won the former but lost the latter. This shows how globalisation has led to the Sikh's alienation of their culture. With people feeling moving across borders certain cultural norms become unacceptable when they mix with new people and hence they seek common ground which allows them to live together in harmony, but in so doing important cultural identities are traded off for inclusion in the new globalised world.

The predictions for National and Cultural identity

The world continues to progress and in so doing, borders are being ignored and cross-border trade of everything is being encouraged. This is creating and promoting a sense of tolerance between human beings of different nations. If we take a look at the past where hyper-powers and identities existed the key to their survival was tolerance as has been illustrated above by their previous success when they incorporated experts from the countries which they conquered into their armies and industries. The same concept has taken a new face under globalisation. Experts in various fields have started migrating and moving to other countries which are pioneering in their fields. Thus, the toleration from the countries to encompass the foreign experts is the new form of toleration and is fast promoting the supranational identities.

Certain countries have relaxed and even supported reforms which allow for immigrants to settle overseas. An example of this is Canada. Canada is promoting and welcoming immigrants. Technological advancements have made travelling easier than before in modern day and the advancements are still progressing. It is foreseeable that in the future people will even be able to travel faster than present day and as such will improve migration which will in turn further erase the national identity.

Mass media advancements, like the internet, global television, improved communication devices, all cater for the spread of foreign cultures which in turn making recognition of the former cultural identity almost impossible in the future as they continue to advance.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

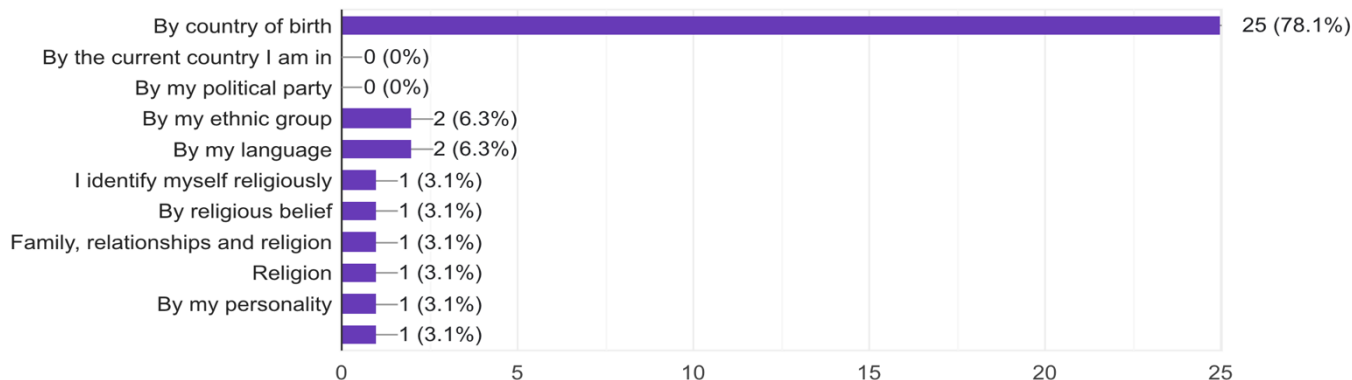
An empirical analysis was held with the help of a questionnaire to investigate the possible future of National and Cultural identities. A random sample of the international students studying in India was taken and 32 respondents took part in this investigation.

THE FOLLOWING DATA WAS FOUND FROM THE STUDY

In present times despite not being in their birth country, the international students still believe

How do you define your identity

32 responses

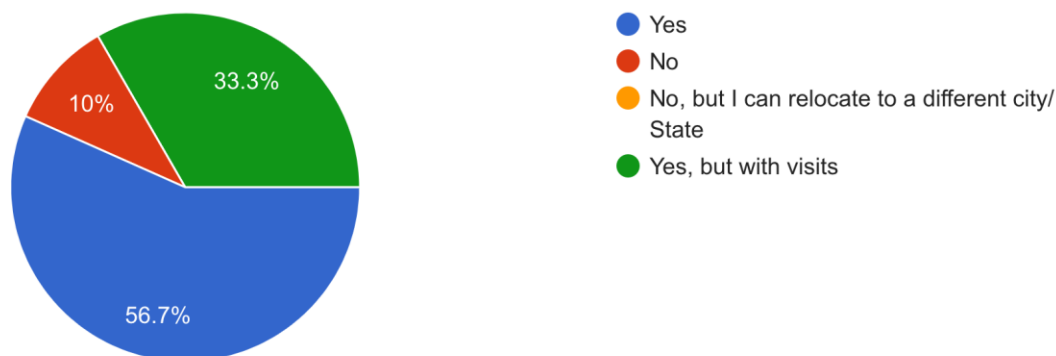


that their country of birth is a major part of their identity. 25 out of the 32 international students all agreed that their country of birth indeed plays a major part in defining their identity. Immigrating to another country did not affect their identity as no one ticked the current country to be an important part of their identity. Despite the noise around politics no one marked it as an important aspect of their identity. They did not realise however, that being affiliated to the nation itself is politics of the world and their country is their political party. Ethnicity and religion was highlighted by a few individuals indicating how cultural identity will soon become extinct or “too evolved to be realised”.



would you be open to relocating to a new country permanently?

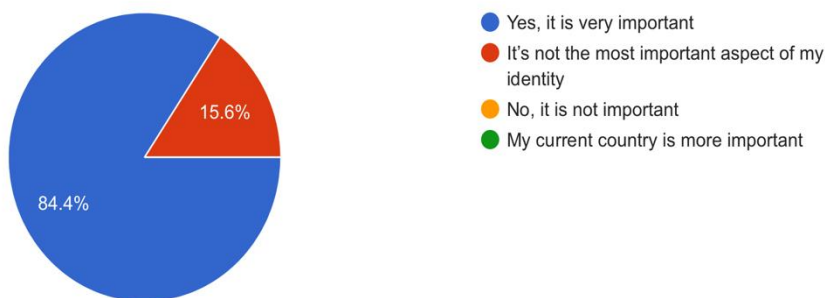
30 responses



The second question was based in the idea of removing one from his nation completely. 56.7% of the test subjects all responded that they would move to a new country without even considering going back to their birth country's. Thus, this proves that despite birth countries being an important aspect of the test subjects, they are open to permanent relocation which would in turn give rise to a new identity for their children who are likely to have no cultural identity to link them to their original roots.

would u consider your birth country to be an important aspect of your identity?

32 responses



The third question was set to establish the importance of birth country in identity. In this case

given the fact that these international students were in foreign lands and were open to relocating permanently, established that the next generation from this subject would inherit a different country of birth and given the importance placed on birth country by the parents this would allow for a new global identity for the next generations who would be having roots from a completely different nation with a different culture to what they will be considering their own national and cultural identity. Thus, advancing the idea of supranational identity

according to you, how is globalisation affecting identity?

30 responses

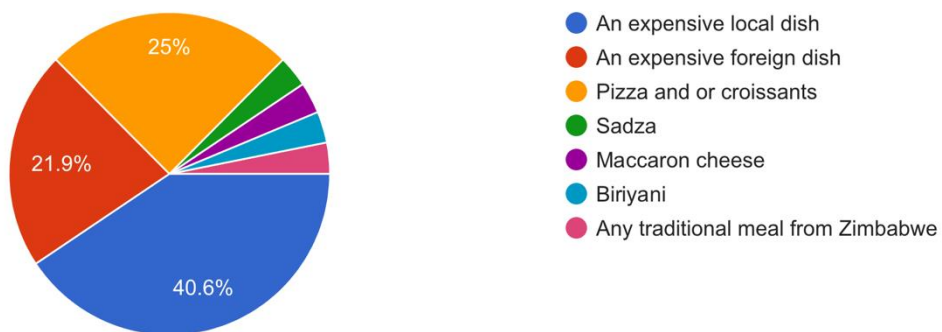


This question was set to get an understanding of globalisation from the international students.80% of the test subjects acknowledged that globalisation is indeed responsible for the creation of a global village in which identity has evolved past national and cultural identity.



which food would you consider for lunch if it was to be provided for free?

32 responses



Given that the test subject was still operating under financial restraints, the question eliminated the issue of finance and questioned good choice. In this case food choice was standing in as a representation of cultural identity. In almost all the countries, one dish stands out and is often times unofficially regarded as the country's national/cultural dish. Given that the test subjects were in India, here Pizza and croissants represented the Italian and French culture respectively. 40.6% of the test subjects opted for a local dish. This accompanied by the fact that 80% had opted to permanently move to another country serves as an indication of what's going to be left of cultural identity, only the food. Even so, the results (25%) were in favour of the popular Italian and French cuisine despite none of the test subjects being from France or Italy.

what would you be more comfortable in on a regular day out/date?

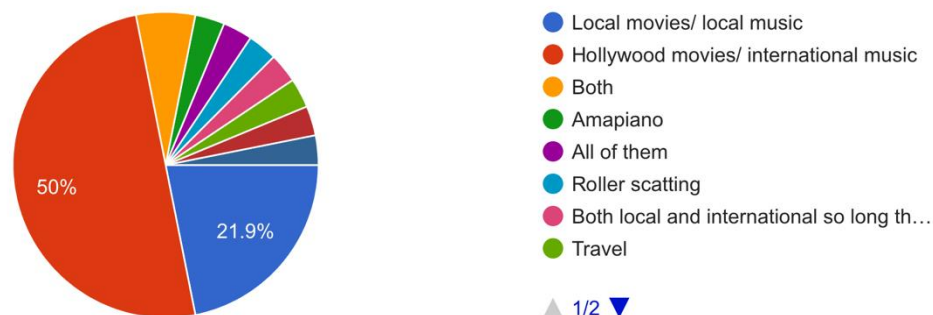
31 responses



In this question, again, cultural identity was being portrayed through fashion. Certain countries like India with their Saris, Nigeria with their agbada, Zimbabwe and Zambia with their chitenge, Cameroon with their toghu, have their own unique traditional attires. However, when given the option to choose something to wear 67.7% of the test subjects opted for a pair of jeans and a t-shirt/ a sundress, which can be considered western culture. Thus, indicative of the part technology, and mass media are playing in the creation of a supranational identity.

Which type of entertainment would you prefer?

32 responses



In this test, entertainment was used as a representation of the olden national and cultural identity. In all the countries, various types of entertainment are prevalent, for example Nigeria has its own Nollywood. 50% of the test subjects opted for Hollywood/international entertainment. This shows how mass media has promoted the annihilation of culture as time passing activities played a major role in defining cultural identity.

CONCLUSION

In summation, as Eric Hobsbawm argued that over the course of time nationalism would no longer be a vital political program and the world would become ‘largely supranational’ (1992,191) in his classic “Nations and Nationalism”,⁷ the same remains true as is being evidenced by the effects of globalisation. Globalisation, a process of increasing cross-boarder flows of goods, services ideologies, people, information, etc promotes international connectedness and improves tolerance. Despite globalisation not having reached its full potential, it is evident that in the near future, globalisation will annihilation national and cultural identities. The advancements in technology and mass media also indicate that national identity and cultural identity will soon give in to supranational identity.

⁷ Gal Ariely, 2020, *Nations and Globalisation*