

*Dr. Eng.  
Nader Riad*

## **German Egyptian Cultural Forum**

**المنتدى الثقافى الألمانى المصرى**

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**Promoting Cultural Identity in the Age of Globalization**

**الحفاظ على الهوية الثقافية فى عصر العولمة**

**Speech submitted by :  
Dr. Eng. Nader Riad**

**Bertelsmann Foundation**

**مكتبة مبارك العامة**

***Excellencies , distinguished guests , Ladies and Gentlemen .***

It gives me a great pleasure to welcome Mrs. Liz Mohn and to be given the opportunity to address this esteemed gathering about a subject which has pre-occupied the world for a number of years , globalisation . Since the signing of the Gatt agreement and later the creation of the world trade organization , the word globalisation has taken top priority in the vocabulary of both its supporters and opponents .

I have followed with great interest the important speeches and comments of the previous speaker . I must say that I have little to add to their deep analysis of the issues raised in this seminar However , I would like to explore one or two points which I find in keeping with the discussion .

I am sure you remember a conference that was convened by UNESCO in Stockholm a few years ago . The conference discussed the important report prepared by a commission headed by M. De Cuellar , the former secretary General of the United Nations (1982 – 1991) . The report had the title “Cultural Diversity and it dealt with the importance of safeguarding the national cultures in the face of globalisation . Neither the report nor the conference refused globalisation . They examined ways of accommodating national cultures within globalisation .

When the Gatt Agreement came up for discussion France in particular took a strong stand against including culture in the Agreement . President Mitterant himself decried the idea and said that the Gatt was

trying to do what communism failed to achieve “a uniformed culture France proposed “ exception culturelle” the cultured exception “which is still under consideration .

But what do we mean by cultural identity ? We do not mean by culture simply artistic manifestations , theatre , cinema , art , writing : what is meant is a people’s attitude to life , their morals , habits and traditions . It is this culture which must me maintained and protected at a time when communication has literally invaded our homes .

For the same reason , globalisation has been closely associated with the United States and there is a general feeling that what globalisation aims at is to replace national culture with American culture . Many people have attacked what they call “ the culture of jeans and hamburgers . ”

But to my mind the influence of American culture is superficial . It is a mere veneer on the surface of things . If you just scratch it , the genuine nature will appear .

There is no doubt that globalisation is misunderstood and prejudged as completely effacing what is national or regional . It has been described as a theatre but with new players . These new players are the international and multinational organization which take over the role of nation / states . This is not how I look at globalisation . It reflects the well known saying “unity in diversity and diversity is unity ” The diverse cultures will certainly enrich and strengthen global culture .

Let us imagine that each country is contributing part of its culture to the process of globalisation . In fact this is already being done . My friend Mr. Khamis , Chairman of the Oriental Weavers has explained how-in-many occasions he has managed to bring about a product which is typically Egyptian using Omar Sherif signed carpets on promoting his product prosperly . The same applies to our cotton industry and our silver ware which have enriched overseas markets . I , personally , have my own example . We have integrated Bavaria production centers in both Egypt and Germany , diversifying a bigger and more outstanding package of products something we could not have done without globalisation .

But while we call for the protection and safeguarding of national identities , we should deplore the emergence of some kind of chauvinism, especially in countries that had suffered under communism or colonialism . We witness this in Eastern Europe and in Africa . What happened in Ruanda and what is happening in Zimbabwe are glaring examples of the kind of narrow nationalism that can wreck nations .

One last point I would like to bring up the issue of emigrants. It is estimated that there are over 100 million people living outside their motherlands . Germany and England are leading recipients of emigrants. The result is what has come to be called a “multi – cultural” society . In Germany there are the turks and the Iranians, with a few Arabs , in England we have the Pakistanis, the Indians , the Jamaicans and other commonwealth people There is no doubt that these emigrants are influencing their new societies in spite of the isolation they impose on

themselves . And this is the intricate issue that has to be solved . They raise a big question . Is it in the interest of the receiving country to keep them isolated or to be assimilated in the mainstream of national life. There is no doubt that they have enriched life in their adopted countries but they have also created problems . But this is a problem that needs a sperate seminar .

To conclude with Egyptian particular case :

Many people just vaguely know Egypt as the sleeping beauty dorming at the northern coast of Africa on a 5000 year old civilization and a one third of the world's discovered monuments .

This perception , although largely true , yet does not reflect the full truth about modern Egypt .

Egypt is a very special case :-

- It is situated in Africa and is quite a promising example of the continent's future .
- What is known as the ancient 5000 year old civilization , is actually nothing but the discovered age of Pharaonic writing . But the true age of the Egyptian civilization on the banks of the River Nile , is many more thousands of years .
- The undiscovered and exploited monuments under the Egyptian ground is believed to be three times what have been discovered up to the day .

- Its spoken language is Arabic , nevertheless for many centuries , Egyptian intellectuals and writers have been enhancing written Arabic in general , and Arabic literature in particular , to the benefit of entire Arabic speaking Communities .
- It has a unique location , being situated in both Africa and Asia, One needs just to cross the Suez Canal , a walking distance of 100 m. to move from one continent to another .
- The Suez Canal is another wonder taking into consideration that it was built before electricity and internal combustion engines were discovered , using merely human power with nothing more than a shovel in one hand and a frail in the other. Quite an achievement as digging in sand in absence of modern equipment is no better than digging in water . The Suez Canal is actually another Pyramid built by the recent Egyptians for the benefit of the entire humanity and did not reflect a different Identity else than the Egyptian despite the considerable French initiation .

***I Hope I have not been long .***

***Thanking you for your patience .***

*Nader Riad  
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