

The Fragility of Identities in the Shadow of Liquid Modernity between Zygmunt Bauman and Amin Maalouf

هشاشة الهويات في ظل الحداثة السائلة

بين زيجمونت باومان وأمين معلوف

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Abstract:

Sociologists and philosophers have devoted considerable attention to the question of identity in the postmodern era, in which prevailing concepts have become marked by fragility and instability. During this period, identity underwent a profound transformation in both its meaning and constitutive elements. It shifted from a condition of stability and permanence, as perceived by certain thinkers, to a state of fragmentation and plurality, and ultimately to an even more disintegrated condition in the work of the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, founder of the notion of “liquid modernity.” This evolution unfolded within a historical context characterized by significant social, political, economic, and cultural transformations on a global scale.

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A similar concern is found in the work of Amin Maalouf, the French academic of Arab origin, who approached the concept of identity by emphasizing the multiplicity of its components and the transformations that may occur throughout its trajectory. For Maalouf, identity is inherently dynamic and does not exhibit permanence. This view led him to reject definitions that treat identity as a set of fixed attributes persisting throughout human existence and associated with gender, color, or place of birth. Rather, identity assumes new forms that were previously unknown.

Keywords: Postmodernism, liquid modernity, liquid identity, liquid society, economic globalization.

ملخص:

اهتم علماء الاجتماع والفلاسفة بموضوع الهوية في مرحلة ما بعد الحداثة التي أصبحت مفاهيمها تتميز بالمشاشة وعدم الاستقرار، حيث شهدت الهوية تغيرا جذريا من حيث مفهومها ومقوماتها، انتقلت فيها من حالة الاستقرار والثبات عند بعض المفكرين إلى حالة من التشظي والتعدد، إلى حالة أكثر تفككا عند السوسيولوجي زيجمونت باومان مؤسس مفهوم الحداثة السائلة في سياق تاريخي عرف فيها كل العالم تحولات اجتماعية، سياسية، اقتصادية، ثقافية، كما لاقت نفس الاهتمام عند الأكاديمي العربي الأصل الفرنسي الجنسية أمين معلوف، الذي تناول مفهوم الهوية من جانب تعدد عناصرها والتحويلات التي يمكن ان تتعرض لها عبر مسارها، فهي متغيرة لا تعرف الثبات مما جعله يرفض التعريف الذي يعطى للهوية باعتبارها عناصر ثابتة تستمر باستمرار الانسان والمرتبطة بالجنس واللون ومكان الميلاد، بل تتخذ صورا جديدة لم تعرف بها سابقا.

كلمات مفتاحية: ما بعد الحداثة، الحداثة السائلة، الهوية السائلة، المجتمع السائل

العملة الاقتصادية.

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of identity in the post-modern era has witnessed a disintegration that almost led to its disappearance due to the instability of its elements on the one hand, and the influence of the post-modern philosophy based on dismantling all components and destroying all constants, especially in light of globalization, where identity, like the rest of the post-modern concepts, has witnessed a radical change in terms of its concept and components, moving from a state of stability and constancy to a state of fragmentation and fluidity, due to the transformations witnessed by the entire world politically, economically and culturally.

Sociologists, thinkers and philosophers have been interested in the subject of identity, including the thinker and academic Amin Maalouf, who addressed identity from the perspective of the multiplicity of its elements and the transformations that it can be exposed to throughout its course. The identity of a person in Maalouf's novel is variable and does not know constancy, and this position of his makes him reject the definition given to identity as fixed elements that continue with the continuity of a person, linked to gender, color and place of birth. As for the Polish philosopher Zygmunt Bauman who rejected this different concept of identity in the light of post-modern societies, which he described as fluid societies, where the concept of identity was linked to the emergence of modern individualism, and this is what strips it of its stability. In 1998,

Zygmunt Bauman launched the term “liquid modernity” to replace the term “postmodernity” which contrasts with “solid modernity” in which there are stable and definitively defined social forms. In liquid modernity, the individual is socially integrated through his act of consumption and is defined by his choices; but he is forced to make new choices that fluctuate rapidly according to social and economic requirements.

How did identity change from harmony to disintegration? What are the reasons that led to its fragility according to Amin Maalouf and Zygmunt Bauman in liquid modern societies?

1- The concept of liquidity according to Zygmunt Bauman

Zygmunt Bauman represents Postmodernism School, he is the founder of the new concept of "liquid modernity", and he launched the characteristic of fluidity on a group of concepts spread in the post-modern era, during which the world witnessed the transformation from the state of rigidity that controlled the philosophy of modernity, to the state of fluidity in various human activities. This is based on Bauman's ideology of liquidity that he adopted in all issues which dealt with modernity, surveillance, consumer ethics and love, synchronized with the globalization system in order to make life easy and comfortable, but it is a philosophy that received great criticism for the mysterious and frightening fate to which man has become exposed.

Liquidity is a term coined by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman to describe the current state of modernity. According to Bauman, the term refers to the rapid transformations that occur in societies, which have become isolated and disconnected among their members, which has led to their feeling of anxiety and

instability. Bauman attributes this to the nature of life, which has become consumerist, especially in the post-modern era, which was characterized by the melting of many of the solid components that existed in the modern era, replaced by liquid ones that do not know stability. Bauman abandoned the name of the post-modern era by this name and replaced it with liquidity and applied it to many areas of contemporary life, then he introduced the theory of "fluid society" "the concept that focuses on the continuous flow of movement and speed that is the most important characteristic of our modernity."¹

Bauman describes our contemporary societies as entities without a fixed reference, but rather the fixed thing in them is the constant movement. Life in all its manifestations is subject to the burden of consumption. Everything must disappear quickly to make room for something new. The shorter the use, the faster the movement of flows in the name of progress and economic efficiency. Therefore, man must be an active, quick-to-adapt actor, capable of transformation and modification as desired.

2- The concept of identity according to Zygmunt Bauman

Political, economic and moral crises have made our contemporary reality more complex, especially under the pressure of globalization and the emergence of consumerism in our societies, which have become "liquid." Liquidity is a concept that focuses on the transformations that affect human life. Moreover, liquid modernity, when...Bauman is an alternative term for the concept of postmodernism, because it is essentially inclined towards the contemporary world that is based on what is transient and not permanent, on the short term and not the long term; and it considers utility as its most important value and

therefore it is necessary to understand the meaning of fluidity around which Bauman weaves his latest philosophical and social ideas.

Solidity and fluidity are the hallmarks of the modern and postmodern eras, in which need gives way to a desire that frightens man in the constant changes and transformations that affect his life. The truth is that the relationship between the individual and society in our era is changing because the concepts of identity, the individual and individuality have become meaningless. The world demands that the individual constantly and increasingly controversially search for identity and follow the criteria for its unification based on the desire to belong to a group or bloc accompanied by a certain desire to be different. Thus, the identity defined by Bauman no longer refers to ethnic or geographical affiliation and is no longer dependent on where one resides, but finds its source in modern concerns that are seen as different, and tend to change relentlessly. It is liquid modernity, where rampant consumerism has made everything expendable and disposable, including our identities. Identity may become a new way of defining oneself, but according to Bauman, identity is not absolute and is perhaps merely a by-product of human progress.

3 - Components of Identity between Solid and Liquid Modernity

The focus of attention in the modern era was on how to build an identity that sought to escape the lack of definition and floating that affected its elements. The most important aspect that this period knew was the concern related to its solidity and stability, as it was defined on the basis of recognition. Hence,

with a common origin with another group, on the basis that it is a complete structure that does not need additions, and Bauman argues that the idea of identity arose from the need to feel a sense of belonging and security, and that the existence of identity only applies to modern, "liquid" society. Where identity has become a new problem because it was not so before the advent of "modernity."

Bauman believes that the existence of identity only applies to the modern, fluid society that is constantly changing and transforming, and is built once. If the problem of modern identity is how to build it, then the problem of postmodern identity is how to avoid fixation in the face of the collapse of its categories based on the absolute and the fixed in interpreting human reality, where new visions were formed instead that came to confirm the inability of major theories to frame this reality in which modernity shed light on the fragility and instability of things. In contrast to liquid modernity, solid modernity was the old form of relationships and identities in a more stable state, but with the dominance of the neoliberal system and the end of ideals that were replaced by doubt in all constants and the focus on profit, consumption, commodification of values and economic freedom, social relations were shaken, so human ties became susceptible to dissolution, in line with the continuous change imposed by social and economic life, so society becomes the one that establishes identity, so the desire to consume became the goal that everyone seeks, especially after the market liberalization processes prevailed, so what is known as the economic class appeared as a basic pillar in determining identity. Social, so the identity of the person became determined by the productive role

he played in the social division, especially after the strict frameworks of state societies collapsed in the early modern period. About identity as an endless, incomplete and open-ended activity, because contemporary society relates to its individuals as consumers in the first place.

4- The concept of identity according to Amin Maalouf

Identity is an important basis for distinguishing people from each other and from other human groups. It is the sum of common social and cultural characteristics that individuals share. It is characterized by change, development, and complexity. For Amin Maalouf, the matter is not related to our identity card that creates our uniqueness, apart from our cultural and religious heritage and the color of our skin. Therefore, we cannot share with others except in some points. For Maalouf, the term identity is, above all, “what makes me not identical to anyone else.”²

Paradoxically, identity is what brings us closer to different human groups, but it is also what makes us different because a person's identity is not innate, it is related to his free will. It can be linked to belonging to a nationality, a religious tradition, an ethnic or linguistic group, an institution, a family, a professional or social environment, but it is also shaped by a certain number of events and elements, what is "conventionally called an identity card is fame, name, place and date of birth, birth, photographs, a list of certain physical characteristics, a signature and sometimes a person's fingerprint"³Amin Maalouf refuses to define our identity based on the information about ourselves contained in our identity cards, and calls for the necessity of freedom's openness to diversity, and raises a heated debate about the diversity of identity elements that achieve its unity despite

this diversity, so that change becomes an alternative to stability around its elements, and it becomes necessary to make different individuals coexist in harmony and allow others to live in peace in a highly interconnected world. This is the question that Amin Maalouf is trying to answer, which he intends to be a humane call in favor of people's openness to each other and cultural mixing, at a time when globalization raises fears of the re-emergence of the idea of uniqueness in identity, especially religious identity, which often leads to murder, and calls us to withdraw to the tribe and condemn others. This has led to the emergence of a major debate recently about the definition of identity, and each intellectual has come to establish his own definition from his side. Amin Maalouf has refused to accept most of those definitions that have established his own foundations for identity and belonging, as was evident in his book "Deadly Identities," in which he asserts that identity cannot be It is neither binary nor triadic, but rather every person finds his identity in the depths of his soul despite the multiplicity of its elements.

Amin Maalouf has confirmed that the reason for his writing about identity is to undermine the wall of hatred between the West and the East. The author is divided between different affiliations. He lived in an Arab and European country, which made him refuse to choose one national identity. This partially explains his thinking by focusing on human identity and opening national identities to any immigrant who wants to join. The West found the opportunity available to it to spread all its ideas, which enhances the feeling of global belonging more than national belonging, so that we can reach a world of justice and tranquility

and reject narrow affiliations that prevent getting to know other cultures and avoid excluding any of the different cultures, without hiding our culture and fearing that others will not accept us. It is a feeling that ensures the continuity of the group and preserves its entity. However, when this feeling disappears, the group begins to face a fate that may lead to disintegration or non-acceptance of the different other. Thus, it is not based on recognition but on exclusion, and if necessary, it adopts violence to achieve this goal. It looks at the other from the perspective of hostility and not from the perspective of interaction. Thus, the identity that claims its supremacy as a supremacist discourse against other cultures and identities has historically ended up in fuelling feelings of hatred and exclusion among peoples, as the internal solidarity of a group based on identity can fuel discord between it and another group to the point of armed violence.

5- The novel "Leo Africanus" and the coexistence of identities

The works of the Lebanese writer Amin Maalouf began to spread in France, and achieved a large readership in Europe, because he delved into the relationship between the East and the West, but not from a hostile position that rejects the other, but rather by focusing on the scope of interaction and encounter, through the character of Hassan al-Wazzan in the novel *Leo Africanus*, which could be a lesson in human and religious tolerance.

Amin Maalouf presents the concept of identity and feelings of belonging at the individual level, especially the concept of identity that changes, and that of modernity and globalization that facilitate change so quickly that people no longer have time to adapt to it. Amin Maalouf calls for not closing in on oneself in

a novel that takes us from Granada to Rome via Timbuktu, Tunis and Constantinople, via

The character of Sherif al-Wazzani, who crosses the Mediterranean in the sixteenth century, is an epic that moves from the fall of Granada to Renaissance Rome through the discovery of the Maghreb in the entire sixteenth century. In the words of Leo Africanus, Maalouf says: "From my mouth you will hear Arabic, Turkish, Castilian, Berber, Hebrew and colloquial Italian, because all languages, all prayers belong to me. But I do not belong to any of them. I belong only to God and the Earth, and to them one day soon I will return."⁴

The hero's journey builds his identity as a person. Every place he passes through brings him a new life tinged with the culture of the place he is in. Each time, the character is refined in this new culture and gradually adapts to it. The result is a complex, multiple and always open identity, made up of the past and the present as well. In a world where cultures meet and collide, post-modern societies live in a kind of fluidity in all areas of life. They have become disintegrated and unstable, which has led to the destabilization of social relations. Human ties have become disintegrating, and the identity of individuals becomes linked to what they consume. It is the "liquid society" as he describes it. the desire to consume has become the goal that everyone seeks. A person's identity is now determined by the extent of consumption, and this is the result of the disintegration of social structures that were rooted in solid modernity. Liquid modernity therefore refers primarily to a globalized society that suffers from uncertainty and instability."⁵

Because contemporary society is primarily concerned with its individuals as consumers, the ability of a person to i Consumption in the contemporary world and its social integration into a society is determined in order to build his personality in the fluid society, and with this description Bauman's postmodern era seeks to dissolve the components of modernity based on stability, in order to enter into the construction of a new social system in which identity is built on flexible foundations, which are easy to abandon in the face of the rapid transformations witnessed by the world, which seeks to establish economic standards that rebel against stability stemming from liberal ideas seeking to liberate the individual even from his identity, so that he becomes the controller of its construction in light of what the market wants, as "Bauman believes that liquid life is a consumerist life, and that it makes the world, with all its living and inanimate objects, objects of consumption, which lose their usefulness when used, and with it lose their magic, attraction, seduction and temptation, and forms the criteria for evaluating the living and inanimate objects of this world according to a model of objects that have a short utilitarian life span..

Conclusion

Identity is an important topic that has seen the identification of its elements and thus its concept developed significantly, especially in the post-modern era. Therefore, it must be studied from a serious perspective and the individual's identity must be dealt with as a sum of different affiliations, not just one affiliation. This is a call for coexistence, especially in the post-modern era, which has witnessed the melting of many of the foundations of modernity, as solid foundations have been

marginalized and replaced by fluid ones that do not know stability in the era of continuous change. Not accepting differences in identity, culture, religion and vision is extremism towards others. Pure origin and superior race are the most present stereotypes in human consciousness, but difference is not contradictory to the idea of identical identity. In other words, difference has nothing to do with cultural or human isolation, but rather is an essential reason for the strength of nations, their interdependence and the construction of their diverse mixture with all spectrums of the human race. The most powerful civilizations are those that fight fanaticism in the name of race, religion and color. There are strong civilizations in which it is difficult to harmonize with others, yet difference can be accepted.

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