

Theoretical-Historical Approaches to Globalization and National Identity in Theatre

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Keywords	Abstract
Theatre globalization national identity hybridity	This article examines how globalization influences the performative construction and transformation of national identity in theatre through a theoretical-historical perspective. Theatre is approached as a dynamic cultural space where national identity is not only represented but also negotiated, contested, and redefined. Using a qualitative and interpretive methodology, the study combines historical periodization, literary and performance analysis, and comparative case studies across four major stages: the rise of national theatre in the eighteenth century, the growth of nationalist dramaturgy in the nineteenth century, the transnational movements of the twentieth century, and contemporary globalized theatre. The analysis demonstrates that globalization does not erase national identity in theatre; instead, it reshapes it into hybrid, multilayered, and context-dependent forms. The study also reveals that national motifs often re-emerge in response to global cultural pressures, while diasporic and transnational performances highlight the fluid and negotiated character of belonging. In addition, state institutions and cultural policies continue to play a significant role in balancing local specificity with global engagement. Ultimately, theatre is shown to function both as a mirror and as a mediator of national identity in the global era.

1. Introduction

Theatre has long functioned as a critical arena for the performative construction, negotiation, and contestation of national identity. As a medium that synthesizes visual, linguistic, and embodied elements, theatrical performance engages audiences in the collective making of meaning, reinforcing, interrogating, or destabilizing prevailing conceptions of nationhood. In an era defined

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by accelerating globalization, theatre is increasingly shaped by transnational flows of artistic practices, ideological discourses, and diverse audiences, prompting fundamental questions about how national identity is staged, sustained, and transformed amid deepening global interconnectedness (Bhabha, 1994; Appadurai, 1996).

Classical theories of nationalism provide an essential conceptual foundation for this inquiry. Anderson's (1983) theorization of nations as "imagined communities" underscores the socially constructed character of national belonging—a process vividly instantiated in theatrical productions that narrativize shared histories, cultural symbols, and collective myths. Gellner (1983) situates the rise of nationalism within the broader dynamics of modernization and institutional consolidation, foregrounding the role of cultural institutions, including national theatres, in promoting and sustaining cohesive national narratives. In postcolonial contexts, theatre frequently serves as a site of cultural resistance, reclaiming indigenous narratives from colonial frameworks while negotiating the demands of contemporary global influences (Smith, 1991).

Globalization has profoundly accelerated the circulation of theatrical forms and performance vocabularies. The resulting intercultural exchange has given rise to hybrid theatrical productions that integrate local traditions with international techniques, yielding new modes of identity expression that are simultaneously rooted in particular cultural contexts and oriented toward cosmopolitan audiences (Castells, 1997; Robertson, 1992). Digital platforms and international festivals further extend the reach of theatre beyond national borders, complicating the relationship between local cultural specificity and global visibility (Giddens, 1990).

Theatre also constitutes a space in which power, politics, and social ideologies intersect with questions of identity (Mammadova & Abdullayev, 2025). Performances may reinforce dominant national narratives or challenge hegemonic conceptions of nationhood, functioning as forums for dialogue on multiculturalism, migration, and postcolonial subjectivity (Javid & Sadikhova, 2025). Contemporary practices increasingly reflect these tensions, incorporating themes of global inequality, environmental crises, and transnational solidarity into works that interrogate both national and global responsibilities. This trajectory highlights theatre's capacity to respond dynamically to shifting socio-political and cultural contexts, establishing it as an ideal medium for investigating the relationship between globalization and national identity (Aslanova, 2025).

Moreover, the temporality and materiality of theatrical performance afford unique insights into the processes of collective memory and national mythmaking. By staging historical events, commemorating significant cultural figures, or representing collective trauma, theatre enables communities to perform identity both retrospectively and prospectively, linking past, present, and imagined futures (Anderson, 1983). Globalized influences introduce new narrative strategies—fragmented storytelling, multimedia integration, and non-linear dramaturgies—that challenge



traditional representations of coherent national identity and invite audiences to reflect on the multiplicity of cultural belonging (Bhabha, 1994).

Globalization theorists, including Giddens (1990) and Robertson (1992), emphasize the dual dynamics of universalization and particularization, concepts that illuminate how national identity in theatre adapts under transnational pressures. Bhabha's (1994) notion of cultural hybridity and Appadurai's (1996) framework of global cultural flows further elucidate how theatre becomes a site where local and global influences converge, producing complex, layered performances that negotiate identity across multiple registers.

Against this background, the central research question guiding this study is: How have the processes of globalization influenced the representation, negotiation, and transformation of national identity in theatre across different historical periods?

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive methodology that integrates historical research, literary and performance analysis, and comparative theatre studies. The research design is interdisciplinary, drawing on political sociology, cultural studies, and performance theory to provide a comprehensive account of how theatrical practices reflect and shape national identity across historical and contemporary contexts (Farzaliyeva & Seyidov, 2025).

The analysis is organized according to a periodized historical framework encompassing four key phases: (1) the emergence of national theatre in the eighteenth century, (2) the consolidation of nationalist dramaturgy during the nineteenth century, (3) the internationalization and transnational movements of the twentieth century, and (4) contemporary globalized theatrical practices shaped by digital media and cross-cultural collaboration. This temporal structure facilitates the identification of both continuity and transformation in the theatrical representation of national identity.

Primary sources include dramatic texts, production notes, archival theatre reviews, and performance recordings, which furnish direct evidence of the ways national identity is enacted and communicated to audiences (Gulkhara & Kamran, 2025). Secondary sources encompass scholarly monographs, journal articles, and critical essays that provide contextual analysis and theoretical interpretation. The selection criteria prioritize works that explicitly engage with themes of nationalism, globalization, hybridity, and identity in theatrical practice.

Analytical procedures involve the thematic coding of recurring motifs, including cultural symbolism, historical representation, language use, and audience reception. Comparative analysis examines differences and convergences across geographic regions, theatrical traditions, and historical periods to assess the effects of global influences on national identity formation (Javid,



2023). Particular attention is devoted to diasporic and transnational theatre, investigating how these performances negotiate hybridized identities while sustaining connections to national narratives.

The study integrates liberal, critical, and constructivist theoretical frameworks to achieve a multidimensional analysis. Liberal perspectives inform the examination of cultural exchange and cosmopolitan theatrical forms; critical perspectives illuminate structural inequalities, cultural commodification, and neo-imperial dynamics; and constructivist perspectives foreground the socially constructed and performative character of identity, highlighting how theatre actively produces and transforms national narratives.

Acknowledged limitations include the interpretive nature of qualitative research and potential biases inherent in the selection of archival materials. These are addressed through the triangulation of multiple sources and analytical perspectives, ensuring a rigorous and comprehensive examination of the interplay between globalization and national identity in theatrical contexts.

3. Results

The analysis of theatre in the context of globalization reveals several interconnected trends in the performance, negotiation, and transformation of national identity.

The hybridization of theatrical forms constitutes one of the most significant findings. Global cultural flows have facilitated the convergence of traditional and international performance styles, producing works that simultaneously articulate local and global sensibilities (Bhabha, 1994; Appadurai, 1996). Contemporary adaptations of canonical dramatic texts frequently incorporate multimedia elements, transnational dramaturgical techniques, or multilingual performance, generating hybridized productions that engage both domestic and international audiences.

A second prominent trend is the resurgence of national themes during periods of heightened globalization. National theatre institutions frequently foreground local history, folklore, and linguistic heritage as a counterpoint to perceived cultural homogenization (Anderson, 1983; Smith, 1991). Historical case studies demonstrate that nineteenth-century nationalist dramaturgy in Europe deployed theatre as a vehicle for consolidating emergent nation-states, while contemporary productions in postcolonial settings reaffirm national identity through the staging of historical narratives and cultural rituals (Gellner, 1983).

Diasporic and transnational theatre constitutes a further significant trend, illustrating how migration and international collaboration engender multilayered identities. Works by diasporic playwrights, particularly those from South Asian and Caribbean contexts, frequently explore the tension between homeland and host culture, producing complex narratives of identity that resonate with transnational audiences (Castells, 1997; Robertson, 1992). These performances foreground



the performative character of identity, demonstrating that national belonging can be both fluid and enduring.

The influence of digital media has further transformed theatrical practice. Online streaming, international festival circuits, and digital collaboration enable performances to reach global audiences, amplifying both cosmopolitan and nationalist messages (Giddens, 1990). However, this globalization of theatrical dissemination raises critical questions about authenticity, commodification, and the potential attenuation of local cultural specificity (Harvey, 1989).

Finally, state and institutional support remains central to shaping national identity in theatre (Sabir, 2023). National theatre companies, funding bodies, and cultural policy frameworks mediate the balance between global engagement and local cultural preservation, demonstrating that the state continues to exercise a significant role in cultural production even within a globalized sphere (Ohmae, 1995; Polanyi, 1944). Collectively, these findings indicate that theatre functions as a dynamic site where globalization and national identity intersect, producing hybrid, adaptive, and contextually negotiated performances rather than effecting a straightforward erosion of national culture.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the complex, dialectical relationship between globalization and national identity within theatrical practice. Rather than constituting a zero-sum dynamic in which global integration necessarily diminishes national particularity, theatre reveals that national identity is both resilient and adaptive in the face of transnational pressures. The emergence of hybridized performance forms exemplifies Bhabha's (1994) concept of cultural hybridity, in which "third spaces" facilitate the negotiation of local and global influences, enabling theatre to mediate multiple layers of identity simultaneously. Appadurai's (1996) framework of global cultural "scapes"—including ethnoscares, mediascares, and ideoscares—provides a further analytical lens for understanding how cultural flows circulate through theatrical practice, reshaping narratives of belonging while preserving culturally specific markers.

The resurgence of national themes in response to globalized theatrical forms corroborates Anderson's (1983) theorization of imagined communities. Theatre operates as a performative vehicle for shared historical memory, collective myths, and cultural symbols, reinforcing national cohesion even amid intensifying transnational exchange (Babayev et al., 2025). Smith's (1991) ethno-symbolist perspective further elucidates why such cultural persistence is significant: national identity is anchored in enduring historical traditions and shared cultural symbols, which theatre effectively mobilizes for contemporary audiences.

Diasporic and transnational performances illuminate the fluidity of national identity, consonant with Castells' (1997) analysis of networked societies in which identity is socially constructed and



negotiated across multiple temporal and spatial contexts. Globalization does not efface national identity but rather stimulates its rearticulation, producing multilayered, adaptive, and contextually specific performances. Harvey's (1989) concept of time-space compression provides a complementary framework, clarifying how accelerated communication and mobility intensify both cultural exchange and the tensions between global and local identity narratives.

At the institutional level, national theatre organizations and state cultural policies mediate the effects of globalization, balancing the preservation of local cultural heritage with engagement in global networks (Ohmae, 1995; Polanyi, 1944). This finding reinforces the proposition that the state continues to shape cultural identity even within globally interconnected systems, demonstrating that globalization and national identity operate in a mutually constitutive rather than antagonistic relationship.

In synthesis, the discussion reveals theatre as a microcosm of broader social and cultural processes, illustrating how national identity persists, transforms, and negotiates its position within globalized cultural flows (Gulkhara & Farzaliyeva, 2025). The interplay between hybridization, the resurgence of local themes, diasporic performance, and institutional mediation reflects a complex, multidimensional, and context-dependent configuration of identity under conditions of globalization.

5. Conclusion

This study has examined the theoretical-historical relationship between globalization and national identity in theatre, demonstrating that theatrical practice constitutes a dynamic space in which identity is performed, contested, and reconstituted. The analysis reveals that globalization does not straightforwardly erode national identity; rather, it generates hybridized, multilayered, and contextually negotiated performances that reflect both local traditions and transnational influences. Through the convergence of diverse performance styles, diasporic narratives, and digital media dissemination, theatre attests to the adaptability of national identity in an increasingly interconnected world (Bhabha, 1994; Appadurai, 1996).

Historical analysis confirms that periods of intensified global exchange frequently coincide with the resurgence of national themes, as theatrical institutions foreground cultural memory, folklore, and linguistic heritage to assert collective identity (Anderson, 1983; Smith, 1991). Diasporic and transnational performances further illuminate the fluidity of identity, demonstrating how globalized theatre mediates tensions between homeland and host culture while fostering hybrid forms of belonging (Castells, 1997; Robertson, 1992).

The role of institutions and the state remains pivotal in this dynamic. National theatres, funding frameworks, and cultural programming continue to mediate the impact of globalization, balancing the preservation of local cultural specificity with participation in global networks (Ohmae, 1995;



Polanyi, 1944). This suggests that globalization and national identity are mutually constitutive processes rather than oppositional forces.

In conclusion, theatre provides a distinctive analytical lens through which to apprehend the evolving relationship between global integration and national belonging. National identity in theatre is neither static nor diminished by globalization; it is performed, negotiated, and redefined through hybridized, adaptive, and contextually responsive practices. This study affirms the enduring significance of theatre as both a mirror and a mediator of cultural identity in the contemporary global era, and invites further empirical and comparative research into the specific mechanisms through which theatrical practice shapes and is shaped by the forces of globalization.

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