

## Who Creates the Identities of Tomorrow: The Family, the Tribe, the Community, the Media or People in the Shadows

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### Abstract

The construction of identity undoubtedly begins with the birth of the child. To this end, Devreux (1967) writes: "when the child appears, he is the object of multiple identifications which initiate a double movement of projection and introjection constitutive of his identity construction; he is thus the portrait of his grandfather, would have his mother's nose or would become a doctor like his father". The child is thus shaped, as soon as he arrives in the world, by the adults who surround him, otherwise, his family. The child is thus shaped, as soon as he arrives in the world, by the adults who surround him, otherwise, his family. But the family does not have a monopoly on this construction; as soon as the child leaves the family to go to the crèche, then to the street, then to school, other influences make themselves felt and deviate from the orientations prescribed by the family. The child will learn other words, other gestures, other songs, other behaviors that will contribute to the construction and affirmation of his identity. Identity thus results from a combination that is both fortuitous and planned, of what constitutes the self on the one hand and the ethnic personality which reveals the socio-cultural context in which the child is immersed.

The family tries from the start to give a religious coloring to its child: the baptism, the incantations pronounced in the ear of the baby... and, later, the family instructs the child on the practice of the religion of the tribe, of the community, ancestors.

Barus-Michel J., et al. (2002), note: "Identity is defined on the basis of each individual's belonging to a family, a community, a social class, a people, a nation, etc". So, will our little schoolboy belong to his family or to his school? We will say of this child: he is blond, he is black, he is distinctive, he is Chinese, he is Arab. However, he did not choose to be blond or black; but it is characterized in this way by associating it, in spite of itself and by its skin color alone, with a community or a type! And the most dramatic thing is that this association calls for another, that of a presumed behavior constantly fueled by the media: we are afraid of black, we are afraid of Arabic, it is difficult to integrate Chinese and sometimes more again.

Amin Malouf (1998), constantly questioned about his identity, notes: "Since I left Lebanon to settle in France, how many times have I been asked, with the best intentions in the world, if I felt "more French" or "more Lebanese". I invariably answer, "Both!" Not out of any concern for balance or fairness, but because to answer differently, I would be lying. What makes me myself and not someone else is that I am on the edge of two countries, two or three languages, several cultural traditions. This is my identity". He adds a phrase that is becoming famous: "It is our gaze that often locks others into their closest affiliations, and it is our gaze that can also liberate them".

This article attempts to question what makes or builds identity. It tries to show the complexity of this concept and the implications of the various factors that build it.

**Keywords:** *Identity; Media Influence; Family; Community*

## Introduction

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### The family and the religious education of the child

Each family wishes to introduce the child from birth into the religion of the family and the ancestors. The rituals are varied. Some less-active families think freedom of choice when the child grows up. We raise here a fundamental question: will the child, having become an adult, really be able to have this freedom of choice? Not having been initiated into any religion, he will not even have the idea of asking himself the question of choice; he will thus increase, quite unconsciously, the community of non-believers:



Figure 1

- In Christian societies, the child is generally “baptized” from birth. Baptism means going into life in God. It thus constitutes a sacramental rite from birth to Christian life: marked with the sign of the cross, immersed in water, the newly baptized is reborn to a new life.
- In Muslim societies, God (Allah) is evoked at the first encounter with the newborn. Those are generally the grandparents who are responsible for saying in the ear of the child: Allah Akbar (God is great) as a sign of gratitude to the Lord but also in the hope that the little being gets used to it and serious in itself - intimate this call to God, which will later be the call to prayer. Later, the boy will be entitled to the ceremony of circumcision.
- Israelite baptism is different for boys and girls: i) for boys, circumcision consists of the total or partial removal of the foreskin leaving the glans of the penis uncovered; the ceremony thus takes place on the eighth day of birth in the presence of a quorum of ten adult men necessary for the recitation of prayers; ii) for the girl, it consists of a naming ceremony one month after the birth of the child at home or in the synagogue.

After baptism, the family will not feel able to continue the religious education of the child, which they will send to Koranic school, catechism or any other place that can instruct them in religious matters. Of course, this still fragile being is already “oriented”, without his consent and by his family “origin” towards a given religious conviction. Of course, this still fragile being will later be confronted with unavoidable questions, choices, various pressures from his context, from family, friends, from society in general. In any case, he will be able to knowingly ask himself questions and make his choices, unlike the child who would not have been oriented, or even who would not have received the basics allowing him to make his future choices.

### Religious education in India

The Indian Union has more than one billion and 60 million inhabitants. This federal entity, which has been independent for decades, grants a certain state neutrality in religious matters. The law authorizes denominations to set up educational institutions and manage them autonomously. Religious minorities are encouraged to establish establishments and to administer them in a way that suits them. The constitutional text says nothing about the principles of public education, apparently for two reasons: i) education is not compulsory and ii) it is a matter for the provinces (states) except for the level superior. D. Heuzé [1] specifies: “The preamble to the Constitution defines secularism as the desire of the public authorities to respect and treat religions impartially, to prohibit discrimination linked to religion and to allow everyone access places of worship of “his choice”. Conversions are allowed but practices of seduction by money or propaganda are prohibited. Activities that offend religious feelings are prohibited. In this system, the child therefore receives his religious education in his community. We can assume that the family, the social pressure (visible or supposed), submits to the common choice. The child, on becoming an adult, can hardly have other choices.

### Religious education in China

In millennial China, religion is understood above all as a teaching and a process of education; the religious dimension and the educational dimension seem immediately inseparable and linked by the generic term “jiao” which encompasses them and which means both education and instruction. Religious practices are practiced in a cultural place where the community and the individual educate themselves by cultivating their relationship to the sacred; thus, education (understood as the learning of Knowledge) and religious education shape, for the community, the barrier between the two states, equivalent in the West to education and ignorance (or illiteracy). We will also notice that the individual is thus intimately linked to the community and education is itself linked to the sacred. In this regard, Zhe Ji [2] notes: “In Chinese educational practices and discourse, cosmology and religious ritual are indeed fundamental themes, themes whose mastery and use constitute a line of demarcation between barbarism and civilisation, between mass and elite. The knowledge conveyed

in the writings has a sacred character there, and the writing itself can become an object of worship. The child, as a still fragile being, is fully supported for his instruction and religious education through the practice of Ijiao, a notion that is both religious and educational. With the establishment of Christian schools in China and the political regulation of education, the rearticulation of religion, education and politics (construction of schools with temple property which demonstrates the desire for a transformation of society by the State), then the modern crisis of education and religion, and finally attempts to modernize the education system of the 1980s, the dominant ideologies have undergone profound changes. To this end, Vincent Goossaert and David A. Palmer [3] question whether religion “is called upon to become a source of alternative civility; one commodity among others on the markets of culture, health products; even a source of ethnic or national identity?”.

### Religious education in Western societies: The case of France

J. Carpentier [4] poses the main question falling squarely within the framework of this work: “The France of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen and of free, secular and compulsory education, of the Dreyfus and the Law of Separation of Churches and State teach the religious fact to her children?”. The author recounts the evolution of school programs in the different primary and secondary cycles, the weight of the past and the present, the awareness and the first measures of the decade 1980 - 1990 (the author mentions the “two debates: on the ignorance of history and the religious lack of culture of young people”); he concludes with “the recent emergence, in France, of the teaching of religious facts in a secular approach”. Thus, the educational system teaches the religious fact and not the religion; this aspect is left to the private institutions concerned. If the Church and the Synagogue do not pose any particular problem, the Mosque and the private schools that may be affiliated to it always give rise to lively debates generated by fears of radicalization induced by fundamentalist religious discourse.

**Religion and colonization:** Colonization attempted to erase the indigenous identity and replace it with an imported identity: the identity in conformity with the ways of life and thought of the colonizer. A fight for Independence would have been almost impossible without an anchoring in popular conviction and a forced and temporary “identity withdrawal”.

### Children's rights

- **The international convention on the rights of the child:** UNICEF was adopted on November 20, 1989. It is the first legally binding international text enshrining all the fundamental rights of the child. Article 1 of the Convention specifies that: For the purposes of this Convention, a child means any human being under the age of eighteen years, unless majority is attained earlier under the legislation is applicable. Article 5 states: States Parties shall respect the responsibility, right and duty of parents or, where applicable, extended family or community members, as provided by local custom, guardians or other persons legally responsible for the child, to give him, in a manner which corresponds to the development of his capacities, the orientation and the appropriate advice for the exercise of the rights granted to him by this Convention. Article 12 states: States Parties shall guarantee to the child who is capable of discernment the right to express his opinion freely on any question which interests him, the views of the child being given due consideration having regard to his age, and its degree of maturity.
- **The universal declaration of human rights:** (UDHR) is adopted in Paris (at the Palais de Chaillot) by the United Nations on December 10, 1948. It is defined in its preamble as “a common ideal to be achieved by all peoples and all nations”. Of the 56 countries then members of the UN, 48 voted in favour, and 8 abstained; these are the USSR (5 socialist countries), South Africa and Saudi Arabia.
- **Adult rights in the educational process of the child:** If we consider that the child is any person under the age of 18 (unless specifically specified by local regulations) and if we admit that it may be difficult for the child to educate himself, espe-

cially at a “young age”, we can logically ask ourselves the obvious question of knowing who can be responsible for the education of this still fragile being? The family (the parents in the majority of cases) has the first responsibility. So, two other questions arise? i) Is the family capable (formed) and free in choosing the type of education it will give to its children? And ii) is the family able and free to give religious education to its children? In response to the first question, we can answer that everyone perpetuates the Knowledge acquired by transmission, customs, individual learning through experience or readings. The answer to the second question is more complex and above all very different from one society to another, from one socio-geographical context to another. In mono-confessional societies, the contextual use means that the family generally adopts to inculcate in its children the religious conviction of the “community”; this education is sometimes done in a very superficial way, or at least lightly; the main reason is that we are unloading on the education that the child will not fail to receive in the national education system on the one hand and the social environment, on the other hand. In multi-confessional and secular societies, on the other hand, it is not uncommon to meet parents who tell you: “I prefer not to give my child any religious education; he is free to make an informed choice later on”. This reasoning is, it seems to us, biased from the outset for at least two reasons: i) secularism being in the law and the experience, specific religious education is left to the private institutions concerned; but the previous reasoning de facto excludes the child since he will not even think of enrolling himself and the family, in its logic of giving him the choice, will not enroll him; ii) the national education system certainly teaches the child the notion of religious fact but does not give him, in our view, the necessary tools for choosing his religious conviction (having one or not). These two reasons mean that the child is not, in reality, free to choose because, unless he has acquired during his studies, and his personal and individual development, the ability to ask himself the relevant questions (and this is not given to the majority of children) which would allow him to choose freely but especially knowingly, he will not be able to choose what he has probably never heard of! He will increase the cohort of those who could not choose.

### Media and consumer suggestion

During the 1920s, advertising became an art of psychological suggestion. Its purpose to transform membership and loyalty to a product in such a way that it appears to be the result of a personal and deliberate choice. Under the influence of advertising pioneers like Edward Bernays, advertisers used new techniques based on psychology and social surveys. While advertisements in the European tradition largely continued to associate products with artistic imagery that appealed to business leaders, Americans sought to understand what might motivate consumers, their needs and their desires. New market research techniques during the 1920s showed that women controlled purchasing decisions for about 80% and were the main agents of consumption. Home products, cosmetics and women’s clothing are then very present in advertisements. But women were also targeted for many masculine items such as clothes or toiletries. In the late 1920s, to increase their sales, the automobile companies General Motors and Ford reinforced their marketing strategy towards women, emphasizing style, beauty and color. Advertisers presented men as producers and women as consumers, a representation that associated the acts of purchase with the feminine and supposedly feminine characteristics such as emotionality, impulsiveness and irrationality. More than the development of techniques creating emotional links between buyers and certain products, advertisers develop slogans intended to increase the quantity of purchases. To encourage gift giving, they reworked national holidays (Christmas, Easter, Valentine’s Day) and invented new ones (Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, President’s Day). Holidays and leisure are now associated with ordinary shopping. The practice of buying on credit is spreading in the economy and becoming an additional tool to encourage citizens to consume more. Finally, the concept of planned obsolescence and frequent style changes lead buyers to replace their products more quickly. For many products, duration and longevity are becoming less important than modest prices and availability.

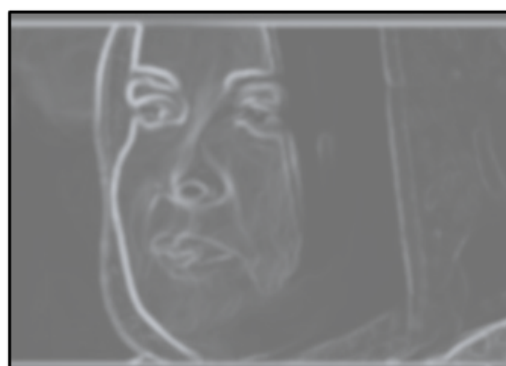


Figure 2

Now, commercial producers have included very young children in commercials in order to make parents feel guilty and force them to buy what their children “want”. These ad producers thus create new consumers, in fact new identities. The colonial empires had done the same; in Algeria, for example, the colonial power began by separating the communities, the Jews from the natives, the Berbers from the Arabs. And in all colonized countries, children are taught that their ancestors are blue-eyed Gauls to create new identities. In Algeria, it is in the faith and its practice that the movements of protest first then of resistance and struggle later found the strength to make the citizens adhere to the armed struggle for liberation. Fashion and advertising makers thus appear as makers of new identities!

Fashion and advertising manufacturers thus appear as manufacturers of new identities! The deep attachment to religion, to the traditions of the elders or to any other morality, philosophy of life or rite then appears as a fierce resistance to these attempts to create new identities driven by profit at the expense of healthy and sustainable social development. But the manufacturers of advertisements do not hesitate to introduce images stimulating the libido: couples kissing, women in very suggestive outfits, sometimes even a man, pants down in the toilet, doing his business. An ad shows a naked baby dancing in its mother’s womb; the camera highlights her behind. These advertisements have their effect, bring in new consumers and create new identities.

### Clothing fashions, another advertising weapon

Fashions encourage people to form like-minded groups and to consume like the group; if we do not comply with it, we feel excluded, even marginalized. Thus, the fashion for jeans with holes, which are a fashion element of the 1980s, 90s and the end of the 2000s, are associated respectively with the image of punk rock (in particular with the image of the group the Ramones or Iggy Pop) or hard rock, grunge or even hip-hop and over the last period to a less marginal and more urban aesthetic. This fashion mainly concerns the “young” class.

All the fashions that are published with great fanfare in the media (winter, spring or summer fashions for example and that we try to implant in the popular consciousness), the high heels of shoes, the various and varied bracelets, objects pinned on the nose or on the faces as well as tattoos are all weapons to create new groups of consumers and therefore new identities loyal to products and brands. Let us recall here that tattoos existed in primitive societies as a mark of belonging to a community.

**Songs for children, another of making new identities:** In nurseries, children are taught the same songs disconnected from their life contexts; sometimes these songs have an implicit religious connotation like “ring the matins”. Children learn these songs, or at least the tune of the songs when they are still too young to speak and learn and repeat the lyrics. Families also learn these songs to sing to their children during play or sleep. And so we have, once again, new behaviors, new identities.

We can ask ourselves two questions to find out: i) who creates these songs and ii) what is the real objective of these songs: a) purely educational and societal or more interested in setting up new identities “in conformity” with a social project.

**Television series and information platforms:** Some television series are very successful: the fires of love, Ko Lantha are examples that many citizens follow, often identifying with the characters. Consciously or not, these series create new consumers, new behaviors, and therefore inevitably new citizens. It is obvious that these series are primarily intended for profit; would they be part of a vast societal project? We have no answer to this question. The information disseminated by the media directs awareness, attitudes and behavior; at first we don’t pay attention, but repetition plays its role, inexorably. Sometimes they print fear or revolt; and some end up feeling rejected.

Nathalie Sonnac [5] notes: “The information and communication sector occupies a growing place in society. Citizens of developed countries devote a large part of their leisure time to media consumption, in particular listening to radio and television, but also reading newspapers and magazines. An American, on average, spends 4 hours a day watching television, while this time is 3:40 in Japan, and 3:30 in France. A significant part of today’s popular culture derives from television programs. In the same way, news and opinion papers can

partly orient and even influence public opinion. The author adds that the media sell their media content to consumers. It's also a way for them to sell consumer "attention" to advertisers.

Advertisers, manufacturers of diverse and varied fashions, creators of popular television series, are we facing creators of new identities? Unconsciously, perhaps, even if they are followed by many spectators. Unconscious but interested in profit and supported by people in the shadows [6].

### Conclusion

We presented the concerns of the family to keep the child, from birth, in his community, his tribe or his group. To also keep him within the bosom of the religion practiced by the family and give him the rudiments of the practice or even more simply to instil in him the idea of belief, sometimes by simple words recited in his ear, convincing himself that repetition will imprint in his little brain a message of the existence of God. We also recalled the case of the atheist or non-believing family who thinks that it is necessary to leave the choice to believe to the child when he becomes an adult. We asked ourselves whether, in this specific case, the child who has become an adult can wonder about a concept he has never heard of and whether he then has real freedom of choice. We recalled the right of the child and that of parents towards their children. Finally, we asked the question of who makes the new identities without being able to give a precise answer, so complex is the subject and brings into play multiple and varied interests. Further research should provide a more precise answer.

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