

**Global Culture: Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

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Globalization and cultural identity is hotly debated in the academy. Subaltern groups and indigenous peoples are affirming and defending their cultural and social identities in the new global era. It makes the situation about globalization and cultural identity quite complex. It will be helpful to look at it analytically. On the one hand, we should understand the globalization more precisely; on the other hand, we also need to have a clear idea of culture. Only then can we understand the impact of globalization on cultures. In the process, it will also become clear to us how we should handle the dynamic of globalization.

Globalization is an overwhelming world trend. Multinational corporations manufacture products in many countries and sell to consumers around the world. Money, technology and raw materials move ever more swiftly across national borders. Along with products and finances, ideas and cultures circulate more freely. As a result, laws, economies, and social movements are forming at the international level. However, the contemporary phenomenon of globalization is precisely the globalization of liberal capitalism and materialistic modernity (Giddens, 1990). Because the economic system is the dominant one that controls other social systems, a materialistic and consumerist culture is spread through the mass media to the people. The natural way of life is changed into a mechanistic and individual one. The gap between the rich and the poor in each country, and between the rich and poor countries is increasing (Waters, 2001). The world may be a global village, but it is not a global community.

Advocates of anti-globalization claim that the world is being homogenized in the new global era. Consumer goods are becoming homogenous all over the world. People use the same kind of things: from planes and cars to pins. With this goes a consumerist way of life and system of values that concentrate on the material world and on physical comfort (Featherstone, Lash & Robertson, 1995). Homogenization is basically something imposed on people by market forces. It treats people as objects. However, it should be noticed that even while they use those goods, people can and do assert themselves as subjects, integrating them in their own way of life. People

are not passively accepting, as they have great freedom to select the way of their lives. In this sense, people could choose their own favorites, regardless of the external factors. The global tendency could not eliminate culture diversity, because we have the right to stick to our cultures.

Does homogenization at the consumerist and rational-scientific levels result in cultural homogenization? It depends on what one understands by culture. A culture is the way of life of a people through which they humanize and socialize nature. It implies a world-view, a value system, and a network of social relationships (Featherstone, 1996). Culture is not static; it grows out of reverence for selected customs and habits. Indeed, Webster's Third New International Dictionary defines culture as the "total pattern of human behavior and its products embodied in speech, action, and artifacts and dependent upon man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations." Culture can be analyzed in terms of three dimensions (Appadurai, 1996). At the first level the humans relate to nature and to life. They produce and use goods and eventually exchange them. The second level relates to symbols and rituals which help the humans to structure social relationships build community and celebrate it. The third level is the quest for ultimate meaning that offers goals and motivations. Religions and ideologies provide answers to this quest. These three levels provide an identity to a social group and distinguish it from others groups.

Culture is changing. People make culture; culture makes people (Tomlinson 1999) Culture does change in dialogue with changing economic and socio-political circumstances. A culture changes with other cultures with which it is brought into contact through commercial or political relations. However, people construct cultures. At the source of culture, there is social agency: a group of people with freedom and creativity. Creative persons can contribute to the change and development of a culture. People are not mere objects of cultural influences, but subjects who can sift various influences and reject or integrate them. Sometimes, advocates of anti-globalization overlook the power of people's subjectivity.

Global homogenization has an impact on culture at all the three levels mentioned above. It affects directly the production and use of consumer goods. People use the same kind of goods everywhere. But even such use is set in differing social contexts. For example, Coke and McDonalds may be very popular in the USA; but in India, only the few rich can afford them and they become status symbols and in China, traditional Chinese restaurants are still dominant. At the level of social relationships, there is a certain homogenization about how a business is run

and how people relate to each other in situations of production and marketing. But the relationships of people are not limited to production and marketing. There are other natural (family), traditional (cultural) and associative groups.

As for the third level, sociologists have frequently pointed out that while religion loses the dominant position and modernity has led to a differentiation of social institutions, modernity has not managed to become a substitute for religions for most people (Bauman, 1998). Ultimate questions of meaning are still being asked and answered in various ways. Religions are even undergoing a revival in many areas.

Considering these factors, we can say that the homogenization brought about by globalization is superficial and is limited to the material level of the consumer goods used by people and a certain consumer culture that is artificially promoted by the media. It does not affect how people relate to each other and how they find meaning and purpose in life. It leaves largely untouched the freedom and agency of the subjects in the creating and changing culture, both as individual and as groups (Friedman,

In the new era of globalization, people become much more concerned about the uniqueness and particularity of their own culture. Cultural identity provides the global significance of local knowledge and the sense of self, community and nation. Since people construct their identities through their cultures, they will defend them. Actually, globalization brings much more awareness of cultural identity than before. In terms of science and technology, or in terms of economic development, globalization may reflect some kind of theory of convergence. But in a deeper sense, globalization enhances cultural identity and people become much more concerned about the uniqueness or the particularity of their culture. If we look at it negatively, globalization may lead to hegemonic control. But hopefully, globalization may lead to a sense of "togetherness".

The planet is our lifeboat and we are all in this boat together. Globalization can also lead to a sense of "deeply-rooted-in-one's-culture," and the global significance of local knowledge. These two dimensions can form a very fruitful interaction. Some people say globalization and localization are so much integrated that we have to coin a new word "glocal", both global and local. Therefore togetherness is not at all in conflict with diversity. The world becomes more diverse and also more "together".

### Conclusion

Globalization is not simply homogenization. When we view globalization in terms of science and technology, we'd better notice that people are not passively accepting the influence of globalization. They have great subjectivity and freedom to change and create culture. Science and technology make the world globalize and globalization reflects somewhat of the theory of convergence, but in deeper sense, it promotes cultural identity. With the development of science and technology, people are closer than before. They become much more concerned about their cultural identity. They are constantly searching for their cultural roots and defending them. If we can respect the diversity of peoples and their cultures in this new era, it can lead to global community marked by unity in pluralism. The cultures may no longer be local in the traditional sense, but still different and plural. This will lead to a new kind of globalization that will not be homogenizing.

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