

Culture and Globalization: A critical Literature Review

By

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Abstract

The paper reviews the existing literature that discusses the relationship between culture and globalization. It begins with an exploration of the three paradigms that describes the impact of globalization on culture: the homogeneity, heterogeneity or hybridity perspective. The homogeneity perspective argues that globalization increases the development of cultural sameness or singularity. That is, globalization allows the adaptation of one dominant culture and hence foresees the possibility of the growth of a global culture. The heterogeneity perspective provides an opposite stance with that of the heterogeneous perspective. The perspective lays its foundation in the believe that existing conflict and violence based on religious or ethnic intolerance among people justifies that globalization actually creates an environment in which people turn back more in their culture and identify more with their existing differences and not sameness. Hence the perspective generally argues that that the homogeneity perspective to be theoretically true but practically questionable. The hybridity perspective on the other side argues that globalization allows give and take of culture and hence people may peak certain cultural pattern to adopt and some discard. The approach therefore persuasive, and support the nature of human behavior and that through interaction with others and even with one's self, human continuously modifies his/her way of thinking, and world views which ultimately affect their way of life, thus maintaining one's culture through time and space seems highly unfeasible. This belief makes the very foundation of culture as is viewed to be in a continuous process of social changes and that human rationality constantly influences them to persistently define and redefine their own culture.

Globalization, Culture, Homogenization, Heterogeneity, Hybridity

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1.1 Introduction

Despite of the fact that globalization itself, as a subject, has become a centre of debate, studies that have concentrated on cultural globalization have come up with diverse, and sometimes, conflicting conclusions. Primarily this is a consequence of the *diverse* theoretical, epistemological, and methodological frameworks informing these scholars. The challenge brought by these conclusions has given rise to three different perspectives of cultural globalization, thus the ***homogeneity, heterogeneity, and hybridism perspective***. Basically, the ***homogeneity perspective*** includes scholars who believe that the impact of globalization on culture increases global cultural sameness (Tomlinson, 1991; Holton, 2000; Kellner, 2002; El-Onjeili & Hayden, 2006; Scholte, 2008; and Moghaddam, 2009). The ***heterogeneity perspective*** believes that globalization creates a conditions that people of different culture continues to integrate with tolerance on their cultural differences (Holton, 2000; Kellner, 2002; Kiely, 2005; El-Onjeili & Hayden, 2006); and the ***hybridism perspective*** includes those who argue that globalization creates a condition in which *heterogeneity* and *homogeneity* intercept to produce a new culture (Holton, 2000; Kellner, 2002; El-Onjeili & Hayden, 2006; Shim, 2006). The charming attribute of all these suppositions is that they use the same features of globalization or same elements of culture to prove their points, yet still have diverse findings.

1.2 The Homogeneity Perspective

Starting with scholars who believe that globalization increases homogeneity, occasionally consider globalization as equivalent to *Westernization* or *Americanization* (Holton, 2000; El-Onjeili & Hayden, 2006; Scholte, 2008; Moghaddam, 2009). This perspective assumes that the role of technology—internet, media or multinational organizations—create an environment in which it becomes easy to spread information about the American or western ways of life, as a result the American or westerns lifestyles becomes increasingly adopted by non-western communities (Holton, 2000). Thus people's ways of lives are increasingly becoming singular. These studies however has one focus—macro-level analysis. The argument is that at a global level, for instance, by observing how hip-hop or pop music is increasingly becoming favored by people in Asia (Holton,2000), how Coca-Cola is increasingly be consumed in Africa (Holton,2000; El-Onjeili & Hayden, 2006), or how many people are being converted in a certain religion (Kale, 2004), to them justifies the increasing homogeneity. The implied thesis of this

position is that other people culture is submissive and flexible, and adoptive toward American or western culture.

This position is mostly supported with the theory of “*Cultural Imperialism thesis*” as was developed by Tomlinson in 1991, its main point is that the spread of western culture to non-western assumes similar characteristics with colonization, whereby western culture is increasingly domineering, hence replaces the traditional cultures that were once valued and cherished by the people in those specific areas, thus occurrence of worldwide standardization of lifestyles. In the words of Falk in 1999, such scenario subsists when globalization assumes a predatory role, hence *predatory globalization*. In this line of thinking, scholars tend to see culture as is placed in the working of the market and that through demands and supply, some cultures tend to attract more consumers, thus some are being sidelined as they fail to compete.

This position is further maintained by those who believe that globalization creates conditions in which even culture is placed in the market place, hence *cultural liberalization*. Thus a global environment, through movement of capital; technology and people; the growing volume of exchange of cultural products; and the rising power and visibility of cultural industries; is observed to be one sided—that is the north-to-south or simply from west to developing countries (El-Onjeili & Hayden, 2006). Thus exchange of culture to the global south is more of adaptation to the western values. This is seen because the west cultural industries are more powerful thus out-competes those from the south. This tendency culminates, sometimes, cultural globalization to be referred as *Disynefication, Coca-colonization, Westoxification* (El-Onjeili & Hayden, 2006; Moghaddam, 2009). Supporters of this thesis tend to use aspect of culture like popular culture and material culture to justify their argument. Cultural goods like McDonald burgers and Starbucks coffees, or hip-hop music or fashion are mostly cited products.

In the same theory, there are also other scholars who contend that even though there is a worldwide standardization of culture, western culture is increasingly gaining domination but at the same time several other culture from the global south are also making their way up. Thus homogeneity not necessarily assumes an Americanization character (Shim, 2006; Sarkar, 2008). Consequently, globalization is actually not un-directional as it is not only from the west to the global south. Their main argument is that cultural globalization can come from any

direction. Shim (2006) cites the popularity of Korean popular culture in South Asia as a good example. In describing the same scenario, Sarkar (2008) reveals that the expansion of the '*Bollywood*' Indian movies in non-Indian states indicates that cultural globalization is not necessarily from west to the rest.

However, in reviewing this literature, one may easily conclude the approach that these scholars use as macro-perspective. At-most, they tend to justify their position by associating consumption of a cultural product or common use of technologies like the cell phone, automobiles, antibiotics, and jeans with the creation of one global culture (Bhawuk, 2008). This position is heavily criticized by scholars who believe in opposite side of the debate. Their main critique being that, such a stand point mis-considers people who consume the cultural goods as submissive and flexible to change, a situation which might not necessarily be true (El-Onjeili & Hayden, 2006).

Another point of critic from most of these scholars is that that with increasing movements of people, as a result of globalization, measuring consumption of cultural goods does not necessarily imply that those consuming the cultural goods comes from a different cultural origin. Nevertheless, this position tends to see that the world is increasingly becoming singular and that the world is progressively becoming more peaceful as a result of a common value system and lifestyle, in general.

1.3 The Heterogeneity perspective

This 'global homogeneity thesis' position has also been a point of debate, especially with an increasing endogenous movement: who by using the right to self-determination, have increasingly been trying to hold on their culture even more (Olzak, 2010). In other aspects, the position has been further criticized by Huntington in 1993 and Olzak in (2010) with an increasing number of ethnic and religious conflicts, some of them have led to genocide. As observed by Huntington (1993) as a result, the trend of many conflicts indicate that the ethnic differences plays a determining role and that many wars or conflicts are increasingly being fought where a identity differences play a independent variable. Supporting such a position, Olzak (2010) found that globalization in general has influenced armed conflicts around the world, but more specifically cultural globalization significantly increases fatalities from ethnic conflicts. The theory also seems to lack credential especially with an outbreak of the xenophobic

violence in some part of the world (McKnight, 2008). The quarrel here is if the world is increasingly becoming one in terms of culture then why are we noticing more problems arising out of cultural differences? The main dilemma here is that despite of the fact that through popular culture from a macro level we see the world as increasingly homogenizing by at the same time at the micro level the presence of our local culture is still active and kicking.

Other scholars who oppose the homogeneity perspective which has a belief in cultural standardization, in most cases, argue that globalization increases heterogeneity of culture. Their main argument is that globalization creates an environment in which people of different cultural grounds or origins become increasingly integrated but their various cultural values co-exist in tolerance (Holton, 2000; El-Onjeili & Hayden, 2006). Mostly, this thesis is supported with an increasing secularization in most western cultures, For instance, in the aspect of freedom of religion, migration of people, as result people can move to other countries change their nationality or at times have dual citizenship. The main assumption driving this perspective is that even though people move to new areas where the culture is alien to them, they still maintain the culture of their place of origin. Most cited example of this includes the increasing growth of China towns or some Indians communities in other countries (Min & Kim, 2000; Bhat & Narayan, 2010). Those who believe that globalization creates a condition in which people of diverse cultural backgrounds live in peace suggest that as an impact, this cultural globalization creates a greater global understanding. They further contend that, in turn, the global understanding makes people aware of their differences, thus development of rich cultural intermixing; and might also reduce the likelihood of cultural misunderstandings and conflicts. Yet, this standpoint also goes with critique. As with the homogeneity thesis, the contenders observe that even here the world is still experiencing more conflicts rather than understanding and peace.

Scholars who try to nullify the *heterogeneity thesis* argues that studies that show the heterogeneity in people's culture tend to be of micro-perspective and at most lean to study migrant communities, that is people in small social groups, thus they may maintain their cultural network not necessarily out of the love they have by their culture but may be as a result of group pressure. The main challenge in these studies is that when people migrate from one area and if they are from the same origin they tend to build a home away from home so that they maintain

their cultural networks and their ways of life. Thus, even if they live in a highly heterogenised community, but as long as they maintain close contact with people of their origin, they maintain their cultural bond hence their culture. But such a premise has also been highly criticized by many sociologists who study social groups. Their main argument is that the close networks among them and because most of them tend to live in close proximity, maintaining their culture might not necessarily represent individual choice but rather a result of group pressure, as being afraid of social sanction and reciprocity within their community (Min & Kim, 2000). This means that the heterogeneity that is observed might not necessarily be their willingness. Thus, migrant groups may not necessarily be a good choice of a study sample to justify global heterogeneity perspective.

1.4 The Hybridism perspective

Globalization as defined by Scholte (2008) entails a “*trans-planetary and supra territorial connection between people*”. It provides a force which is beyond neither an individual nor state’s control. It has penetrated in all sectors; economy, politics, culture and society; that is to say, all aspects of people’s lives in general. The interesting aspect of globalization is that it has a power to enter even in areas where it is challenged. Through its agents—media, movement of people, capital, and technology—globalization today is felt everywhere ranging from the most urbanized areas to the most remote areas of the world. It’s this attractive character of globalization that has made many scholars fascinated with the subject. As a result, globalization has become one among the most researched subjects of this century (Kellner, 2002; El-Onjeili & Hayden, 2006). At the same time, scholars have viewed the subject from different angles; some focusing in analyzing the economic globalization (Scholte, 2005; El-Onjeili & Hayden, 2006), some in political globalization (El-Onjeili & Hayden, 2006), and others in evaluating cultural globalization (Holton, 2000; El-Onjeili & Hayden, 2006; Bhawuk, 2008).

Scholars forwarding the other (*hybrid*) perspective can simply assumed to play what can easily be called a middle ground position, a situation in which they agree that the two forces (of *heterogeneity* and *homogeneity*) all are present. Their coalition creates a new cultural trait which is referred to as hybridization or glocalization (Holton, 2000; Kraidy, 2002; El-Onjeili & Hayden, 2006; Shim, 2006). These scholars do not perceive globalization a straight forward but

rather a complex social phenomenon. To them, globalization all the same, creates friends and enemies, winners and losers, all at once (Kellner, 2002). The hypothesis driving this perspective is that humans are rational beings, thus with globalization they adopt new culture but in connection with their own culture. They then create a new culture which is a median of both two forces. Thus, globalization becomes a source of social change to both consumers as well as producers of cultural goods. This supposition is further demonstrated with the argument that human as rational beings will adopt what they essentially consider good and will not adapt to what they define as destructive. This position however depends on an individual choice: as good is relative to one's mind.

Other scholars in this perspective negates the premise that hybridization involves the *mixing, blending, and synthesizing of different elements that ultimately forms a culturally faceless whole*, but rather the interaction of culture generate new forms and make new connections with one another (El-Onjeili & Hayden, 2006). The implied assumption is that both producers and consumers of cultural good are involved in an active negotiation which ultimately leads to a consensus which is designed in a way that both cultures compromise and create a frame in which the two collaborate rather than confront one another. This position further presupposes that even if people are faced by globalization from above they still have a power to modified and refold, reformulate a new culture and define it in the terms that are compatible with their own value systems (Kraidy, 2002; El-Onjeili & Hayden, 2006; Kellner, 2002).

The scholars following this perspective have a tendency to substantiate their position by evaluating changes that take place in different elements of culture like food, fashion, language, and architecture. For instance, Makoya (2006) argues that in Kenya there is a development of a language hybrid in which people are mixing the languages specifically English, Swahili and various ethnic languages, mostly spoken in big towns. The interesting aspect that Makoya finds is that the created language is called 'Sheng' which uses a Swahili structure and grammar but with lexicon drawn from Kiswahili, English, and other ethnic languages. This position is also shared by Nas (1998), where by observing architecture in Indonesia he found that housing architecture indicates a diffusion and hybridization of global architectural styles a mixture of Japanese culture, indigenous Indonesian, and some western elements. In music, as was found by Yoneoka in 2008, despite of the fact that Japanese music has been much influenced by western

music but that the same time it has been modified and reinterpreted so as to fit the Japanese people's local lifestyles. Implicitly, this position justifies that all cultures are in active interaction and that neither is stronger than the other. It is rather up to the consumers' (agency) position to reconfigure the way they see it possible to create another culture that is accommodative to all consumers.

Scholars who support this position go a step further in advocating that when culture is placed in the mechanics of the market, it is not necessarily true that one cultural good can assume a monopolistic character, but rather cultural industries under the multinationals cooperation's tend to work along the lines of the local cultures. The rationality of this premise is that multinational organizations find it easier to work along the lines of the local culture so as to make more profits rather than defying it (*culture*) (Kiely,2005; Scholte, 2008). This argument is supported mostly by scholars who see polarization between globality and locality, for instance Scholte (2008) gave an example that globally mobile phone "*companies may follow locally tailored marketing strategies*" just for the sake of making profit. Google introduction of a Swahili version of Microsoft was an example cited by Moshi in 2006. This indicates that regardless of the fact that multinational organizations may be the biggest producers of cultural goods; they at the same time do not necessarily produce's cultural goods that enhances the western culture to the global south.

Other scholars with regard to hybridity try to describe different stages in which any cultural product goes through before a new form of culture is formed "the hybrid". Yoneoka (2008) argues that the first stage is 'deculturalization' as a phase in which certain specific elements of the cultural product that appear not to be understood by the targeted audience are removed. The second stage referred to as 'acculturalization' is the one in which cultural-specific elements which seem to be understood by the target audience are added; and the last stage involves the 'reculturalization', in which cultural-specific elements are changed from ones that would not appeal to or be understood by the target audience to those that would.

As discussed earlier, despite of the three perspectives, some scholars have tried to go a step further in trying to speculate the future of the three suppositions. That is as homogenisation perspective which believes that globalization is inevitable, and that homogenization is the

outmost outcome. The implicit outcome is peace and collaboration among people. However, the position also explains that the outcome will not necessarily be a straight forward, that is to say, in some places at the beginning, cultural globalization will face resistance, or what other have referred to as *backlash* (Friedman, 2005) or *dysfunction* (Natrajan, 2003), a situation which in the words of Huntington represents a “**clash of civilization**”. As observed by Huntington (1993), globalization creates a condition in which people tend to turn inward for instance “*Asianization in Japan, the Hinduization of India, and re-Islamization of the Middle East*”. The main point posed by Huntington is that even through the west tends to create a condition in which the rest adapts to its ways of lives; the situation creates the motives for non-western to shape the world in non-Western ways. For other scholars the situation becomes the basis of their explanation of the increasing religious fundamentalism; and to some, it even provides explanations for the current form of terrorism (Lizardo, 2006). But these scholars are also optimistic of the situation as they believe that the backlash will also give rise to counter backlash movements which will ultimately be out-spaced (Friedman, 2005). In simple words, this means that even though people are turning inward, some see the advantages of globalization and thus will also create a movement for the community to consume the good things that come with globalization.

Regardless of the fact that the homogenisation and hybridization thesis negates any prospects of conflict but communicate on the assumption that globalization creates a situation in which people live in high level of tolerance and cultural relativity, the heterogeneity perspective on the other hand maintains that peace does not however come from the fact that there is cultural sameness, but rather it is the tolerance of differences that creates a peaceful co-existence. For the hybridization theory, they see peacefulness as a result of a growth of a new global culture; that is reflexive and accommodative to people of different cultural origins, a position which seems to be highly ambitious but yet very persuasive in reference to the forces of globalization.

In all the three paradigms, the hybrid perspective is the most persuasive, though not at the global level, it makes more sense if applied at a local level. This is because by nature of human behavior and that through interaction with others and even with one’s self, human continuously modifies his/her way of thinking, and world views which ultimately affect their way of life, thus maintaining one’s culture through time and space seems highly unfeasible. This belief makes the very foundation of culture as is viewed to be in a continuous process of social changes and that

human rationality constantly influences them to persistently define and redefine their own culture. At the same time, this does not mean that people can adopt into a new culture easily and completely, thus saying that people can wipe out their culture and adopt into a completely new one it's highly unlikely. However, there is a possibility of adopting some patterns of it and diffuse in their lifestyle. Furthermore, this position also negates the assumption that the new or created culture will also carry the homogenisation character and that will be accommodative to all people of the world. However, through literature, scholars have focused in establishing their position by observing changes in elements of culture and spotlighting in urban or cosmopolitan areas. Areas where we assume people have been mostly affected by globalization, and because movement of people, technology, and capital is specifically high in these areas, the outcome will most likely indicate homogenization of culture. Consequently, it will be difficult to establish patterns of cultural negotiation as the groups interact. This simply means that if we want to stipulate the conditions in which culture negotiation takes place, then our focus should be in a rural area; a place where people still deeply hold on to their culture. To be clearer, the focus should also be in a particular cultural practice. Doing so, will provide a scholar with a situation in which he/she can be able to detect patterns which that community are not willingly letting go but at the same time documents aspects of which that community is flexible. Further, the scholar will be able to further stipulate the reasons as to why some patterns are more flexible than others.

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