



Conceptualising culture in a globalised world

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Abstract

Globalised world has witnessed widespread interchange of views, opinions, and various aspects of culture. This has resulted in the mixture of cultures resulting in transplantations, transitions, hybridisation, and ultimate transformations of culture leading to the growth of a global culture. Due to the impact of globalization, culture comes under Three “H” Syndrome (Homogenisation, Heterogenisation, and Hybridization). In contemporary situation, there has been affirmative as well as damaging changes in culture. Thus, the globalised world presents both significant opportunities and critical challenges to develop a new framework of culture.

Keywords: Globalised world, homogenisation, heterogenisation, and hybridization

Introduction

In a globalised world, there is widespread interchange of views, opinions, and various aspects of culture. Further, the exchange of world perceptions, information, and ideas has resulted in a major transformation of the lifestyle and living standard of people across the globe. Various means of communication, social media, and most importantly the internet have played a major role in the mixture of cultures resulting in transplantations, transitions, hybridisation, and ultimate transformations of culture leading to the growth of a global culture. In substance, global culture emerges as the vital outcome due of this process of worldwide interconnectedness. The present paper aims at analysing the changing contents of culture in a globalised world.

Theoretical Framework

Culture is a way of life of a people. It is not static but grows out of selected customs and habits. Indeed, culture can be the “total pattern of human behaviour and its products embodied in speech, action, and artifacts and dependent upon man’s capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations” (Gove, 1986, p. 552). Appadorai (2002) ^[2, 9] analyses culture in terms of three dimensions:

1. “1. The way human beings relate to nature and life—they produce and use goods, and eventually exchange them.
2. The relation to symbols and rituals which help humans to structure social relationships, build community, and celebrate it.
3. The search for ultimate meaning that offers goals and motivations, where religions and ideologies provide answers to this quest.” These three dimensions provide an identity to a social group and distinguish it from other groups.

In its major aspects, culture is an integrated set of values, norms, and behaviours acquired by human beings as members of a society. In this context, culture refers to a constituent of identification within a specified group of individuals and a constituent of differentiation vis-à-vis other groups. Secondly, culture implies an artistic and symbolic creations, heritage, and indigenous products.

In the context of globalization, these two aspects of culture explain the ways through which individuals express their cultural identities. There are two powerful scenarios which reflect the consequences of globalization. In one scenario, the culturally distinct societies of the world are being dominated by global goods, media, ideas, and institutions. This endangers native or local cultures and leads to westernization in disguise. The second scenario is cultural fragmentation and intercultural conflict where local cultures fail to encounter the tides of global culture.

Culture in a globalised world

Due to the impact of globalization, culture comes under Three “H” Syndrome (Homogenisation, Heterogenisation, and Hybridization). Accordingly, scholars find three major impacts on culture:

- ‘It is having a homogenizing effect,
- It leads to the development of hybridisation in cultural forms, and
- It results in a heterogenisation effect in culture’.

This is popularly known as the three H syndrome relating to cultural globalisation (Pieterse, 2009) ^[16].

Homogenisation of Culture

Cultural homogenisation is the direct outcome of globalisation. It implies the tendency of cultures to be inclined towards a uniformed way of life by adopting similarities. According to Barnet and Cavanagh (1994 ^[3], p.15), “the impact of this homogenisation on the rich cultural diversity of communities all around the world is immense”. Homogenisation reduces cultural diversities. In the twenty-first century, people dress more alike all over the world in comparison to the closing part of nineteenth century. In fact, homogenisation of culture moves through different concepts or models such as ‘Global Culture’, ‘Westernisation’, ‘Americanisation’, and ‘McDonaldization’

- **Global Culture:** Globalization contributes to developing a new and specified class of individuals who become the part of an evolving global culture. The new global culture indicates de-territorialisation and the

development of a borderless world. Sizeable number of people watch the same entertainment programs, listen to the same music, consume common global brand products and services, and wear similar clothes across the world. According to Robertson (1992^[18], p.8), these “comparable developments in cultural practices are suggestive of the emergence of a global culture or world culture”

- **Americanisation:** An Americanized world is the net outcome of the growth of globalization. The world is witnessing Americanization in a big way as there is a global spread of America’s influence, dominance, and culture through communication networks and the infiltration of American companies into other countries. There is convergence in consumer taste and behaviour with the American model. This is not only a framework for global culture, but also constitutes a major impact on culture in a globalised world.
- **Westernisation:** Cultural homogenisation is rooted through westernisation, which poses a danger to cultural diversity. Mazrui (2001)^[14] uses the term “hegemonisation” to describe this phenomenon, implying that the Western world has become more powerful to exercise global domination and influence.
- **McDonaldization:** The US based McDonald Corporation is a fast-food company founded in 1940 as a restaurant run by Richard and Maurice McDonald. McDonaldization is a concept developed by sociologist George Ritzer (1993)^[17] to describe the situation when a society adopts the characteristics of a fast-food restaurant. Ritzer defines McDonaldization as “the process whereby the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society and the world” (p. 1). In simple words, McDonaldization is a symbolic idea to reflect worldwide homogenization of cultures through the impacts of multinational corporations.

However, homogenisation has been rejected by critics as it does not allow diversity. According to Beck (2000) and Berger (2002)^[5, 6], “globalization, when viewed as a replication of American and/or Western cultural traditions, is considered a destructive force and a recipe for cultural disaster.” In line with this, globalization contributes to weakening identities and spoiling cultural traditions and practices of local people. Often, it dilutes the distinctiveness of culture of a nation and establishes a homogenized culture in the world.

Further, Fukuyama (1992)^[8] rejects the view that ‘globalization is leading strictly to cultural homogeneity. He believes that ‘while there may be homogenization of certain aspects of the economy and society, simultaneously there will be an affirmation of distinctive cultural identities.

Heterogenisation

The globalization generates a heterogeneous atmosphere with two distinct variants:

- Heterogenization refers to a condition under which the practices of one area of life in a particular environment assumes diverse character over a period of time at local level.

- Further heterogenization implies a state of affairs where the practices of one area of life in at least two different environments become more distinctive over a time at global level.

In this light, heterogeneity facilitates cultures to exist different from one another. Further, heterogeneity focuses on diversity and multi-directional flows of culture at global level (Appadurai, 1996)^[1]. However, in the process of heterogenization, the local cultures are not eradicated rather it changes some of their traits while reinforcing others.

Hybridization

Hybridization of culture is a continuous process of mixing or blending cultures resulting from globalization and derived from the integration of both global and local cultures. The emerging new, distinctive, and hybrid cultures are primarily neither global nor local. According to hybridization theory, ‘external and internal flows interact to create a unique cultural hybrid that encompasses components of both (Jan, 2009)^[12]’. Thus, cultural mixing or hybridization model reflects the interactions between globalization and culture.

Affirmative changes in culture

- **Cultural Similarization:** Due to globalization, culture acquires a generalizing and universalizing character. Increasing communication technology has caused the integration of different cultures, thereby developing a new global culture presenting the cultures of different countries look alike. This is called cultural similarization. However, advocates of cultural similarization often refer to Western culture symbols, especially American ones. According to Tomlinson (1999)^[21], items like clothing, food, music, film, television, and architecture are drivers of cultural similarization. Today, brands like Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Calvin Klein, Microsoft, Levi's, IBM, Nike, and CNN facilitate this phenomenon globally.
- **Cultural Variety:** Globalization has led to new variety in culture. Compression of time and space, shrinking of cultural and physical barriers, and increased interactions between nations have resulted in the reinforcement, proliferation, and variation of cultures, languages, religions, and ideologies. In substance, globalization has caused cultural variety, and cultural variety has caused variety in life.
- **Mix of Culture:** With the interaction between boundaries, mixing of culture takes place. Globalization creates hybrid or mixed identities combining elements of traditional, modern, national, and global cultures. Hannerz (1987)^[10] used the term ‘creolization’ to symbolize the process of Western cultures being transformed and re-conceptualised outside the Western world.
- **Glocalisation of Culture:** The concept of glocalization has gained popularity in the wake of globalisation. It facilitates improving standards of life without hampering local traditions. Robertson (1995)^[19] coined the term “glocalization” to describe the process through which the local is integrated into the global, and the global is adapted to the local.

- **Multiculturalism and Cosmopolitanism:** During ongoing globalization, two processes are seen at work: migration and cosmopolitanism. There is migration of skilled and unskilled persons from less developed countries to more developed ones to seek better employment opportunities. On the other hand, cosmopolitans move across the globe in search of profitable market opportunities. As noted by Bauman (1998, p.87) ^[4], “the migrant cannot go home, whereas the cosmopolitan has no home to go”. Globalisation thus fosters multiculturalism through migration and cosmopolitanism through global movement.

Damaging impacts on Culture

- **Clash of Culture and Civilization:** The process of globalisation can lead to a clash of civilizations arising out of cultural struggle. Huntington (1996) ^[11] suggested that “the fundamental conflict in the world will not be primarily ideological or political, but cultural”. He argued that the major conflicts in global politics will occur among different civilizations.
- **Cultural Hegemonisation:** In the process of interaction among different cultures, dominant cultures often prevail over weaker ones, giving rise to cultural hegemonisation. The dominant culture of the West influence’s cultures worldwide, posing severe challenges to global cultural diversity (Mazrui, 2001) ^[14].
- **Cultural Imperialism:** Cultural imperialism originates out of the cultural impacts of globalisation. According to Weckert and Adeney (1997 ^[22], p.112) “the use of political and economic power to exalt and spread the values and habits of a foreign culture at the expense of native culture” (p. 112). Schiller (1976) ^[20] argued that cultural imperialism arises within the world economic system, where terms of production settled in one location are imposed elsewhere, fostering a consumerist mentality and depressing local industries.
- **Emergence of English as a Global Language:** Language is a vital part of culture, but local languages face erosion under globalisation. Throughout the world, individuals are compelled to learn English to use computer software and participate in the global economy. Leading scholars refer to global English as a “killer language” that threatens linguistic diversity (Phillipson, 1992) ^[15].
- **Erosion of Local Cultures:** Advocates of cultural homogenization theory maintain that global media, information systems, and multinational corporations lead to the erosion of local traditions as Western popular culture dominates local environments (Crane, 2002) ^[7].
- **Cultural Degeneration and Poverty Culture:** Globalisation has created economic inequalities, widening the gap between rich and poor. In this context, Lewis (1966) ^[13] outlined how marginalization gives rise to a “culture of poverty.” Extreme

monetization and consumerism foster culturally tabooed activities, contributing to cultural degeneration.

Discussion and Conclusion

Precisely, globalisation results in cultural harmonisation. It brings the cultures of different communities, so far isolated, into closeness with each other. This leads to cultural harmonisation or cultural integration. Further, cultural harmonisation culminates into cultural hybridisation and homogenisation, which refers to negative cultural change through loss of diversity.

In a globalised world, culture has come under immense and diverse impacts. It has affected the cultural aspects of human life in multiple ways. While cultural globalization offers positive dimensions by fostering diversity, intercultural exchange, and higher living standards, it simultaneously presents severe socio-political and cultural challenges by reducing local uniqueness and state autonomy. Thus, the globalised world presents both significant opportunities and critical challenges to develop a new framework of culture.

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