

Cultural Globalization and Global Flow of Popular Culture

İhsan Çapçioğlu

Department of Philosophy and Religious Sciences, Faculty of Divinity, University of Ankara, Türkiye

Abstract: Globalization is a term referring to doing business on global scale beyond the national borders, to the processes of unifying and combining the communities and organizations within new time-place combinations, and making the world objectively and in a more connected way with the experiences of men. The dynamics concerning globalization give rise both to the conflicts due to binary oppositions on global scale and to the mutual transactions among each pole of these conflicts. Cultural globalization also includes the global circulation of information, signs and symbols on a global scale and the reactions shown to the various socio-cultural transformations as a result of these conflicts. Today, the global cultural elements has been created and directed largely by the global media empires which have powerful communicative technologies. The reification of popular cultural patterns in the traditional local cultures and the communication devices of cultural images displaced from their local contexts where the visuality is dominant, particularly with the fact that the circulation has speeded up through the internet have made difficult to appreciate the problems about the future of traditional cultures, with their all aspects, against the global sovereignty of popular culture that aims to create, by abrading the cultural differences, a homogenous culture. Hopefully, we took, in this article, helpful steps to voice some problems regarding the future of the traditional culture in the globalizing world.

Key words: Globalization • Cultural Globalization • Media • Popular Culture

INTRODUCTION

Globalization is concept that refers to the processes which include activities beyond a nation's borders, and consolidation of groups and organizations within a new time and space combinations as well as attempts to unite experiences of people in an objective way. Such complex processes witnessed in recent times lead to disappearance of national culture identities. Globalization refers to go away from the classical society that has clear-cut borders, and that is defined as a border of a nation-state or region. Rather, it contain a different perspective that focuses on how societal life is arranged across time and space [1]. In this perspective, one of the fundamental features that is resulted from the last phase of globalization is the compression of time and space. It means that the world feels itself smaller as a result of fast global processes, and distances have become shorter and then, any event occurred in any part of the world has impacts on very remote places in a short time interval [2].

Cultural Dimensions of Globalization in the Contradiction of Opposites: Dynamics related to globalization lead to certain contradictions resulting from mutual opposites at local and at global levels as

well as some interactions between two poles of these contradictions. Cultural contradictions that occur as a result of conflicts and interactions between the pair of time-space and the pair of time-largeness can be briefly stated as follows:

A) Globalization Versus Singularization: Globalization, on one hand, tries to make universal some parts of modern life such as nation-state, production processes and consumer trends, etc. and on the other hand, it also encourage singularization through supporting differences.

B) Homogenization Versus Heterogenization: The process of globalization tends to homogenize the surface appearance and institutions of modern societal life, but at the same time, it make the global internalized through taking into consideration the local conditions.

C) Consolidation Versus Fragmentation: Globalization forces societies to totally new global, regional and transnational organizations but at the same time, it may fragment groups within national borders and also out of these borders. In this framework, racial and ethnical differences have become related as the "others" have been closer.

D) Centralization Versus Decentralization: Globalization provides increases in the frequency of power, information, capital and communication. On the other hand, it supports the attempts of local institutions, groups in their desire to have more power leading to decentralized dynamics.

E) Being Side by Side Versus Being Simultaneous: Globalization requires that different cultures, life styles and social practices should exist side by side. Such a practice supports a nation's borders and unites socio-cultural differences and biases. However, globalization also allows for common cultural identities and social settings in which ideas, knowledge, values and life styles are hybridized [3].

Based on these globalization can be regarded as a socio-cultural process that contains three basic dimensions. Smith (2005: 308) argues that these three basic dimensions are the following globalization areas [4]:

- a) *Economic globalization* that refers to the increase of worldwide financial markets and free-trade regions, global exchange of goods and services, and fast growing of transnational firms.
- b) *Political globalization* that refers to replacement of states by transnational economic and political organization such as the United Nations, the European Union, and the increase of global policies.
- c) *Cultural globalization* that refers to global flow of information, signs and symbols as well as the resulting socio-cultural transformations.

Cultural Globalization: Historical Background: Debates on globalization in social sciences fields has started since 1980s. However, it is widely acknowledged that the process of globalization has been going on nearly for one century. For instance, transition from small-scale hunting and collecting societies to modern nation-state can be regarded as a step towards global society. Theories of Durkheim, Marx and Weber provides different accounts on emergence and order of distinct societal organizations within a historical process. However, research on globalization mainly focuses on more contemporary global contexts. Within cultural globalization, such topics as capitalism, metas, time-space press and information flow lead to an inevitably close relationship between research on globalization and postmodernist studies [4].

Featherstone (1995: 6) states that research on cultural globalization includes two rival hypotheses or models [5]. *The first model* is developed by Ritzer (1996) and Barber (1996) and they argue that we live in a world which is characterized as "Americanization", "McDonaldization" and the increase of homogenization [6,7]. This approach emphasizes how "cultural imperialism" works and how the US culture is exported to other parts of the world through free-market ideologies. Globalization definitions included in this approach have certain major facts such as active position of western, especially the US, values and ideas, capitalist values that have an established transborder characteristic, universal characteristics of law, the forces to realize content analysis of traditional forms of nation-states, multiculturalism, the rise of transparency in societal and individual lives, decrease in confidentiality [8]. Furthermore, in this model, The US-based media and popular entertainment products such as Disney¹ cartoons are heavily emphasized in relation to export of these products. Recent studies adopting this model focuses on global cultural preferences, the rise of management systems and distortion of local/national cultural differences. These are subject to capitalist rationality that has no foundation and that is continuously expanding, and related metas and technology rather than American values [4].

Within this tradition, the most well-known theory is that of Ritzer (1996) who employed the studies of Marx and Weber [6]. His theory is called the theory of McDonaldization. Ritzer uses the term McDonaldization to refer to different socio-cultural processes that lead to the use of logic of fast-food restaurants in other parts of the world in addition to the US society. In other words, principles adopted by fast-food restaurants influences the whole world. These principles are efficiency, reasonability, estimationability, and control. Ritzer argues that recent activity targets of McDonaldization are universities, funerals, and hotels. Although these principles provides some benefits in terms of service delivery and finance, Ritzer points out several disadvantages of them. Practical outcomes of social change driven by fast-food restaurants includes a narrow rationality of vehicle-goal without any large-scale social goals: (a) requirement of no quality jobs and other activities (b) packaged delivery, (c) standardized modules and options, (d) use of cruel market rules and (e) distortion of authenticity and meanings in social life.

¹New popular culture industries have a belief towards "cultural integration of the world" and their production is regarded as universal culture production. This belief contributes to the idea that life styles, cultures and consumer behaviour will be similar all around the world. This "common culture" belief and "awareness" is supported by such media products as *Dallas*, *Batman* and *Disneyland*. The director of the Euro Disneyland argue that the characters of Disney are universal. "You could not persuade an Italian child on the fact that Topolino (Italian version of Mickey Mouse) is American [9].

For Ritzer, all these have negative meanings, and “if there is less McDonaldization in the world, people can live better with their own potentials” [4].

In the long term, McDonaldization of the world will lead to inhibition of creativeness of people and to acceptance of standards that end humanistic social relationships [10]. Similarly, Benjamin Barber also warns against the process of “McWorld” that make various distinct groups of the world homogeneous market with consumer capitalism that has no spirit. For Barber, McWorld is a product of American popular culture in the 1950s and 1960s and is directed by imperialist commerce-driven purposes. Common logos of music, videos, plays, books and entertainment parks, commercial slogans, stars, songs, brands and commercial musics are all representations of American image, and produced as export products [10].

In this context, Peter L. Berger deals with popular culture using four aspects of globalizations with reference to Barber’s “McWorld” term. Therefore, popular culture has western, especially American origin. Young people all around world dance with American songs, and wear American blue jeans and t-shirts with symbols of American universities and products. Adults watch American TV series and movies. Therefore, all people go to fast-food restaurants and become more fat. All these facts points out a clear cultural hegemony. For Berger, it is not surprising that these facts are criticised by French culture minister or Iranian religious leaders. Those who criticise cultural hegemony are aware of the fact that it is not an approach towards outside. Cultural hegemony carries a series of beliefs and values.² Consumption of American culture has a ritual quality. This hegemonic aspect can be observed in the symmetrical nature of consumption. For instance, Mexicans eat hamburger but Americans Taco. However, Mexicans also consume other aspects of American culture in addition to hamburgers. Americans, on the other hand, do not consume other aspects of Mexican culture except for their cuisine [11].³

Berger states that those people whose task is to globalize the popular culture are the managers of global elitist culture which he calls the “Davos culture”. The consumers of such cultural products are much larger than its managers. Criticisms towards popular global culture vary between total acceptance and total rejection,

although they have some common points. Total acceptance generally leads to generation conflict and the motive for young people to accept this global culture is their reaction to family members.⁴ Total rejection of global culture, on the other hand, is not possible even in totaliter regimes [11].

Beginning by the 1980s and 1990s, homogeneity and the loss of authenticity led to questions about this approach. It also led to the emergence of *the second model* that emphasizes highly complex interaction between “global” and “local/national”. In general, “local” refers to traditions and life styles that are small-scale and limited in terms of geographical borders such as religion, national culture, language, local traditions. “Global”, on the other hand, refers to larger societal and cultural forces that are related to globalization and have larger space borders such as consumptionism, satellite communications, cultural industries and migration. Advocates of the second model focus on how globalization processes themselves become interrelated and how globalization processes and local/national cultures become interrelated. They argue that such interrelationships can produce very unpredictable and highly complex outcomes such as cultural “homogeneity”⁵ as well as “cultural hybridization”⁶ and “cultural differentiation”⁷.

Morley and Robins (1997: 125) points out that national borders have distorted as a result of increase in information and communication flows and intense migration leading to frequent conflicts between culture and identities that have not been observed before [9]. Formerly, cultures are separated by time and space. But in recent times, the concept of culture which was fixed, integrated and surrounded by borders has replaced by the concepts of “global dynamics of global groups” and their trend to be penetrated.

Cultural Globalization, Media and Popular Culture: In recent times, global culture products are basically made and directed by global media empires that have strong communications technologies to convey their messages. Global culture is shaped by firms that produce TV series and commercials and the acceptance of the people also contributes to this process [10]. TV programs has become platforms for global gossip marketing and provides the

³For instance The USA TV series provides many examples of consumption products. All elements used such as furniture, automobiles, clothes, athing habits etc. are all provided to present the images of desired life styles [18].

⁹The reason for regarding the US culture as popular culture should be studied in relation to the distinctive characteristics of the US society. As Baudrillard stated; “the USA is an authentic version of modernity. It ignores the problem of ethnicity, it does not try to be authentic. It does not have the past history. Therefore, it lives in the current period ” [19]. Therefore, because of the arguments argued by Baudrillard the USA culture can be stated to be totally popular. McRobbie, (1999: 118) argues that it is because of the imperialist approach of the USA that leads to have its societal impact [20]. The sociological existence of making American the world can not be denied. It can be observed through the Hollywood movies, Bunu Coca Cola and Mc Donalds [16].

people from all ages with unmeaningful details of American stars' private life. Research on the effects of the popular culture products in the USA concludes that children of 12 years old watch a total of 20.000 commercials annually and as a result children develop a commitment to certain brand names [10]. TV series that are famous at the global scale are being adapted by local TV broadcasting firms and they are repeated in many local platforms. Values delivered by transnational media firms throughout the world reinforce the hegemony of popular culture and lead to depolitization and weakening of social bonds. As an example, news and educational programs full of gossip and entertainment can be given [10,12].

Globalization expresses the creation of a world that has no deep meaning and the press of time and space. Global space is the space of flows and it is electronic, has no center and borders within it can be penetrated. In this global space, economies and cultures have intense and direct relationships with one another [9].

Global commercial strategies create small, dependent local economies that are related to multinational production. It allows for integrating local elements into the flow of media products and also for having larger international platforms for media companies. As stated by Hall (1998: 49), global culture does not produce mini versions of being English or American but it adopts the differences and puts these differences within a larger framework that in fact includes *American Way* [13]. Dominant culture and capital can only have a place in different geographical regions. In other words, global popular culture has opportunity to extend its space through local capitalists and through its cooperation with economic elitists [14]. Therefore, global popular culture products that includes local cultural elements are provided to national and international markets to be consumed. Such products can be like blue jeans or McDonalds restaurants or several kinds of TV series⁸ [15].

In this context it is possible to argue that the US culture⁹ has established its dominance in different aspects of life and it has regarded as an universal culture throughout the world. Beginning by the 1950s during which television broadcasting appeared, the US culture has more or less complemented by many other nations' cultures [16]. Hall calls popular culture "global mass culture" that is regarded as meta through modern communications and has no borders. It is a fact that global mass culture has western origin. Furthermore, cultural images through media products have been transmitted from the USA to other western cultures and then, to undeveloped cultures for a long time and this flow is one-way transmission. Therefore, these cultural

products that shape the entertaining form of the world has become global brand-names. Global flow of such products is realized through symbols, brand-names and huge media and commercial firms [14].

Popular culture is a general term that refers to practices towards making sense of the world consisting of symbolical forms. Most of the approaches studying popular cultural forms produced within daily life deals with the use of various symbols in the current cultures. In order to analyse the readings of popular products in different contexts and to understand them through daily representations, cultural flow between local and global should be focused. Therefore, popular culture studies may contain international comparative perspective as well as local-based perspective [17]. Cultural products have also effects on daily life styles. Production, marketing and delivery of popular culture symbols by media firms may lead to masses watching the same TV series as well as lead to cultural hybridization in which any popular culture product contains local and traditional features. Additionally, popular culture representations produced at global level and local level distort the identities [17].

Through Internet and other newly discovered technologies, very distinct life forms and cultural patterns are delivered very fast, freely and commonly. As images and ideas can be transmitted easily and fast from one place to another, they have direct impacts upon the lives of people. Waters (1995) in this regard states that the major element that makes the globalization process fast is the frequency of cultural symbol exchanges between societies and people. Cultural symbol exchange that has increased as a result of advances in communications technologies reproduces the established value system and consumption patterns [21]. Recent cultural practices exceed the fixed localities such as cities and nations and have new meanings through interactions with dominant cultural themes [10].

Distances shortened through mass media and fast delivery of information distort the understanding of time and space that is very stable in traditional perceptions and life styles. Mass media as a means of having information and conveying culture can be vehicle to consume the culture with market perceptions. In fact, it is the feature of it that is mostly criticised. The thing delivered by mass media is the popular culture that is modified in terms of form and content based on the needs of consumers [22].

Cultural products have existed in several forms across historical periods. However, global production and marketing of culture products by cartels is a characteristic of our period. Many disadvantages of this process are the reason for criticisms towards popular culture. Popular

culture make not only products and daily life practices but also certain world views popular. Through this process, capitalist system and its market relationships are regarded by the masses as universal facts. Cultural, economic and political processes are integrated components of social life. Culture is vital for both policy and economy. Culture is not merely a processes of conveying values, attitudes, etc. to masses contributing to the existence and future of the society. At the same time, culture is the most strong source for people's social life patterns. In this sense, culture is the one that is and was being lived and that is related to the one was lived and is being lived. Since humans' experience shapes the culture, it can be viewed as a total of experience of all humans living in the same culture. Such experiences occur in relation to certain geographical region through local and direct relationships. However, culture in the global world includes distant and others' experiences that are identified by a dominant global market [23].

Popular culture distorts nearly all traditional preferences and encourages the cultural differences but at the same time mixes all cultural products leading to homogenous culture. Therefore, it distorts culture and also, serves for totaliter perspectives. This feature of popular culture resulting from global culture patterns cannot be independent from the changes in general culture settings. As a result of exchanges in culture, cultural isolation has become impossible creating a totally new form [16].

CONCLUSION

Discussion presented above shows that globalization is the dominant and challenging paradigm of social sciences in recent times. In this complex process cultural heterogeneity is lived with cultural homogeneity simultaneously. However, it does not mean that traditional, local or national has no significance. In this context Aymaz's (2004: 47) following criticism about globalization discourse seems to be relevant [24]:

Transborder data flow, global broadcasting networks, satellite communications, etc. have still the same ideological problem as seen in newspapers of the 18th. century. Furthermore, this problem has become more complex. Communicational experience is closed to pure perception, so it is not physical but mental. Therefore, the question of whether or not the thing that the mind comes across is the absolute true is still valid. The other thing is the cognitive side of the mind. Can the mind of modern human beings be active in relating the information,

realizing the information provided, comparing it and making sense of it? Taking into consideration such concerns, it is not reasonable to be happy with the idea that borders have disappeared and distance and space have dissolved. The approach needed is to think about the question whether or not there is any danger of global masses. Thus, a perspective in which human beings are in the center not the globe should be adopted.

In conclusion as stated by globalization theorist Robertson (Robertson 2007: 114), if we totally accept that we live in a world in which differences are placed into similarities intensively and cultures are subject to increasing manipulation, it is safe to argue that the future of traditional cultures is promising [25]. However, the existence of popular culture products at the global level makes it difficult to assess the future of traditional cultures in a clear way. We hope that this article presents some problems about the future of traditional cultures in the globalizing world.

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