

**CONSUMPTION CULTURE AND HOMOGENIZATION IN THE
GLOBALIZATION PROCESS
KÜRESELLEŞME SÜRECİNDE TÜKETİM KÜLTÜRÜ VE
HOMOJENLEŞME**

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Abstract

Globalization is a concept used in entitling an economic process which began to appear especially in the 1960s, but has been intensely felt for the past 25-30 years. Globalization refers to not only an economic process, but also a social, political and cultural process. Western multinational companies which are the subjects of globalization offer Western products and services, as well as contextual features in the utilization of these products and services to non-Western countries in parallel with technological and communicational developments. Thus, perceiving, thinking and living features of the Western culture affect the culture of non-Western countries, which leads to the development of firstly hybridization and then assimilation into the Western culture and homogenization in national cultures. As a consequence, unitary states become economically, politically and culturally dependent on the West. This dependence provides the West a source of raw materials and an opportunity of marketing. Consumption culture which dominates the West is also imposed on non-Western countries in various ways. This culture is a process which is offered to the world especially by the USA and developed Western countries, imposed with technological, economical, political and cultural oppressions and simply aims to “standardize” people from different cultures, lifestyles and geographies. Predicting “Americanization” in terms of perceiving, thinking and acting; consumption culture is a cultural process which spreads via today’s mass media (radio, tv, internet) such as news, documentaries, tv series, advertisements and social media and hypnotizes people to consume with its subconscious-related effects. The process aims to homogenize individuals in thinking, acting and consuming. Cultural homogenization is only one aspect of globalization and it signifies reducing the cultural diversity by means of not only using material products, but also extending and spreading a wide cultural series such as beliefs, thoughts, values, attitudes and behaviors.

Our study will center upon homogenization which is tried to be formed by globalization through increasing the consumption on the national culture and explore the cultural diversity of national cultures and the differences between homogenization and multiculturalism.

Key Words: Globalization, consumption, cultural diversity, multiculturalism, homogenization

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Özet

Küreselleşme, özellikle 1960'larda belirmeye başlayan, ancak etkileri son 25-30 yıldır yoğun olarak hissedilen ekonomik süreci adlandırmada kullanılan bir kavramdır. Küreselleşme, ekonomik olduğu kadar sosyal, siyasal ve kültürel bir süreci de işaret eder. Küreselleşmenin öznelere olan Batılı çokuluslu şirketler, Batılı olmayan ülkelere teknoloji ve iletişimdeki gelişmelere paralel olarak bir yandan Batılı ürün ve hizmetleri, bir yandan da bu ürün ve hizmetlerin kullanımındaki bağlamsal özellikleri sunarlar. Dolayısıyla Batı kültürünün algılama, düşünme ve yaşama özellikleri, Batılı olmayan ülke kültürleri üzerinde etkili olurlar. Böylece milli kültürlerde önce melezleşme, ardından da Batı kültürüne benzeme, homojenleşme başlar. Bunun sonucunda da üniter devletler ekonomik, siyasî, kültürel olarak Batı'ya bağımlı hâle gelir. Bu bağımlılık Batı'ya hammadde kaynağı ve pazar imkânları sağlar. Batı'da egemen olan tüketim kültürü, Batılı olmayan ülkelere de çeşitli yollarla benimsetilir. Bu kültür, başta ABD olmak üzere gelişmiş Batılı ülkeler tarafından dünyaya sunulan ve teknolojik, ekonomik, siyasî ve kültürel baskı yoluyla benimsetilen farklı coğrafyalarda farklı kültür ve yaşayıştaki insanların adeta "tek tip"leşmesini hedefleyen bir süreçtir. Algılama, düşünme, davranma açısından "Amerikanlaşma"yı öngören tüketim kültürü, günümüz iletişim araçlarından (radyo, tv, internet) haber, belgesel, dizi film, reklam, sosyal medya, vd. yollarla yayılan, insanların bilinçaltına yönelik etkileriyle onları, tüketime yöneltme anlamında ipnotize eden bir kültürel süreçtir. Sürecin hedefi düşünmede, davranmada, tüketmede kişilerin homojenleş/tiril/mesidir. Kültürel homojenleş/tir/me, küreselleşmenin yalnızca bir yönüdür ve sadece maddî ürünlerle değil, inançlar, düşünceler, değerler, tavır ve davranışlar gibi geniş bir kültürel dizinin yayılması, yaygınlaşması ile kültür çeşitliliğinin azaltılması anlamına gelir.

Çalışmamızda, küreselleşmenin milli kültür üzerindeki tüketimi arttırarak oluşturmayı hedeflediği homojenleştirme üzerinde durulacak; milli kültürlerin sahip olduğu kültürel çeşitlilik ile homojenleşmenin ve çok kültürlülüğün farkları irdelenecektir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Küreselleşme, tüketim, kültürel çeşitlilik, çok kültürlülük, homejenleşme

INTRODUCTION

The concept of globalization is a multi-directional and thus, a pretty complicated concept. Many researchers from a variety of disciplines have evaluated globalization and defined it in their own ways according to their fields of study and viewpoints. The phenomenon of globalization which has economical, political and cultural effects is still being explored by many field researchers. In this study, we also will try to evaluate the basic features of globalization and then center upon homogenization which is probably the most important feature of globalization from the cultural aspect.

To define roughly; globalization is a capitalistic, economical, political and social process which has been intensely felt and experienced for the past 25-30 years. The actants/subjects of this process are developed Western countries primarily such as the USA and the UK. What these countries do within the scope of a certain plan and project is that they include non-Western countries in the process and make them an object in the capitalistic consumption process. Western countries, particularly the USA have become very successful in the process. Because in the current situation, other countries have all become passive and economically, politically and culturally dependent on them. International Western companies use these countries as a source of raw materials and a market where they can sell their products and impose globalization on these countries as a historically inevitable and inescapable process. It is surely beyond doubt that they have a right to do so. Because with their economical and technological power, as well as technological progress and development; they are able to control and govern the mass media as they wish to. In other words, they are an active subject in the process and non-Western countries in different regions remain weaker than these countries from a number of aspects, which makes them passive against the imposition of a monotype culture, the consumption culture on them. Thus, their traditional cultures, social values and social bonds get weaker and even destroyed. Being a supra-state structure; international companies and organizations which are the actors of globalization realize their own institutionalization using the opportunities of technology and thus communication with “consumption cathedrals”¹ (Ritzer 2011:14) that are rapidly constructed in every country and impose a culture, understanding and behavior patterns based on consumption due to the global ideology on selfish, self-interested communities consisting of individuals who get happier as they consume more and more. In fact, “this economic structure which grows like a hormone-injected teenager eating everything and getting so tall that it is no more possible to measure” (Harari 2015:302) generates a social structure consisting of individuals who are always hungry and act with an instinct of possessing and consuming.

Continuing with an intense effectiveness economically, politically and thus socially; globalization process is an expression of capitalistic-imperialistic Western countries, primarily the USA and the UK to dominate the world. In other words, it is reshaping the world in perceiving, thinking and living ways of these countries and this reshaping includes the division of unitary states, adjustment of borders of the countries and by this way, construction of satellite states for themselves. Thus, there is an effort to build

¹ With the term “consumption cathedrals”, Ritzer implies shopping malls which escalate in every country today and refers to the semi-religious ‘magical’ properties of these “cathedrals” or new environments. He suggests that consumption has become a place where we ‘go on pilgrimage’ to apply our religion (2011:14).

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new energy resources and new markets on one hand and create a single order of thinking, perceiving, consuming and briefly living all over the world on the other. As E. Kongar² suggests, an example consumption culture where the difference of language, religion, race matters no more and all the people of the world drink the same soda, eat the same meatball, wear the same trousers and shoes is being formed. Hereby, a monotype and homogeneous culture is imposed on all nations. This culture is of USA origin and reminds us of the economical and political dominance of the USA and consequently a homogenized world like some kind of Disneyland which has spread everywhere with metastasis in a “threatening way” and (in the great words of a French public official) a ‘cultural Chernobyl’.” (Berger 2003:10).

Consumption Culture and Cultural Homogenization

Consumption culture is a process which is offered to the world especially by the USA and developed Western countries, imposed with technological, economical, political and cultural oppressions and simply aims to “standardize” people from different cultures, lifestyles and geographies. Predicting “Americanization” in terms of perceiving, thinking and acting; consumption culture is a cultural process which spreads via today’s mass media (radio, tv, internet) such as news, documentaries, tv series, advertisements and social media and hypnotizes people to consume with its subconscious-related effects. In this respect, the process is global and also popular in a constant change, transformation and innovation. Its popularity requires a constant innovation and this innovation brings along a chaos. The chaos arises from its attack to traditionalism and national culture. The process also aims to create its own cultural structure because it leads to different reactions by different social layers in the social structure. The structure which is tried to be created is cultural homogenization. Cultural homogenization is only one aspect of globalization and it means “reduction of cultural diversity with not only material products, but also extending and spreading a wide cultural series such as beliefs, thoughts, values, attitudes and behaviors”.³

Natural diversity of individuals in almost every country forms a whole by interacting with the diversity of people in their social circle and the advances in transportation, development and pace in communication, as well as the relationships and interactions between people from different regions enrich the national culture. Integration of people from different regions on the basis of identical opinions, behaviors and applications and generation of common values will provide a cultural diversity.

² https://www.kongar.org/makaleler/Izmir_konusmasi.php 28.8.2018

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_homogenization 30.8.2018

Cultural diversity implies a culture which develops different from the whole country in the regional culture from the aspect of geographical characteristics of a country such as; climate, demographic structure, transportation facilities, economic structure, but also relates to the general culture. Region-specific culture constantly contributes to the revival and updating of the general national culture and is concretized as the colorfulness and richness of a country. In other words, language, belief, eating-drinking, entertainment, traditions and applications are also among the features that are specific to a region. For example; corn and anchovy in the Black Sea region, vegetables, fruits and fish in the Aegean region and grain in the Central Anatolia are the richness and diversity of Turkey in economy, nourishment, clothing and lifestyle. In the aspect of belief; the differences in religious and denominational beliefs and applications are also the richness and diversity of the Turkish culture.

Rather than external pressures and instructions; transactional natural communication and interaction create cultural diversity spontaneously based on voluntariness. In other words, it is formed “automatically and voluntarily”. On the other hand, the diversity predicted by globalization is multiculturalism which is the total opposite of cultural diversity and it is created with instructions by certain powers or via pressure as a project of globalization.

“Multiculturalism” and “cultural diversity” are widely different from each other in terms of meaning and content. However, these two concepts are -somehow- used instead of one another. While cultural diversity emphasizes the diversity of a nation; multiculturalism emphasizes ethnicity. Because globalization aims at national cultures and thus, unitary states. Solving the unitary structure and separating it into fractions are among the most important goals of globalization. Masters of globalization provoke ethnic communities and make them fight using highly pleasant commitments such as freedom, democracy, independence and alliance with the modern world and include them in the hegemony of the capitalistic system if these communities are able to win their independence. Many changes-transformations such as recent developments in the Balkans, pink revolutions and division/dismemberment of the states in the Middle East exemplify what we have mentioned.

Staying focused on the target of making the world a fairly single state and dominating the whole humanity; the USA, UK and Western developed countries (or rather the Jewish capital) are well aware that the main power of providing an economical homogenization is cultural homogenization and they go all lengths to establish that. Their driving force is consumption culture. As stated above, suppressing the thoughts and behaviors of people

with various factors (such as radio, tv, internet; news, documentaries, tv series, advertisements and social media), making them suitable for certain templates and directing them to consumption will reveal homogenization.

The desire of spreading homogenization which is effective on making the consumption culture dominant, reorganizing the communities and making them homogeneous is the desire of countries which are the actors of globalization or rather multinational companies that are considered the motor power of these countries and it is highly profitable for them to realize that desire. On the other hand, unitary-national states or nations with cultural diversity consider this process a very harmful process preventing them from developing and advancing. Because globalization predicts monotony, becoming stereotyped, similar consumption habits and similar behavioral patterns all over the world, it is closed to development, diversity and colorfulness. Predetermined and planned thinking, acting and consuming patterns are tried to be made dominant and imposed on people. "There is such a little chance of enhancing the life quality, solving the problems and trying new ways in such a world. A culture [consumption culture] where opinions and behaviors are arranged will neither invent new technologies nor develop economic regulations that may develop people's welfare or potential better." (Stolyarov 2011). Additionally, economical, political, cultural differences and different thoughts and behaviors will not be tolerated and natural cultures of every nation which maintain their vitality within the frame of spontaneity will be damaged considerably. Because globalization operates as a process where people/nations are unable to think and act freely and their activeness is turned into passiveness.

As stated above, the most effective way of spreading economical or cultural homogenization is consumption and directing society to consumption by creating fake needs. Thus, everything (beliefs, behaviors, products, culture, etc.) is made popular. Advertisements which are presented in various ways are the most effective instrument to increase the popularity and thus, consumption. Perceptions, tastes, inclinations and preferences of people are changed and homogenized via subliminal⁴ advertisements. A global consumption culture is imposed on people via advertisements whether they need it or not. Attraction in the presentation, facilities in payment, international brand value of the product and the social status and satisfaction to be attained by the person just by consuming these kinds of products are effective on adopting the culture. The person is never allowed to consider whether the information and features in the presentation are correct or not and whether the product is actually needed or not. J. Williamson states that information given to consumers in advertisements is generally uncorrect and

⁴ A sound, an image, etc. containing messages regarding the human subconscious.

even if it is correct, consumers are tried to be convinced to buy products that are not needed (2001:15). Advertisements present consumers the qualities of products that are tried to be sold on one hand and preach a perception, belief, behavior and lifestyle on the other. In such a process, the culture will develop, in other words transform with oppression in a certain direction rather than spontaneously. In this respect, global culture is political and it takes a stand against national culture. In such a process, “individuals will traditionally not have their own discretionary power in art, economy or interpersonal daily interaction” (Stolyarov 2011).

It is seen that individuals are estranged from critical thinking in a homogenized society which simply consists of flocked individuals and is also called consumption society. Because critical thinking is a difficult and disturbing situation. Masters of globalization offer today’s human beings the ways of escaping from this disturbance (!) in highly appealing ways. Considering the past 35-40 years in our country; it is seen that individuals have become free-rider, idle and self-centered. Individuals who read, investigate, observe and react to events and situations that develop around them with full consciousness are gradually replaced by individuals who value consuming above everything, are pretentious and mad about brands. Rather than thinking and investigating; appearances prevail. “We began to turn into isolated individuals obtaining information by watching the images being produced and in return having a shower of messages as passive receptors when the language was reduced to communication and seeing to looking.” (Sartori 2004:9). An individual who can not think critically is just a shallow person without any depths and “a materialist and hedonist who highlights a money-oriented possession.” (Odabaşı 2013:47). Thus, “anti-intellectuals are inclined to zealotry, rudeness and toughness” (Stolyarov 2011). Intolerance and chaos will prevail in a society which consists of such individuals. As a matter of fact, the only thing that matters to those who predict homogenization is a complicated society which is the implementer of a perfect status quo and consists of individuals who just hope to consume and enjoy that. On the other hand, interactions and relations of differences in communities with a cultural diversity will develop and renew the intellectual knowledge. Significant values like plus-minus, good-bad, right-wrong will form and develop in society. While homogenization is stable, diversity is determinant and it contributes to the development of democracy in society. Tolerating differences, utilizing the richness of differences and living together in peace within the frame of certain social values will develop social peace and democracy.

Conclusion

Homogenization remains ineffective in communities consisting of individuals who are informed about and committed to their own culture. Efforts for protecting social values and norms and maintaining their validity

in social life will weaken the homogenizing effects. Standardization of consumption and products in consumption will decrease the diversity of consumption in certain centers (as in the example of shopping malls⁵) in terms of both thinking and acting. In countries which resist globalization and thus homogenization, multinational companies that are the actants of globalization necessarily try to make local cultural values, products, perceptions and behaviors appropriate for their own values, perceptions and products, which leads to hybridization and corruption of local and national culture. National cultures are targeted, individuals with different levels of income are homogenized in terms of consumption and diversity is destroyed in order to create a universal culture. It is unlikely to remain outside this process. In that case it is necessary to be included in the process actively. In other words, countries that desire to protect and maintain their authentic structure should tend towards their own resources in the process, develop their production and get included in this market with products emphasizing their authenticity. They should keep away from the things that may damage their national structure; from eating-drinking to clothing, entertainment and products to be imported and exported, and commercialize their own authenticity.

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⁵ Ritzer (2011:27) states that shopping malls provide consumers a collectivism which is traditionally provided by temples and are built in such a way that they have a similar balance, symmetry and order.