BEYOND CULTURAL IMPERIALISM: CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION AS HYBRIDIZATION

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Abstract:

Globalization, in its simple terms, has tended to be seen as a process in which economic unification of the globe comes into being through the integration national economies under a single grid of market. Rather than viewing globalization in merely economic terms, this article first aims to reconceptualize globalization in its broader sense as a multidimensional social process by looking into the various dimensions of globalization in the light of what Tomlinson (1999) calls *complex connectivity*. In doing so, this study secondly intends to critically examine two widely accepted and interrelated notions; (1) globalization, as a phenomenon, primarily associates with the economic integration of national economies into a single world market, operating in compliance with the creed of capitalism; and (2) globalization, in its cultural sense, refers to hegemonic domination of the West on the rest of the world appearing in the form of "cultural imperialism" or "Americanization". To put it in an argumentative way, the article suggests that globalization does refer neither to the march of capitalism as an all-embracing economic system on a global scale nor to a new version of cultural imperialism signalling the convergence toward common set of cultural traits and practices, goes under the name of Westernization or Americanization.

Key words: Globalization, Complex Connectivity, Cultural, Globalization, Amaricanization, Hybridization.

INTRODUCTION

> "*Globalization means the spread of free-market capitalism to virtually every country in the world. Culturally speaking, globalization is largely, though not entirely, the spread of Americanization – from Big Macs to imacs to Mickey Mouse – on a global scale*" (Friedman, 2000, pp. 27-28).

> "*Globalization is not a stage of capitalism; it is capitalism per se*" (Wood, 2003, cited in Mercan, 2007, p. 18).

As the opening quotations emphasize, globalization has often tended to be seen as an economic phenomenon which mainly refers to the rapid flow of goods, services, capital and labour across the inherited map of political

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borders. In this sense, globalization is literally viewed as a process which brings economic unification of the globe through the integration of national economies under a single grid of market. However, despite this mainstream tendency of viewing globalization in the realm of political economy, its consequences have been going on in almost every sphere of social existence: the economic, the political, the environmental and the cultural (Robins, 2000; Tomlinson, 1996). Indeed there are many narratives of globalization associated not just with different dimensions of it, but with different theoretical affiliations and political discourses. Despite the bourgeoning literature on the various dimensions of globalization, what has been going on in social reality is still ambiguous given the clashing assumptions and contradictory claims surrounding the concept itself which makes the very notion of globalization problematic in a scholarly sense (Robinson, 2007, p. 127).

In this article, rather than viewing globalization in merely political economic terms, I aim to conceptualize globalization in its broader sense as a multidimensional social process by looking into the various dimensions of globalization in the light of what Tomlinson (1999) calls *complex connectivity*. In doing so, this article intends to challenge two widely accepted and interrelated notions that (1) globalization, as a phenomenon, alludes primarily to the economic integration of national economies into a single world market, operating in line with the creed of capitalism; and (2) globalization, in its cultural sense, refers to hegemonic imposition of the West on the periphery of the world in the form of "cultural imperialism" or "Americanization". To put it in an argumentative way, the article suggests that globalization does not refer simply to the march of capitalism as an all-embracing economic system bringing homogenization on a global scale, nor is equivalent to a new version of cultural imperialism signalling the convergence toward common set of cultural traits and practices, goes under the name of Westernization or Americanization.

In parallel with this argument the article is organized as follows. The next section conceptualize globalization with abstract and general terms as a rapidly developing social process of complex interconnections between societies, cultures, economies and states on a global scale. Grasping globalization with this high level of complexity and abstractness not only enables us to understand it as a multidimensional and heterogeneous social process, but also it opens the space for what the cultural dimension of globalization or cultural globalization here refers in this article. Then, the second section argues against popular thesis of cultural globalization – the homogenization and the polarization thesis-, and rather than viewing cultural globalization as Westernization or Americanization it argues instead for seeing cultural globalization as hybridization, or creolization in the form of

new patterns of cooperation and intercultural exchange, and the emergence of translocal melange cultures.

1. A PROBLEM OF DEFINITION AND CONCEPTUALIZING GLOBALIZATION AS COMPLEX CONNECTIVITY

> "*The issue **of the language of globalization** is more than one of careless use of words: intellectually, such muddy use of the term fogs any effort to separate cause from effect, to analyze what is being done, by whom, to whom, for what, and with what effect.* [bolds added]" (Marcuse, 2000, p. 23)

Without having a clear-cut definition, the term globalization appears as an overtly ambiguous buzzword which has been used as an *explanan* or a narrative in examining the recent social transformation in the last few decades, mainly characterized by rapidly developing cross-border movement of capital, goods, services, people, technology and ideas. Looking into the literature there are different narratives of globalization varying with the subject of inquiry and theoretical stance adopted by the researchers (Khondker, 2000, p. 19). Given the plurality of these different narratives and the ambiguity surrounding the concept, it, as Rosenberg (2000, pp. 93-95) stresses, seems that the term globalization first must be clearly defined as an *explanandum* before using it as an *explanan* for further analysis. Otherwise, one might fall into the error of taking globalization as an empty signifier used to explain other social phenomenons without defining it in clear terms and delineating its borders in a theoretical sense. One way to refrain from falling into this fallacy is to conceptualize globalization in relation to different narratives and theoretical stances in the genealogy of globalization debate.

Looking into the literature, the earlier scholarly interest in globalization can be traced back to the studies of Moore (1966), and Nettl and Robertson (1968), but comprehensive theoretical discussions appeared after the mid-1980`s, in particular after the end of the cold war (Hay, 2001, cited in Mercan, 2007, p. 24). After the mid-1980`s a great number of scholars began to view globalization primarily in economic terms (Ohmae, n.d., cited in Khondker, 2000, p. 27). Broadly speaking, many liberal and left quarters have tended to associate globalization with the reconstruction or resurgence of capitalism in the context of economic, political and technological developments of the last several decades. Some authors such as Wolf (2004) and Wynne (2005) have tended to define globalization in a reductionist manner by primarily linking it with the increase in international trade, and capital mobility which bring along high level of interdependence among national economies and by which the whole world appears as a single market. In a similar vein, Friedman (2000, p. 26) has narrowly argued that "The driving idea behind globalization is free-market capitalism – the more you let market forces rule and the more you open your economy to free trade

and competition, the more efficient and flourishing your economy will be". From a left-leaning point of view, some scholars such as Wallerstein (2000) and Arrighi (2005) understand globalization through the analysis of crisis-prone feature of capitalism, and view it within the innermost essence of capitalism as an expansionist economic system both internally within market structures and externally through geographical expansions.

Thereby, globalization, in its most general sense, has often tended to be viewed primarily in economic terms. The rapid movements of capital, labour, technology and information across political and cultural borders have been perceived as threatening forces against the integrity of national cultures and of nation states in the Westphalian sense. Although the economic perspectives to globalization and some concerns about the future of nation state system are to some extent plausible and legitimate they reflect one-side of the great globalization debate and preclude the multidimensionality of globalization process regarding to both its causes and consequences. In fact, the essence of multidimensionality in globalization process lies at the core of what Tomlinson (1996; 1999) calls *complex connectivity* which can be found in one form or another in almost every accounts of globalization.

As Tomlinson (1996, p. 22) argues globalization as a social process literally refers to "the rapidly developing process of complex interconnections between societies, cultures, institutions and individuals world-wide". A critical point to draw out here is that the increased global interconnectedness implies multiple linkages varying from "the social-institutional relationships that are proliferating between individuals and collectivities worldwide, to the idea of the increasing 'flow' of goods, information, people and practices across national borders, to the more 'concrete' modalities of connection provided by technological developments such as the international system of rapid air transport and the more literal 'wiredness' of electronic communications systems" (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 2). In one sense, one of the most prominent characteristics of this process is what Harvey (1990) has put forward as `time-space compression`. In fact, what the compression of time and space implies here is not only what Harvey (1990) mainly argues for the high level of mobility or flexibility of new forms of capitalism, but also the shrinkage of distances for both social and cultural relations through "the dramatic reduction in the time taken, either physically (for instance, via air travel) or representationally (via the transmission of electronically mediated information and images)" (Tomlinson, 1997, pp. 170-171).

This brings us to the notion that the rapidly developing global interconnectedness in almost every realm of social existence makes the world a smaller place where human beings in a certain sense get closer to one another. This paves the way for a sense of global unicity which to some

extent transform the world into a single economic, political, social and cultural setting. Prominent examples for this are the current economic context in which the affairs within national economies are closely linked to the global economic situation, or how an environmental problem in one part of the world leads to economic, social or even cultural consequences for others living thousands of miles away from the problem zone. However, although it seems appealing to speculate that the increasing networks of connectivity embraces every existence in human society, we should treat the term `unicity` with caution considering the countervailing tendencies towards cultural and social divergence.

In this context, Robertson (1992) has presented a reasonable formulation of how, and to what extent the world has compressed into a single place where a sense of unicity developed. As Robertson (1992, p. 26) argues rather than being a simplistic uniformity such as a common world culture, global unicity refers to a social context in which "different orders of human life are brought into articulation with one another". These orders of human life, for Robertson (1992), consists of four main realms namely individual human beings, national societies, the 'world system of societies' and the overarching collectivity of 'humankind'. Basically, as these orders interact with or position against each other, the world appears as a single place where a sense of unicity develops. However, the important point here is that what comes into existence as a global unicity is neither "the unicity of homogenization" nor a "global community" in a naïve sense, but one where social and cultural differences still exist within the wholeness of the world as a single place. Therefore, global unicity in Robertson`s sense provides a conceptual framework which views globalization in its wholeness and comprehensiveness while it takes into account the fact that the world with its all empirical complexities displays concurrent processes of convergence and divergence.

Conceptualizing globalization in these abstract and general terms broadens the scope of globalization and enables us to view it in respect to simultaneous and interrelated processes in the areas of economy, politics, culture, technology and so forth. By considering mainstream economic approaches as too narrow and one-sided, we have opened the space for the other spheres of social existence such as culture, politics, environmental and religious. In a nutshell, drawing on Tomlinson`s (1999) term of complex connectivity and Robertson`s (1992) sense of global unicity we view globalization as an ever-densening networks of interdependence and interconnections, and a multidimensional process which "like all significant social processes, unfolds in multiple realms of existence simultaneously" (Pieterse, 1994, pp. 161-162). All these considerations eventually brings cultural elements to the core of globalization debate and provokes an interrelated interest in a range of cultural consequences that globalization

leads to. Therefore, the next section argues against another myth or notion that globalization, in its cultural sense, refers to hegemonic imposition of the West on the periphery of the world in the form of "cultural imperialism" or "Americanization".

2. BEYOND CULTURAL IMPERIALISM: CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION AS HYBRIDIZATION

As a multidimensional social process globalization seems to make itself evident in almost every social existence of life linking local contexts to global ones. In other words, it, as Giddens (1990, cited in Pieterse, 1994, p. 164) argues, has been associated with intensifying "worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happening are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa." Concerning these relations, attention turns to question of cultural consequences of globalization, or how and to what extend the rapidly developing global interconnectedness affects the cultural landscape of distant localities. In response to this question, most widely held answer is that "globalization and culture is probably that of convergence toward a common set of cultural traits and practices" (Holton, 2000, p. 142). This is a common interpretation of cultural globalization that the world is becoming more homogenous and standardised place through cultural, economic, commercial, and technological equalization originating from the West, particularly from the USA.

Such a widely held belief can be exemplified that an international tourist hotels or shopping malls look much the same worldwide, whether it be in New York, Abu Dhabi, Astana or Sao Paulo, the same TV series or video clips are on TVs worldwide, similar fast food restaurants are available even in small cities of peripheral countries, and so on (Wise, 2008, p. 35). In this respect the homogenization thesis which asserts that the world is becoming uniform place around a Western or American pattern assumes in a similar vein that globalization, in its cultural sense, has the same impact on Malaysia as it does on Brazil or Turkey. Homogenization thesis, whether it is labelled as Westernization or Americanization, has been frequently conflated with the one-directional process of the spread of global capitalism as a form of cultural imperialism (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 49).

In one sense, the driving force behind the global cultural homogenization is assumed to be the market economy and the penetration of transnational companies into local markets. In a similar vein, it is also assumed that with the role of the market economy, a sense of "the cultural of consumerism" has been constructed through standardized brand images, mass advertising, and a given status to Western/American products and services. Moreover it is mainly thought that the construction of the global culture of consumerism has been based "not merely on the utilitarian

convenience of global products but also on the sale of dreams of affluence, personal success, and erotic gratification evoked through advertising and the culture industry of Hollywood" (Holton, 2000, p. 143). To give some more concrete example: such a sense of cultural homogeneity has been to a certain extent evident from the mid-20th century to onwards in the form Coca-Colonization or McDonaldization of the distant localities reflecting the notion that cultural globalization as an one-directional Americanization process has tended to overtake a range of rival cultural processes such as Japanization or Arabisation, and threaten the local forces and cultures that resist to American model or create hybrid cultural forms. In this sense, McDonald's as an American icon or a symbol of American cultural imperialism has been attacked in Asia, Latin America and even in Europe with the thought that it involves "the exportation of a particularly American style of life, organization, service and consumption and serves as the symbol of American economic affluence throughout the world (Ritzer and Stillman, 2003, p. 40).

What has been called the global cultural homogenization is powerfully persuasive and alluring theory in understanding the cultural aspect of globalization process, but it is liable to a range of limitations and criticisms. The first problem with this thesis, and so with cultural imperialism thesis in many similar aspects, is that it is mainly presumes that cultural globalization is an one-directional or one-way flow of knowledge, belief, art, food, music and so on from the West, particularly from the USA, to the rest of world. In fact, there is not just one global flow of cultural forms, but the multiple directions of flows. Unlike what homogenization thesis implicitly or explicitly argues for the singular flow of global culture there are multiple centres of cultural influence around world whose impacts are felt not only in regional level but on a global scale as well (Wise, 2008; Cohen, 2007).

To give a couple of examples, for many Latin American countries the center of media production is not the US but Brazil, in which telenovelas and programmes produced by TV Globo are translated into Spanish and widely distributed throughout the region. Moreover, the cultural influence of Brazilian media production is not confined to the region, but the media production of Brazil is also shown on the screens in Portugal, reversing the old colonial flow of cultural influence. Another example for the multiple directions of flows is the Indian film industry (Bollywood) which annually produces more films than any other country on the globe and exported them to countries in which considerable Indian population live and people culturally and aesthetically find Bollywood films valuable. As one success indicator of Bollywood, an Indian musical debuting in the US in July 2003 was the 16th highest grossing movie of the week and made more money per screen than the big Hollywood blockbuster of that week (Entertainment Weekly, 2003 cited in Wise, 2008, p. 39).

To put it briefly, with the development of technology and emergence of multiple centers of cultural influence in the last several decades the singular flow of culture forms, in old colonial sense, from the core to the periphery has been replaced by the multiple directions of cultural flows. As Appadurai (1990, cited in Holton, 2000, p. 145) argues that cultural threats or penetrations in many countries today are mainly perceived in other terms rather than Americanization; "for the people of Irian Jaya, Indonesianization may be more worrisome than Americanization, as Japanization may be for Koreans, Indianization for Sri Lankans, Vietnamization for Cambodians", and so forth. Therefore, what cultural globalization implies is multi-centrality of cultural power, not a simply cultural centrality of the US or another center of cultural influence organized within a unitary core-periphery relation as homogenization thesis implicitly or explicitly puts forward.

Limits to homogenization thesis are also set by forms of resistance in Britain, France as well as non-Western countries and by how cultural flows from the US to the rest are received differently in different distant localities (Kuisel, 2003; Delanty, 2003). For instance, in countries such as France and Australia governments have undertaken measures to protect national culture industries through official regulations and subsidies to film industries. As Holton (2000, p. 144) points outs rather than rolling back Hollywood or Disney these measures which were developed as a form of resistance to the overwhelming US cultural penetration have had positive impacts on the "preservation and promotion of national cultural output". Another example for the cultural resistance to Americanization is in Japan where culture and society has been characterized by "their capability of sustaining a sense of powerful culture of orientalism", and the culture of consumerism have not necessarily undermined local traditions and culture as homogenization thesis claims, but "many traditions are sustained by popular culture, in particular by television programmes and by tourism" (Delanty, 2003, p. 120).

The reception of American cultural outputs by Western and non-Western countries is another part of the issue posing limits to homogenization thesis. Globally distributed American cultural outputs are given different local forms through the perceptions and interpretations of people in different distant localities. To give an example in a comparative cross-cultural study on the global popularity of the American television show Dallas Liebes and Katz (1990, cited in Wise, 2008, p. 42) have drawn a conclusion that "audiences interpret (or decode) the series through their own experiences and cultural frameworks". In other words, the meaning and the impact of the show is not the same for every audience or for every locality it broadcasted but its meaning and impact was shaped by the framework of the audience`s local culture.

The limits to the homogenization thesis have often regarded as evidence of cultural polarization. In his thought-provoking yet problematic book -Jihad vs. McWorld- Benjamin Barber (1996) argues that globalization provokes two different processes, namely Jihad and McWorld, operating in opposite directions but reinforcing the presence of each other. McWorld, as a unifying process, is working towards gradual but steady homogenization of the world by the expansion of capitalism and the commodification of almost everything related to social life. In Barber`s (1996, p. 17) own words McWorld whose "template is American", and whose "goods are as much images as materiel, an aesthetic as well as a product line" is a "product of popular culture driven by expansionist commerce." Again for him (1996) McWorld is about "culture as commodity, apparel as ideology." On the other side Jihad, as a dividing process, works simultaneously in an opposite direction by developing itself as a resistance to McWorld. Borrowing loosely from Islam Jihad refers to conservative tendencies of protecting and revitalizing traditional identities as a reaction to and a shelterbelt against the "encroaching" Westernization. Unlike the destructive McWorld process, Jihad creates a sense of identity and belonging to a particular group whether national, ethnic, religious. In one sense it is basically a process of retribalization in which world is being divided and subdivided into particular units identifying themselves with one or more affinities whether national, ethnic, linguistic, and religious.

Thinking of the world in such a dichotomous way is also evident in the writings of many scholars such as Samuel Huntington (1993) and Edward Said (1985). In a nutshell, such a binary presentation of cultural dichotomies is, in a sense, based on the rough distinction between Western and non-Western ways of life. However, cultural globalization implies a more complex process than any dichotomy can claims. It gives rise to tendencies of both fragmentation and unification, simultaneously reinforcing a consciousness of cultural difference as much as a sense of mutual understanding and common identity. Even if homogenization and polarization thesis seem significant to a certain extent and in certain cases, they seem to fail in explaining intercultural exchange and the incorporation of diverse cultural elements from a range of sources into the formation of particular cultural identity or practice. This brings us to the third paradigm of cultural globalization, namely hybridization. Quite simply, cultural hybridization refers to "the mixing of Asian, African, American, European cultures: hybridization is making of global culture as a global melange" (Pieterse, 1994, pp. 175-176). One of the notions offered to describe the global cultural melange is the creolization of culture. As Cohen (2007, p. 381) critically asserts creolization as a hybrid term have its *locus classicus* in the context colonial settlement". While in Hispanic America it alludes to descent of European colonizers born in the continent, particularly, in North

America, it associates with `Creole cooking` which usually implies a mixture of elements and traditions from tropical and European cuisine- particularly alludes to cooking practice which mixes of African and French elements. In fact creolization is not simply a mimetic and derivative social and cultural formation. In one sense it is rather a process in which "forms become separated existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices" (Pieterse, 1994, p. 165). The crucial point here about creolization is that it, as Hannerz argues (1992, cited in Cohen, 2007, p. 382), enables the periphery to express itself in a cultural sense and generates "a greater affinity between the cultures of the center and the periphery".

Principally what distinguished the hybridization from other two paradigms of cultural globalization is an outward-looking view of culture as a translocal learning process. While homogenization and polarization thesis view culture in a territorial context as a localized learning process i.e., the culture of a society or a particular social group, hybridization thesis understand culture in a wider context as general human software (translocal learning process) that cannot be confined to certain territory, ethnicity or national entity (Pieterse, 1994, p. 177). In fact, this difference, as Pieterse (1994) argues, is not necessarily incompatible: the later understanding of culture finds expression in the former one, but they put emphasis on different historical process of cultural relations and derive different assumptions about cultural relations by discuss them through the varied vocabularies. In broad strokes this distinction between these two views of cultural relations can be briefly drawn as Pieterse (1994, p. 177) has put forward:

Table 1. Assumptions About Culture

Territorial Culture	Translocal Culture
Inward-looking	Outward-looking
Endogenous	Exogenous
Societies, nations, empires	Diasporas, migrations
Locales, regions	Crossroads, borders, interstices
Community-based	Networks, brokers, strangers
Community linguistics	Contact linguistics
Ethnicity	New ethnicity
Identity	Identification, new identity

In the context of this differentiation cultural globalization as hybridisation refers to fluid relations between cultures. It is "the cross-fertilization between different cultures as they interact: participants select particular elements from incoming or inherited cultures, endow these with

meanings different from those they possessed in the original cultures and then creatively merge these to create new varieties that supersede the prior forms" (Cohen, 2007, p. 369). In this respect unlike homogenization thesis implicitly or explicitly claims, global cultural relations do not necessarily mean neither cultural convergence around Western or American values, cultural norms and way of living nor sharpening polarization along cultural and civilizational boundaries, but rather they are characterized by the multiple directions of cultural flows and emerging transcultural identities and affinities such as "Thai boxing by Moroccan girls in Amsterdam, Asian rap in London, Irish bagels, Chinese tacos and Mardi Gras Indians in the US, Mexican schoolgirls dressed in Greek togas dancing in the style of Isidora Duncan, or a Shakespeare play in Japanese Kabuki Style for a Paris audience" (Pieterse, 2009, p. 75).

3. CONCLUSION

To sum up, having argued against two popular arguments about globalization this article first takes a more abstract and broader perspective on globalization debate and places it in its wider context as a rapidly developing multidimensional process of complex interconnections between societies, cultures, economies and states on a global scale that generates a sense of global unicity in which social and cultural differences still exist within the wholeness of the world as a single place. By doing so it opens the space for a more extensive analysis of globalisation beyond political economy and brings cultural elements to the core of globalization debate. Second, drawing on this highly abstract, but more extensive conceptualization of globalization the article provides a critical analysis of cultural relations in the context of globalization process. By arguing against widely held two popular theses of cultural globalization it shows that global cultural relations do not necessarily mean neither one-directional cultural convergence around Western or American values, cultural norms and way of living nor a sharpening polarization along cultural and civilizational boundaries as any binary thinking claims, but rather they imply to the multiple directions of cultural flows, hybridization/creolization of cultures as a translocal learning process and emerging transcultural identities and affinities in the complex global interconnectedness.

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