GLOBALIZATION AND CULTURE

In recent years an extensive debate on the issue of globalization in relation to culture has begun. In the academic world the arguments have unfolded mainly in sociological and anthropological writings (Robertson 1992; Friedman 1994; Wehler 1998; Berger and Huntington 2002; Lockwood 2004). In simple terms the question in dispute is whether globalization makes people more the same or more different? Those who think of globalization in terms of liberalization and westernization predict a homogenization of the world under the auspices of US-American culture and western consumerism. Usually these views are disputed by those who point out the resistance of local cultures and their richness compared to the substitute nature of western culture in its Americanized form (Held et al. 1999: 327). In support of the homogenization thesis, Berger points out to the rapid spread of the use of English in its US-American variety as the basic language of the emerging global culture, as “every language carries with it a cultural freight of cognitive, normative, and even emotional connotations” (Berger 2002: 3). Depending on one’s perspective, this homogenization involves either advanced consumerism or oppressive imperialism (Scholte 2000: 23).

Besides those who hold the two positions mentioned above there are those who take a transformationalist position by describing the mélange of cultures and peoples that is the outcome of new cultural networks and cultural amalgamation. For the purpose of this book, the following definition of culture has been adopted from Held:

... a lived and creative experience for individuals as well as a body of artefacts, texts and objects; it embraces the specialized and professionalized discourses of the arts, the commodified output of the culture industries, the spontaneous and unorganized cultural expressions of everyday life, and, of course, the complex interactions between all of these (Held et al. 1999: 329).

One of the central theses Peter Beyer defends in his book Religion and Globalization is that the global system wears away inherited cultural and personal identities (2000: 3). The rapid changes in religious affiliation in the Pacific Islands can be interpreted in that light, as will be shown later.

It is undeniable that the globalization of culture has a long history. The global flow of trade and migration led to the movements of people, objects and ideas around the globe. It is a truism that, historically, human beings have always been on the move, sometimes covering great distances over land and water or a combination of both. A huge variety of impulses can be differentiated: people moved in search of food or fertile land, or to escape a hostile natural environment; victorious armies and rulers were on the move to expand their empires and implanted themselves in new territories where they left their genetic and cultural marks; the defeated and dispossessed fled and moved into new territories; people moved to escape persecution, land shortages or misery, or have been moved as slaves or contract workers to work on huge infrastructure projects or plantations. There have been always the curious and adventurous.

In the context of this book we restrict our focus on the globalization of culture by examining aspects of its extent, intensity, velocity, impact and supporting organizational forms, from 1945 to the present time. (For a more comprehensive picture see Held et al. 1999: 327–75; Berger and Huntington 2002). With regard to the extent of the globalization of culture, infrastructures have appeared in telecommunications, linguistic interaction and mass transport that are unparalleled in history. These infrastructures have led to the global
diffusion of new means of cultural transmission and reception, by radio, TV, satellites, Internet, cable, computing, and jet airlines, all of these also unequalled in previous times. Looking at the intensity, the sheer volume of communications, enabled by the digitization of all media, is unmatched (Held et al. 1999: 364). The new technologies impacted on the velocity of globalization, with instantaneous communication possibilities and ever faster transport speeds available today at low cost. Concerning impact, a trend towards an increase in the size of the foreign component in national systems of ownership and control of cultural product markets and media corporations has been observed. Another trend can be seen in increasing attempts to regulate global cultural interactions by means of corporate or trade laws. Global political organizations like UNESCO have so far not shown a strong regulatory capacity. With regard to stratification, aspects such as restricted participation because of income disparities within countries and regions, and the dominance of Western cultural flows but with an increasing diversity in recent years, have been highlighted (Held et al. 1999: 367).

The main agents of cultural globalization are overwhelmingly large public and private media, tourism and transport corporations that spread secular (or religious) ideologies and discourses through global networks and are mainly driven by the pursuit of profit. The difficulty here, of course, is how to measure accurately the impact of the influences mentioned above on the shaping of political identities, national solidarities, cultural and ethical values, and religious identities, and how to interpret this impact. The impact of globalization on cultural and ethical values and on religious and denominational identities will be fully discussed in Part III.

All these modes of cultural globalization stretch and deepen relationships and involve the movements of symbols, digits and people. The creation of infrastructure and institutions usually leads to distinctive patterns of hierarchies and disproportions, and access to global communication can be extremely uneven within countries and between countries. As previously mentioned, TV and film production is concentrated in and dominated by a few companies and a few countries.

Another important impact of globalization in relation to culture must be seen in individualization, because all sectors of the emerging global culture boost the independence of the individual over against tradition and collectivity. To some extent this explains why the new global culture is seemingly so widely attractive. It is believed (Smith 1973; Eisenstadt 1970; Hezel 1992) that social change and development in history always undermine the presumed authority of tradition and collectivity and open up multiple options for new beliefs, values and lifestyles, which together contribute considerably to greater individual independence.

In a context of traditional societies such as in the Pacific Islands, the new sense of open possibilities and the aspiration for greater freedom are potentially destructive both of the region’s chiefly systems and of the long unchallenged historic Protestant mainline churches. In this context Berger uses the image of a cultural earthquake that affects virtually every part of the world. When the earthquake strikes, different people respond differently. Similarly, the response to the emerging global culture ranges from adaptation and acceptance to militant rejection under the banner of nationalism or religion. In between one can also find a kind of mixed reaction, in which some countries try to balance their global economic participation with resistance against global culture (Berger 2002: 9).
Telecommunications and Media: The telecommunications industry is dominated and controlled by a few companies in the developed countries, which try to keep the ‘soft part’ of the industry, such as chip design, software design, audiovisual programmes, trademarks and patents protection, for themselves. The ‘hard sector’, i.e., the licensed production of computers and TV sets and all sorts of electronic equipment for entertainment, electronic components and semiconductors, and the low paid parts of movie shooting, is left to others in the developing world. The world of information and the media is shaped by a deregulated market, increasing digitalization and new form of investments. AOL-Time Warner, Disney-ABC, Viacom-CBS (Paramount), Australian News Corp (Fox), the Japanese Sony Corporation (Columbia) – these are the media giants that dominate and control today’s world market for pictures and information. The Murdoch group News Corp, which includes press, TV, cable, movies and multimedia, for example, is active with its 800 companies in 52 countries and on 4 continents (Achcar et al. 2003: 16). Sooner or later these media giants will sell the newest movies digitized via satellites directly to the homes of those who are able and willing to pay. The number of people going to the movies is constantly decreasing in countries with a well-established network of satellite and cable TV, while – after a brief boom in videotape rental outlets – shops for the sale and rental of DVDs are now the latest way of making a good living on the basis of a small investment. The Indian film industry (Bollywood, Tamil-Kollywood, Bengali-Tollywood, Kannada, Malayalam and Telugu) has developed into the largest in the world in terms of films produced and tickets sold. In recent years ‘Bollywood’ (a blending of the words Bombay and Hollywood) has become a strong part of popular culture not only on the Indian subcontinent but also in the Middle East, parts of Africa, parts of Southeast Asia, and among the Indian Diaspora worldwide (e.g. Fiji, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Great Britain, Canada and the US). Recently both the US film industry and the Indian film industry have been characterized by a process of concentration leading to a uniformity of movie production.

SUMMARY

In the globalization discourse we can differentiate four thematic meanings:

1. The expansive conquest of the developing countries by means of the Western economic system, which led to the spread of the absolute dominance of the capitalist market economy and of formal democracy (in the Western understanding). This has undermined traditional cultures as well as forced the tying of these cultures into a world market that is dominated by the industrialized nations.

2. The global range of environmental risks.

3. The internationalization of undesirable developments, in the form of speculative capitalism, unemployment, the feminization of poverty, crime and drug trafficking. The global networks for the traffic of goods and information are also used for the transporting of drugs and weapons, the transfer of stolen cars, money laundering, and pornography.

4. With increasing disparities of income and lifestyle within and between nations and regions, there will increasingly be reactions that are manifested in greater cultural plurality, religious fragmentation and ethnic tribalism — all expressions of a more intense search for identity in local, tribal or national form (CSIS 1997: 26).
ALTERNATIVES TO GLOBALIZATION

Introduction

A 15 page essay titled “The End of History”, written by a little known deputy director of the US State Department’s Policy Planning Staff and published in the journal The National Interest in the summer of 1989, made the author, Francis Fukuyama, an overnight new celebrity of the conservative right wing public in the US. The millenarian title, without a question mark, soon became a slogan studied and reflected upon in Washington think tanks, the press and academic circles. With a position at the RAND Corporation and a generous book contract, Fukuyama expanded his ideas further in a book titled The End of History and the Last Man, published in 1992 and almost immediately a bestseller in the non-fiction category. Fukuyama’s core arguments can be summarized as follows:

1. A global consensus concerning the legitimacy of liberal democracy as a system of government has emerged in recent years.
2. Liberal democracy has triumphed over rival ideologies such as hereditary monarchy, theocracy, military dictatorship, fascism and, most recently, communism.
3. Liberal democracy constitutes the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the final form of human government.

These ideas obviously clash with the dialectical materialism of Karl Marx, which argues that capitalist society would become ever more polarized between workers and bourgeoisie, and that class antagonisms would result in a communist revolution that would lead to a final form of government. This government would introduce amongst other things the abolition of landed property and the application of all land rents to public purposes, a heavy progressive or graduated income tax, the centralization of the banking system, state control of the means of communication, free education for all children in public schools, the abolition of children’s labour, and an equal obligation of all to work (Marx and Engels 1971: 52). Since Marx’s expectation of class polarization quite clearly was not realized in the West during the 20th century — in fact the opposite occurred — Marxists began to rethink how a capitalist society functioned. It was increasingly recognized that society was becoming more, rather than less, complex, with more classes and intermediate social groups. Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937) re-defined the debate about class and power, employing the concept of ‘hegemony’. This arose from his observation that the bourgeoisie did not rule by force alone but also by consent, forming political alliances with other groups and working ideologically to dominate society, and it is a concept that has come to be central in neo-Marxist sociological discussions of the complexity of modern society (Forgacs 1988). As pointed out earlier, Wallerstein believes that the internal contradictions of the present world-system will lead to an entirely new system and that anti-systemic movements could play a prominent role in the realization of such a new system.

Held and his co-authors and Scholte ultimately deal with the question of the future on the basis of their own analyses, both studies concluding that the current system needs to be, and can be, reformed. Phrases such as “Civilizing and Democratizing Globalization” (Held et al. 1999: 444–52) and “Humane Global Future” (Scholte 2000: 283–317) are used in this context. The way in which Scholte has structured and written his Globalization — A Critical Introduction makes it an excellent and highly recommended textbook, and Global
Transformations by Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton is, in the view of the present author, the best book on globalization yet published. These two books, together with the reader edited by Rainer Tetzlaff (2000), containing very interesting responses to globalization offered by a variety of expert authors from the perspectives of Africa, Latin America and Asia, have provided inspiration for the writing of what now follows—a summary of the present author’s position regarding the alternatives to globalization.

Reactions and Responses to Globalization from the South

According to Tetzlaff (2000c:18–64), the most widespread perception of globalization in the three continents of Africa, Asia and Latin America is that of an originally ‘Western’ phenomenon within the historical context of colonialism, neo-colonialism and imperialism. Globalization is not rejected in principle by politicians and intellectuals but rather accepted as an inescapable fate. From this view derives the tendency to employ globalization for what is seen as one’s own best interests. Political pragmatism is usually stronger than ideological programmatic confrontation. The general perception of economic globalization, however, with its unpleasant and partly feared effects in the form of social divisions, the erosion of traditional norms, economic dependency and political patronizing, is quite different.

In East and South-East Asia, for example, globalization is seen by most as bringing the possibility that efficiency will be honoured and that the quality and standard of life will increase (Omvedt 2000: 174–201; Schubert 2000: 120–50; Keping 2000: 151–73). On the opposite side are the Muslim and Arab-African nations that have not yet benefited much from what is perceived as an attack by globalization. Here scepticism about cultural foreign control and mistrust of the global players is typical (see Kappel 2000: 202–31; Aderinwale 2000: 232–58). In Latin America the necessity for an opening of their own markets according to the rules of competition has been accepted by those in power as a precondition for economic growth and social prosperity, but not the consequent need for implementing prescribed structural reforms (Esser 2000: 260–95; Nolte 2000a: 296–361). As far as the South Pacific Islands are concerned, one can find a mixture of all the perceptions mentioned above.

Looking at the developing countries in particular, but also at the rest of the world, it can be said that cultural globalization deforms and devalues local and national areas of everyday life but at the same time offers parallel worldwide new perspectives for real and virtual experiences. There is an increasing pressure on local and/or regional traditions, strengthening tendencies of competition and plurality at the cost of egalitarian and common values. By means of new technologies in communication and transport, globally unified education values and a ‘modern’ style of culture are spreading fast (as in the Internet, tourism, migration, etc.). A homogenous global village is not appearing but rather a chain of ethnically-culturally fragmented global cities, with multiple town centres and expanded poverty-stricken peripheries, from Berlin to Rio de Janeiro, from New York to Suva, where people of different origins try to live together in multiethnic, multicultural societies in which not all cultural values are equally accepted. For the global cities a further increase in violence, caused by ethnic-religious divisions, is predicted. This poses an enormous task for future conflict prevention and conflict resolution politics.

Elites in China and other countries (India, Brazil, Mexico, Korea, etc.), with great potential for economic development, as well as opposition groups in non-democratic countries, have hopes for their own material advantage through:
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- economic and cultural globalization by closing the gap between them and the historical centres of capitalist development;
- more democratic participation;
- the enforcement and protection of human rights;
- fairer access to markets in the industrialized leading nations.

From this perspective the leading Western nations are called to provide better framing conditions for competition on a world market for the ‘late starters’ by lifting trade barriers and adequately reducing accumulated debt.

Willingness to seek multilateral co-operation in global problems (environment, climate, energy, terrorism and international crime) has increased in recent years, despite the obvious lack of a co-operative attitude in the USA. All governments are facing the principal globalization dilemma. On the one hand they must legislate to secure and extend their international competitiveness, but, on the other hand, they cannot move too far away from the ideal of social justice, because that might take away the legitimization of their rule. This dilemma is intensified by the pressure to offer groups within civil society more space to use their potential for innovation, whether government-approved or not, as this may lead to a feared political liberalization or globalization from below.

According to Scholte (2000: 216) there are three principal choices when it comes to shaping the future of the current capitalist world-system:

1. Neo-liberalism, which is undesirable because of its unacceptable social and environmental costs.
2. Radicalism, which is currently not viable as there is no sign of a major revolutionary movement.
3. Reformist strategies, which seem to be the way forward for the time being.

There are alternatives to the view that we have reached the end of history now that the collapse of a deformed form of socialism in the Soviet Union and the Eastern bloc has left no future other than ruthless global capitalism. The following ideas and postulates will illustrate that there is an urgent need in the area of global politics (global governance). What needs to be done is widely known, but what is still needed is a new breed of decisive politicians who will overcome their narrow nation-centred worldviews and consider the whole world as the new field of domestic politics.

**Framework for Reforms**

1. If globalization causes deterritorialization and fragmentation it is the task of global politics to define boundaries and develop legislation to organize coherence. The urgency of recovering the political dimension through governments and civil society should be a lesson from the globalization crisis that began in Thailand in 1997 (the so-called Asian crisis) and the still smouldering permanent African crisis. The historical chances for resolute political action to shape the global economy for the benefit of all people have never been better than now, after the end of the east-west confrontation. It should be possible to face problems that are increasingly truly global, as highlighted in a recent series of UN conferences on the environment, finances, development, social issues, and population growth.

The task of diplomacy in the 21st century is global governance (Tetzlaff 2000: 366).
But global governance will only be successful if two goals can be met: Firstly, a significant decrease of mass poverty, and, secondly, greater justice in the distribution of wealth between developed and developing countries, within the societies of each country, and between those who profit and those who lose out at global level. Successful development co-operation and an equalization of the burdens would be important dimensions of global governance and provide fertile ground for the development of sustainable structures between ‘de facto’ unequal partners.

At the normative level global governance should include the further development of the idea of universal human rights (all three generations). Here, it is important to pay more attention to the right for development in order to overcome a socially divided world. A pre-condition here is that each human being has fundamental rights, recognizes that there are rights and can claim them. From this results three essential claims:

- a claim to survive, as a fundamental basic condition for the capacity to act;
- a claim to realize the ability to speak and think;
- a claim to realize social interaction.

II. The concept of sustainability for an ecologically sound economic growth must become a model for social justice. Social justice should be the maxim for political action. Realistically, doing all of this will not automatically lead to global equality. It needs serious joint effort to work towards conditions that enable human life by meeting the basic needs of every human being on the planet.

III. At the level of international law, instruments for a further limitation of national sovereignty should be created and extended to realize the ideal of a global rule of law (e.g. UN conventions, international regimes for co-operation, international law, multilateral arbitration procedures, and interventions on humanitarian grounds to protect human life).

IV. More control, more information, more transparency, and more responsibility must be demanded from the global players in the area of international capital turnover. Internationally binding legislation must be created to avoid the destabilization of countries through speculation. Priority should be given to the demand by UNCTAD that indebted countries relying at present on the mercy of their creditors should be able to have themselves declared insolvent. The aim of any action here should be to strive for a bearable burden of debt that does not exceed the debtor’s capacity for repayment. For example, central public expenditures on health and education should not be affected because of public debt. Whether current attempts to privatize education and health will bring the wanted effect must be doubted.

V. There is a need for global legislation for minimal social standards to avoid laissez-faire principles by which countries with a focus on social concerns are punished by the utilization of capitalist ideology. At the level of economic co-operation, globally accepted instruments for controlling the international turnover of capital are needed in order to avoid future crises and shocks resulting from the activity of globalized markets in which movements of capital are unrestricted.

VI. Complementary to the above is a need for fundamental reforms to the international financial system. The competencies of national and regional supervisory authorities must be strengthened and intensified to get illegal money laundering under control.
VII. Global economic leadership, which is at present the privilege of the G8 countries, needs to be changed. China, India, Brazil, Egypt and South Africa should be invited into this currently exclusive circle.

VIII. The creation of an institution for the control and supervision of cartels should be pursued in order to challenge the growing tendency for increasingly fewer people in fewer companies to produce more goods without creating more income or a just distribution of income. The existing objective of securing and increasing shareholders’ value at any cost and without any social awareness must be challenged and changed.

IX. All trade barriers and protective measures instituted by the industrialized nations at the cost of the developing countries need to be removed, and parallel revisions are needed to use political and economic power to oblige economies in the countries of the South to open up their markets completely also.

X. Last, but not least, a reform of the institutions that came into being with Bretton Woods is needed. The World Bank and the IMF need new decision-making structures that enable the developing countries to accept reforms through more dialogue. The usually imposed Structural Adjustment Programmes need to be replaced by fairly negotiated reform programmes that take into account the cultural ‘load limit’ regarding the speed and intensity of reforms.

Because economic globalization necessarily leads to a revival of traditions that create locally rooted identities, cultural plurality (which includes religious plurality) with extended space for tolerance should become the new model for the new politics. The implementation of such ambitious reforms, difficult as it is, faces the additional challenge of nourishing and increasing respect for cultural diversity. As Scholte (2000:312) warns: “Reformers must take great care to build new politics of intercultural negotiation into the very process of changing the course of globalization. Otherwise, good intentions notwithstanding, global social democracy could easily become yet another form of imperialism.”

Notes

1 Hitu Tau is a confederation of non-governmental organizations in French Polynesia. Its founder members include many activists of the CSIP trade union, a pro-independence movement that draws inspiration from the USTKE trade union in France’s other Pacific colony, Kanaky (New Caledonia).

References


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