

Are cultures diminished or enhanced through the process of globalization?

[Economics](#), [Globalization](#)



Are cultures diminished or enhanced through the process of Globalization? An essay by Jaclyn Macdonald- 389686 Globalization offers opportunities but presents problems. Connectivity between cultures is developing at an exponential rate. This has ramifications for individual cultures. Increased interaction, principally through new media and greater global mobility creates opportunities to enhance cultures but it carries with it the risk of cultural erosion as external influences may overwhelm attitudes, beliefs and values.

Globalization is defined as ' a process in which worldwide economic, political, cultural and social relations become increasingly connected across time and space' (Thompson, 1995, 149). Globalization is not a modern phenomenon and has its precedents in the empires of Spain, France and Britain among others. The progressive development of economic and political ties of these colonial powers took decades or centuries to come to realization.

The rapidity of this process has been greatly accelerated by the technological and communication developments of recent decades that have facilitated a dramatic increase in global economic, political, cultural and social integration. Consequently, the world has become increasingly interdependent in the areas of travel, communications, trading and finances, all of which contribute towards frequent cultural interactions and greater mobility of people. Globalization brings about a rapidly developing and ever increasing density of the network of interconnections and interdependencies that characterize present-day social life. Globalization lies at the heart of modern culture; culture practices lie at the heart of globalization. This is the

reciprocal relationship' (Tomlinson, 1999). Globalization alone does not determine the shape and character of culture nor is culture the only influence on globalization. Edward Tyler defined culture as 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society' (Thompson, 1991). The evolution of technology, primarily newsocial media, has created opportunities for individuals to choose to embrace or dismiss the aspects of the cultures they are exposed to. Additionally, they can run the risk of losing parts of their own cultures to a wave of foreign influences. 'One of the most widespread theories of cultural globalization is the idea that the world is becoming more uniform and standardized, through a technological, commercial and cultural synchronization emanating from the West' (Lange, Meier, 2009, 56).

Theorists who support cultural homogenization insist that the spread of globalization has lead to an erosion of cultures and traditions. This view infers globalization to be a euphemism for western culturalimperialism, proposing ethnocentricity will eventually eradicate individual cultures. Identity is commonly deemed fundamental to human experience 'Identity is people's source of meaning and experience' (Castells, 1997: 6). The ethnocentric view does not recognize that globalization invariably causes individual culture as David Morley comments, migrants 'moved from a world in which . . identity was not a central concern, to one in which they were pressed . . . to adopt a particular form of individuality' (Rantanen, 2005). Manuel Castells writes; 'Our world and our lives are being shaped by the conflicting trends of globalization and identity'. Opposing homogenization

theories, Castells explores ' the widespread surge of powerful expressions of collective identity that challenge globalization . . . on behalf of cultural singularity and people's control over their lives and environment' (Castells, 1997: 2).

While homogenization theorists suggest that a ' global culture' will dominate all others, Castells proposes that the need for identity drives cultures to remain individual and as such, globalization thus proliferates cultural identities rather than diminishing them. Global homogenization has an impact on culture by directly affecting the production and use of commodities, social relationships, and the dominance of religion in societies. Homogenization... does not affect how people relate to each other and how they find meaning and purpose in life. It leaves largely untouched the freedom and agency of the subjects in the creating and changing culture, both as individual and as groups (Friedman, 1994). Increasing global mobility has produced a fear of the deterioration of cultures however, people are not merely objects of cultural influences but rather, subjects able to consciously discard or assimilate culture. This choice to embrace culture is now augmented.

Integrating cultures can contribute to increasing nationalism due to the human need for sense of belonging and identity, Hall writes; ' when the era of nation-states in globalization begins to decline, one can see a regress to a very defensive and highly dangerous form of national identity which is driven by a very aggressive form of racism(Rantanen, 2005; 97). Nationalism has thrived to accomplish this sense of belonging throughout history and though

national identity may not be everlasting it remains today despite increased global mobility.

National identities no longer rely on physical location due to media facilitation as people have gained the ability to communicate and access information to connect to their nation. International students at the University of Melbourne encounter this threat to their national identities. They are submerged in a new location for three years or more with cultures incongruent to that of their homeland. They are faced with the diversity of cosmopolitan Melbourne and the culture of the university itself. Isolated from their native culture, international students would easily become overwhelmed by the lifestyle of their new surroundings.

However, through communication programs like Skype, Facebook, and Twitter they are able to stay in closer contact and with greater ease than students in previous times. People of individual cultures naturally relate to others who share their culture and this bond is immediately apparent when viewing the social relationships on the Melbourne University campus. Students of similar backgrounds, ethnicities and languages can often group together on the university campus, insulating themselves from other cultures.

Some groups speak in their primary language in order to distinguish themselves from others and of course to communicate more effectively. The difficulty inherent in this is that language can be divisive as well as inclusive. It can be a deterrent to other students initiating a conversation if they feel excluded. Cultural interaction in tutorials is less divided than in the open and

unsupervised areas of campus. Though friendships are often formed between those of similar cultures, the interactive style of learning typically deems social groups irrelevant.

Students necessarily have to communicate more in tutorials with other people. Australia's tertiary institutions 'have an important role to play in the shaping of young peoples' identities and in the development of active citizenship in an increasingly multicultural and globalized society' (Mansouri, Lobo, 2011). Multicultural tertiary campuses can offer many advantages for their students by facilitating greater social understanding of cultural differences and similarities. Creating a educational environment which nurtures and manages cultural diversity effectively is not an easy task. This management depends on the professional management and governance of teaching and learning activities', which allows students to develop their full potential' (Grobler et al. 2006). Increasing numbers of international students have brought about a level of insecurity driven by the belief that common values are being eroded because they are distanced from their native lifestyles. The concept, termed deterritorialization, explains the way in which events outside of our immediate localities, 'action(s) at a distance' – are increasingly consequential for our experience.

Students with migrant backgrounds, who were born in Australia or have lived here for many years, 'may have issues with their hybrid identity; mediating between two cultures, that of their parents and that of mainstream Australian society' (Butcher, 2004; 215-216). Specifically, it is argued that people worldwide now develop a bicultural identity, which distracts from

their local heritage. When students leave their home country to study in Australia, they are breaking the physical connection to their local heritage. Modern culture is less determined by location because location is increasingly penetrated by 'distance' (Giddens, 1991).

Before the advances of communication technologies, people were only aware of their physical surroundings, which limited their reception of information and cultural influences. 'Places provide an anchor of shared experiences between people and continuity over time... It enables people to define themselves and to share experiences with others and form themselves into communities' (Bennett, 1998, 103). Global mobility has increased through the process of globalization, which breaks the physical bond between cultural groups.

Modern technology works to reconnect people through communication rather than place. 'In conditions of modernity, place becomes increasingly phantasmagoric: that is to say, locales are thoroughly penetrated and shaped in terms of social influences quite distant from them. (Giddens, 1990: 18-19)'. The customary method of social interaction has in many cultures progressed into global online communication rather than traditional face-to-face interaction. The change in interaction method has produced new social relationships. The decreased need for place in communication is evolutionary in culture.

People are no longer determined by their physical surroundings as technology provides them with a choice of the information they receive. 'When we communicate through telephone, radio, or computer, we are

physically no longer determined by where and who we are socially (Meyrowitz, 1985: 115). The processes of globalization has evolved concurrently with media technologies, causing telecommunications to be described as the ‘central nervous system’ of the very process of globalization (Castells 1996, Mansell 1994). Media is vital for providing cultural and symbolic resources worldwide, contributing to its success.

Barker has observed, ‘globalization has increased the range of sources and resources available for the construction of identity’ (Barker, 1997). According to many theorists, the sense of place has been fundamentally changed by the arrival of media and communications. ‘Our world is becoming senseless to many because, for the first time in modern history, we are relatively without place; we are part of a global world’. (Meyrowitz, 1985). What many theorists of place have failed to acknowledge is the increasing connectivity, not only between global places, but also within places.

Audiences ‘naturally gravitate towards programming choices that appear most relevant or proximate to their own context and thus allow them to seek the pleasure of recognition of their own culture’ (Straubhaar, 1991) or ‘ultimately people like to see something close to their lives’ (Hong, 1998). The process of globalization creates many benefits for enhancing cultures. The evolution of technology, has most significantly, created opportunities for individuals to view culture as a preference rather than compulsory.

People are now able to make an informed decision about their adoption of culture through increased information access, ‘the combination of economic, technical, social and cultural resources held by media organizations had

meant that ' quantitatively and qualitatively... the media have established a decisive and fundamental leadership in the cultural sphere' (Hall, 1977, p. 341). Many external influences threaten to diminish cultural individuality however; it is the evolutionary influence of globalization, which has allowed culture to be an individual's choice, which truly enhances culture. References

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