

Term paper on cultural anthropology

[Politics](#), [Democracy](#)



Cultural anthropology, as a practice, notes the fundamental and subtle differences between cultures in an increasingly globalized world. As the world gets increasingly smaller, cultural anthropology will become more complex, especially when it comes to economic systems and how they interrelate. Globalization has led to increased access to foreign goods; various economic and cultural theories will be used to explain the effects that the melding of different cultures and markets are having on the way nations and peoples interact economically. A shift towards democratic autonomy is suggested as a potential solution for the complexities of melding different economic systems in a globalized planet.

Globalization is an ongoing process; every day brings us closer to an interconnected and interdependent economic footing. As we continue to lean on each other more and more for economic and financial security, questions are raised as to whether or not this is a good idea. This also extends to the idea of the government's role in the world economy - whether or not a private business should adhere to governmental regulations and oversight in order to be allowed to operate (Bordo, 2005). The most important factor, though, is whether globalization is good for local economies and cultures - by melding together in unity, we may lose what it is that makes us unique.

As the world becomes more globalized, and as more and more foreign goods become available to buy, people will go for the more exotic, desirable option. This leaves local farmers and businesses without appropriate business to maintain their companies. Because everything is becoming more globalized, it allows corporations and international forces to have a lot more power than they used to - instead of only being restricted to local goods, people have a

wide variety of products to choose from, shipped and created from around the world. This also dramatically affects their cultural identity; instead of investing in their unique culture, they take from other things from other cultures that are different. This creates a melting pot of cultures that continues to the point where, for example, many cultures are "Americanized." Because America and other industrialized nations have a greater ability to bring their products and culture to other countries, those countries will start adopting American culture through the things they buy (Sahlins 186).

Competitive elitism is a type of democracy in which "there [is] little scope for democratic participation and individual or collective development, and where whatever scope existed was subject to the threat of constant erosion by powerful social forces" (Held 125). Essentially, the tenets of science and philosophy, as well as logic, are eschewed in favor of technical development and uniformity. At the very least, an overwhelming majority forces its rule and philosophies onto the rest, a very anti-liberal view of democracy.

Some of the main features of globalization are global market commodities, finance, production and organization. These features can indeed be critiqued in both qualitative and quantitative ways. In terms of global market commodities, one of the biggest issues is whether or not "production relations and market economies can be characterized as non-political" (Held 227). In essence, the interconnectivity between countries in their market can just as easily be configured through political whims and decisions as it can be economic or financial needs. "Markets, and societies, are becoming more sensitive to one another even when their distinctive identities are preserved"

(Held 297) - this means that events in another country, even when they do not directly affect the productivity or identity of our country, can still have dramatic negative effects on our economy if there are vested interests in the country of interest. Countries are then tasked with managing and intervening within other countries, particularly when there is a global division of capital and labor on the line. This places an undue burden and imperialist sense of responsibility for the welfare of countries that carry the financial assets of another.

The same can be said of finance and production aspects of globalization. Whether it is a financial investment or outsourcing of work and production to other countries separate from the host country, you run the risk of becoming responsible for assets residing in another country. Therefore, you have a vested interest in the welfare of that country as a whole, a commitment you may not have the resources to uphold. Furthermore, resentment coming from this occupation of space and territory could lead to unfortunate consequences further down the road. Disastrous events in the economies of one country can have horrific results for others, due to the increasingly pervasive economic web that results from globalization. Investment capital, production facilities and other economic assets can be sacrificed or turned to the needs of a greater whole while lessening the importance of the host community from which a company or organization resides (Bardhan, 2004). Globalization has also brought about the widening of social organization and exercising social power to solve global problems. For example, the efforts of the first world to solve the hunger and poverty problems of the third is a consequence of the increased globalization happening in the world today.

However, one of the problems with human social organizations as it relates to globalization has to do with the potential political and financial motivations for the benefactor country, and whether that is the reason they are helping instead of through altruism and humanitarianism. This can lead to a false sense of security on the part of the benefited country, and can lead to poorer deals in the future that negatively affect them. The aforementioned problems and concerns with consensus are also found when countries have greater connections (both social and economic), in which the minority's needs would then be ignored on a global scale in favor of the majority (Bardhan, 2004).

According to David Held, democracies should be able to take what is best from both classic and contemporary models and apply them to a new type of government called democratic autonomy. In this style of government, citizenship is taken more seriously, with people taking more active roles in their political and social lives. This idea is meant to extend and deepen the idea of contemporary democracy, bringing the people into the process much more intricately. The principle of 'autonomy' is applied directly to the idea of democracy, creating a hierarchical structure in which the stakeholders (i. e. individual citizens) directly participate in the handling of the issues which are personally at stake for them. " The meaning of democracy, and of the model of democratic autonomy in particular, has to be rethought in relation to a series of overlapping local, regional and global structures and processes" (Held 304).

The fundamental tenets of democracy involve " the democratic process is compatible with the procedures and mechanisms of majority rule" (Held

265). However, this flies in the face of what democratic autonomy stands for - individual liberty and agency in a wider political system. " The principle of autonomy specifies both that individuals must be 'free and equal' and that 'majorities' should not be able to impose" their values upon the rest of the citizens of that society (p. 265). With that in mind, individuals are given a lot more agency and freedom to pursue and support what they themselves support, instead of falling to the whims of the majority.

Of course, this raises many interesting questions about the nature of the individual. " Does the pursuit of the principle of autonomy and a common structure of political action entail that people should always be treated in a similar way by the state?" (Held 286). With Held's theory in mind, democratic autonomy is an absolutely viable enhancement of democratic practice, provided issues are clarified and the concept is handled with care. The biggest problems have to do with the reconciliation of public and private interests with this new sense of democratic autonomy. " What is at issue is the inscription of the principles, rules and procedures of democracy and democratic autonomy into the organizational rules and procedures of companies, and of all other forms of economic association" (Held 285). If companies and organizations on the economic side of things are not willing to play ball with the tenets of democratic autonomy, the system cannot be upheld.

If a democratic autonomy were to be introduced in modern societies, new considerations would have to be made towards the rights and authority of citizens, who now have direct powers of decision making on public issues. " Within the framework of democratic autonomy, an experimental view would

have to be taken of the new rules, technologies and procedures" (p. 284). If people were to become dogmatic about these issues, issues like impartial political authorities and the preservation of democratic rights would have to be protected, lest they become weakened and threatened by those who wished to profit from these new rules. In a perfect autonomous system, people would be able to weigh in on the most controversial issues, and would have political power and freedom of their own to cast their true vote in the system. This would indeed enhance the democratic conversation, provided the underlying issues of privatization and others were addressed.

In conclusion, globalization is having a dramatic effect on cultures and economic systems of nations. Already, a slow but ongoing process of redistribution and reciprocity is happening as markets learn to work together – domestic markets are finding it easier to access foreign goods, increasing demand and creating greater interest in the affairs and governments of a foreign nation. This can create some interesting issues where a nation that benefits economically from these foreign goods can have a vested interest in developing worlds that would not have been possible otherwise without globalization. Regardless of the actual reactions to foreign market forces, globalization is making countries more sensitive to the economic and social issues in other nations, whether through altruism or economic self-interest. Democratic autonomy can provide an elegant middle ground to permit appropriate intervention without being too intrusive in other nations' affairs.

Works Cited

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