



Globalisation and Identity: A Reflection

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ABSTRACT

This research paper intends to reflect a debate on identity and globalisation, by highlighting the process of globalisation and its related nature of homogenisation and heterogenisation, influencing culture and identity of group and community across the world. It has discussed further the cultural consumerism imparting consumer culture and turning society into a consumer society. Globalistaion with its homogenisaing nature obliterates cultural difference and spreads cultural imperialism in terms of mainly nation, media, modernity, and making people conscious and alert about their cultural identity. Transnational or multinational corporation (TNC) also plays an important role in this regards.

KEYWORDS

Globalisation, Homogenisation, Hetrogenisation, Identity, Culture.

The two processes homogenisation and heterogenisation are parts of globalisation, are important to mention to understand the issues of cultural change and identity. Globalisation begins with revolution in information and communication technology (ICT) rendering global circulation of messages and symbols in the shortest possible time, which infuses homogenisation of consumer products and market process in the realm of commodity, cultural symbols, life style and behaviour pattern on the one hand and on the other elevates sense of cultural identity and distinctiveness. This homogenisation leads to spread of cultural imperialism by obliteration of cultural difference and cultural plurality and it also leads to generation of a sense of alertness and consciousness of identity among various cultural community across the world. The cultural imperialism is generated by globalisation spreads distinctive dominant culture of multinational and produced homogenised global culture by way of serving a capitalist system by producing good life to consumer and luring powerful people across the world. It is significant to mention here that this form of globalisation has a disruptive influence on local cultural practices because it converts traditional objects of arts and aesthetics, customs and ritual uses into marketable commodities. It has not only disrupted the cultural autonomy but also destabilised the life of the people by creating a network of competition, price war and exploitative class. In such conditions people from local cultural community feel loss of their cultural identity.

Tomlinson (1991) has tried to analyse cultural imperialism, as a result of homogenisation occurring through modernity, on the grounds of discussion on media, culture, nation, capitalism, and modernity, and its effect are seen on culture and identity across the world. The process of late modernity refers to the main route of development of global cultural hegemony. Cultural imperialism generates deeper question about cultural identity, requires attention to the historical process of modernity and cultural change. The common argument about linking cultural imperialism and capitalism is seen in spreading sameness and threatening diversity, richness, autonomy and practices of cultures, which are necessary for their actual survival. Media becomes the most common focus of producing cultural imperialism helps in invading an indigenous culture by a foreign, again possessing a threat to the survival of local cultures in the era of globalisation. The concept of nation has been discussed on the grounds of imagination, territory, sovereignty etc., and stressed upon imagination as essential feature of cultural belonging, which is particular to the broader social-cultural conditioning. Tomlinson highlights culture and

autonomy in the frame of reference of time and domination in the discourse of cultural imperialism. It conceives the idea of living of one community in a sense how we live is being threatened by the imposition of others in a sense of saying how they live. The living of one community has been a dynamic not a static and totalising. The cultural imperialism has not put threat to the cultural pattern but to the cultural imagination. Tomlinson uses media imperialism in particular way of discussing cultural imperialism especially when media is placed at the centre of cultural processes then the issues of cultural domination turns into media domination. Media like TV and phone are seen powerful in society in terms of information and leisure activities to grasp their social significance. He claims the importance of virtual identity in contemporary society by saying that medium and real are such interwoven that the media has been transformed from the idea of means of communication to the ground of obscenity. It grasps the most intimate aspects of our life and radically altering sense of culture boundaries of public and private, makes all experiences equally visible. It becomes, later, the central source of massive tension and conflict in various western and American societies. Media gets fit into the world system of capitalism and the multinational corporations provide the ideologically support for promotion, protection, and extension of modern-global world system. Cultural imperialism spreads capitalism and enabling it as an economic system, seen spreading a distinctive cultural domination and homogenised global culture. The cultural imperialism serves capitalist system by luring people from all around in the developing countries by displaying good and comfortable life of capitalist consumers and placing concept of consumption at the centre in culture of capitalism for generating profit, essential for development of capitalist modernity. It is important to mention that the UNESCO,1982 has also suggested to have respect for the cultural identity of all and asserted the right to peaceful coexistence of all cultural differences, recognition and respect for difference, tolerance and spirit of brotherhood, as culture for all men is not one/ universal.

The hybridising nature of globalisation is based on the blend of global with local. This trend produces tensions in terms of assertion of identity and culture at local level. In a comprehensive mode global is not counterpoised to the local rather local is necessarily included within the global (Roberstson, 1995). Such features of globalisation is found to be closely related to responses of various global categories of individual, regional, ethnic, gender and consumers seen in the forms of

tailoring and advertising goods and services on the basis of global and local market, leading to construction of differentiated consumer tradition. This view holds the idea that globalisation as a major problematic of global-local polar relationship where the idea of local is formed as form of opposition or resistance to the homogenising trend of globalisation. It is perceived that both local and global are two aspects of the same process of globalisation. At this juncture, Pieterse's view (1995) on hybridisation deserves special mention. He has seen hybridisation process in several structural sense such as nation-state formation, global-local dynamics, ethnic community, super-national and sub-national regionalism, political economy and organisational space, which are another way of raising reconstruction of issues of the some form of identities. The increasing structural form of globalisation provides hybridisation by increase in available mode of various instrumental, transnational, non-governmental organisation (NGO), micro-regional, macro-regional, and multi-local organisation which ultimately criss-crossed by functional, professional, informal and communicational uses. The network of organisational function and ideology has created informal space inhabited by diaspora, migrant, refugee, exile, etc. of various socio-cultural identities. As a matter of fact hybridisation in cultural area is a mixture of different cultural categories and believes of Asian, African, European and American culture in origin and it produces a global culture through global melange, which is evident in the various areas of culture such as food, music, dance, drama, art, painting, etc. producing a different hybrid culture. These hybrid forms are in one angle appears to exotic and from other angle reflects trans-cultural class affinity. The culture and its elements existing prior to the hybridisation is viewed as territorial cultural system from localised learning process and having orthogenetic, endogenous, authentic in-word looking and community based characteristic for identity formation. After hybridisation these characteristics are transformed into different trans-local exogenous, heterogeneous, out-word looking and network of strangers. As a result not only criss-crossing of culture happens but also the cultural forms get transformed in appearance and identity. This hybridising nature of globalisation may be viewed against the homogenisation of globalisation. If one accepts a culture is hybrid in identity then globalisation means hybridisation of hybrid culture. In hybridisation of culture new trans-local cultural expression of independent in nature requires new cooperation, which evokes new cultural imaginaries. The identity practice of individual and group is created in the way of immediate experience, which is structured in a definite social context, called identity space. This identity space in the presence of globalisation is derived from the identity space of modernity and the essentialism of substance of meaning of culture is generated by such space. The production of local difference in global relation is produced by a global control over local consumption through product of differentiation.

At this juncture it is significant to dwell upon the characteristic of consumer culture spreaded by globalisation process and converting society into consumer society. Bauman (2001) conceives consumer society as a society where consumption is self-propelling and it has its own purpose. The distinctive mark of consumer society and consumerist culture has not been primarily elevated to a fast rising volume of consumption but it is an emancipation of consumption from its past instrumentality of limit in terms of norms and plasticity of needs, which makes consumption free from its functional bond and absolving it from the needs of justification of leisure ability. Even Bourdieu (2010) understands cultural identity through his idea of taste, life style, habit and consumption. Habit is a relationship between two capacities- one the capacity to produce classifiable practices and the other is the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products. It represents a social world that is the space of life style. This relationship has been established between characteristic of economy and social condition and the distinctive feature, which are associated with the corresponding position in the universality of life style. Life style is related to choice of products and desire for goods and is not the consequence of income but it has been

the result of way of life, which is distinctively precipitated through the process of socialisation in habitus. In other words, the distinctive life style and social distinction has not been the function of income but primarily the result of different socialisation. The social identity according to him is defined and asserted through the difference, which is inevitably inscribed within the disposition of habitus. In this way Bourdieu's ideas of the habitus, life style, and consumption have provided a platform for analysing different dynamics of identity relating with family socialisation, class and caste.

Many scholars have seen consumer culture as a unique culture of consumption by giving a meaningful practice to everyday life. It is found not only to be a way of consumption but also containing a way of ideology and scope, which can structure and subsumes all other ways to a great extent. Slater (1997) has understood consumer culture as the result of advance western business and universalising western modernity. It has been the part of making modern world, which is experienced by special actor who has been free, rational and not governed by tradition. In this way consumer culture can be equated by mass culture. And the desire and taste of masses who are newly empowered by money and democratic rights are reduced to consumption. The consumer culture is also called the culture of capitalism in the sense that modern consumption is moderated by market relation and is a culture of market society.

L. Sklair (1991) has chosen to analyse changing cultural identity with the spread of global consumerism, which is based on three spheres- the economic, political, and cultural-ideological. Each sphere is typically characterised by a representative institution, and cohesive structure of practices, which can only be properly understood in terms of their transnational effect. The primary agent of institutional practice of economic sphere is the transnational corporations, which are very powerful like the World Bank, the IMF and commodity exchange. The primary agent of the political sphere is the transnational capitalist class (TCC). The institution of cultural ideology of consumerism is expressed through transnational mass media that is also known as its primary agent. Each of this primary agent typically produces the result of its practice such as TNCs produce commodities and services necessary to manufacture and sell them. TCC produces the political environment within which the product of one country can be successfully marketed in another. The cultural ideology of consumerism yields the values and attitudes that create and sustain the need for the global product. One of the most visible features of the process of globalisation is the rise of giant companies that is transnational corporations (TNCs) which operate in the influence of national economy throughout the world. A transnational corporation is a company that operates in more than one country, entails the setting up of productive activities may refer to services and products and finance. This growth of TNCs represents a qualitative shift from world economy to the global economy. For political transnational practices, Sklair has used the term transnational capitalist class (TCC), which is a socially comprehensive category, encompassing various entrepreneurial elite, managers, senior state functionaries, leading politicians, learned professionals and persons of alike standing in all spheres. The political practices of the transnational capitalist class (TCC) can be analysed in terms of two kinds of struggle- struggle between capital and labour and struggle between global and domestic practices creating a comprador mentality. It is an attitude that the best practices are invariably connected with the global capitalist system. This attitude is also understood as an ideological struggle between those who believe that TNCs will inevitably damage Third World development prospects in the long run, against those who believe that TNCs are urgently needed because there will be no development prospects without TNCs. This struggle revolves around opposing materials cultural interests of competing classes, groups and communities in all countries. They are those who see destiny of the Third World with the adoption of all that is modern and often embodied in the products and practices of the TNCs. The functions of transnational political

practices create and sustain the organisational forms, which penetrate and connect domestic practices that can be incorporated and mobilised in the interests of the global capitalist system. For this interest the TCC promotes a comprador mentality throughout society. TNCs make both linkages: backward and forward for the successful transnational practices in this regard. The mass media perform many functions for global capitalism. They speed up the circulation of material goods through advertising, which reduces the time between production and consumption helping in creating the cultural demands needed for the survival of global capitalism. The systematic blurring of the boundaries between information, entertainment, and promotion of products lies at the heart of this practice. It has not in itself created a culture and ideology of consumerism for such practices but has generated reformulation of consumerism that transforms all the public mass media and their contents into opportunities to sell ideas, values, products, and in sort, a consumerist worldview. The medium becomes the message because it is engulfed by the message, culture and ideology of consumerism. In connections between global capitalism and the culture-ideology of consumerism a useful composite picture of contemporary consumer culture by focusing on goods and services are framed and displayed to entice the customer. And the acquisition of goods leads to a greater aestheticisation of changing reality of cultural identity in global era.

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