

THE IMPACT OF GLOBALISATION ON CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN WORLD POLITICS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Culture has become a significant force motivating nation states, other institutions and individuals to act and organise themselves as they do. As a theme in the literature on international relations, culture is growing in importance. As different rival theories of international relations developed through the years, the aspect of culture often featured - sometimes prominently, sometimes indirectly - depending on the particular theory and author, as a factor which strongly impacts on how the unfolding of world events is viewed.

Globalisation, on the other hand, describes the process of internationalisation and integration of the global community into a single society without barriers and national boundaries. It has forced theories of international relations to take account of transnational interdependence as a global phenomenon, and not to focus solely on state-to-state relations. Globalisation should also be seen as the culmination of what, since the mid-1970s, was commonly called 'interdependence' - the "increasing degree to which the quality of life within states was rapidly and visibly becoming dependent on conditions in other states" (Kegley and Wittkopf 2001:18).

When dealing with a complicated subject such as the impact of globalisation on culture in international politics, many possible questions can be posed, such as:

- How are the concepts 'culture' and 'globalisation' being addressed by competing theories in international relations? Or, put differently: What do competing theories say about these concepts and their impact on world events? What is the link between culture and globalisation, if it exists at all?
- What are the most widely accepted definitions of 'culture' and 'globalisation' and how do these concepts relate to other concepts such as global integration, civilisation, ethnicity, cultural nationalism, identity and tribalism?

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- How will the concepts 'culture' and 'globalisation' change over time and be perceived and understood in future and how might the perceived conceptual change/variation impact on world events? Events influence the perceptions of culture and globalisation that theorists hold at a particular time, but will their perceptions influence events?
- As globalisation erodes the state system, will cultural divisions in the international system eventually also be eroded by globalisation, as perceived by certain authors? Do these authors believe that globalisation will eventually integrate different cultures of the world, thereby creating a 'world culture' (cultural homogenisation)?
- Is it not possible that globalisation, instead of integrating global cultures, is actually causing cultures to disintegrate, as they react against the effects of globalisation?

Although all the above questions are interrelated, legitimate and worth investigating, this paper will focus mainly on the latter question, i.e. whether globalisation is actually causing cultural disintegration on a global scale. But before this issue is addressed, it is imperative to first examine what is meant by the concepts 'culture' and 'globalisation'.

2. THE CONCEPTS 'CULTURE' AND 'GLOBALISATION'

To ensure conceptual clarity, key concepts such as culture, civilisation, ethnicity, identity, tribalism, clash of civilisations (Huntington 1996), cultural (dis)integration, cultural nationalism, international society, world society and others should be examined and defined. However, such an array of definitions would comprise a lengthy document and a study in itself. Therefore, for the purposes of this article, the following explanations and definitions of the two key concepts would have to suffice:

Culture, as such, is not a singular thing, but should rather be understood as a loose collection of characteristics, i.e. language, religion, history, institutions, etc. For example, authors who write about impending 'tribal chaos' on a global scale, such as Kaplan (1994) and Kennedy and Connelly (1994), point to factors such as overpopulation, resource scarcity, crime and disease as co-conspirators with intensifying cultural and ethnic identities in creating a chaotic, anarchic world. But the fundamental process at work here is socio-economic, not cultural. Cultural tensions are often most intense where socio-economic strife exists. In this case cultural factors have incorrectly been confused with socio-economic factors.

Therefore, in any study on culture, a necessary precondition would be an explicit definitional base which could provide the foundations for theoretical propositions. However, it should be borne in mind that over the past decades many fruitless attempts have already been made to codify formal definitions of culture.

Culture, according to Clifford Geertz, as quoted by Rubinstein (1998:203), is "an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life". According to Kolb (1978:91) "culture provides a 'view of the world' ... (i)ts images, beliefs, and values serve as the framework or set of optical lenses by which individuals perceive, interpret, and evaluate the physical and social universe, the realities and conditions that surround them, and the events and developments that occur in the universe". These definitions would be sufficient for the purposes of this study.

Globalisation, as in the case of culture, has also elicited an abundance of definitions. Globalisation can be differentiated in terms of economic, military, environmental and cultural (and social) dimensions. In terms of this paper, globalisation will be viewed as "cross-border ties based on forces that bypass governments" (Clemens 1998:538), and "the integration and growing interdependence of states through their increasing contact and trade that is creating a single united global society within a single culture so as to tie people together in a common fate and to reduce through this process the capacity of states to control their national destinies" (Kegley and Wittkopf 2001:41). It can also be defined as "the movements of ideas, information, and images, and of people" (Keohane and Nye 2000:4). Social globalisation, in particular, affects the consciousness of individuals, and their attitudes toward culture, politics and personal identity. According to Keohane and Nye (2000:4), social and cultural globalisation "interacts with other types of globalism, since military and environmental, as well as economic activity convey information and generate ideas, which may then flow across geographical and political boundaries".

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE IN WORLD POLITICS

With the end of the Cold War, culture has emerged as a notable factor and, increasingly, a predominant driving force in world affairs. Why has culture become so important? The following reasons for the growing importance of culture are briefly outlined below:

Firstly, culture plays a critical role in determining the economic fates of nations, peoples and individuals. Some cultures underwrite success better than others. Sowell (1994:1) suggests that "racial, ethnic, and cultural differences among people play a major role in the events of our times (because) a particular people usually has its own particular set of skills for dealing with the economic and social necessities of life".

Secondly, cultural perspectives and belief systems strongly influence the way in which national leaders view policy problems, both individually and collectively over time, and often determine the solutions they choose to apply. Anand (1981:15) wrote: "There can be no doubt that peoples or countries are affected by their cultural differences which reflect their values, outlooks, interests, habits and historical hopes and fears."

Thirdly, culture serves as the dominant blueprint for social, economic and military structures and institutions, thus exercising a strong influence on the behaviour and prospects of nation states in the world community. Fukuyama (1992:7) argues that "a nation's well-being, as well as its ability to compete, is conditioned by a single, pervasive cultural characteristic: the level of trust inherent in the society". His work contends that free markets and free politics are the basic aspirations of all humankind.

Fourthly, culture serves as an important framework for international relations, a principal basis for state action and a major source of conflict in world affairs. Huntington (1996), who has much in common with classical realist theorists of international relations, "has replaced the nation-state, the primary playing piece in the old game of realist politics, with a larger counter: the civilization" (Rubenstein and Crocker 1994:115).

The USA's official viewpoint on globalisation is that it "has a profound impact on our ability to promote cultural understanding among nations and to preserve and protect the unique and diverse cultures of the world". According to the former Under-secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, Evelyn Lieberman (2000), "many countries consider economic globalization as a threat to their cultures and traditions ... Indeed, culture and cultural differences have a major impact on many of the foreign policy challenges we confront ... Effective foreign policy must not simply accept, but extol and preserve cultural diversity."

It has therefore become imperative that culture, as a phenomenon, should be scrutinised more closely in future. But to do so, it is essential to also examine how political theorists have perceived culture. I wish to briefly dwell on this issue, before addressing the central argument of my article.

4. THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO CULTURE

As can be seen from the above exposition, different political theorists have, through the years, held differing views on the impact of culture on the development of an integrating or disintegrating global society.

According to the realists, there are no guarantees that a pluralist form of international society will survive. Huntington (1996), for example, states that increasingly the main fault lines in international society are those that divide cultures (civilisations), causing a disintegration of cultures. Liberals, such as Fukuyama (1992), believe that liberal democracy will prevail in most parts of the world. The implication is that major advances in realising a solidarist conception of international society are taking place, thereby integrating world cultures. Liberals battle to avoid the charge that their "conceptions of democracy and human rights are culturally specific, ethno-centric and therefore irrelevant to societies which are not Western in cultural orientation" (Burchill 1996:43).

On the other hand, rationalists such as Watson (1987), have been particularly interested in questions regarding cultural differences which have been at the heart of critical international theory in recent years. They maintain that agreements and compromises which command the consent of the world's peoples require forms of dialogue which are sensitive to cultural differences. Alternatively, structuralists, such as Marx and Engels, downplayed and underestimated the impact of cultural differences on human history, the continuing strength of national loyalty and the need to satisfy demands for cultural autonomy in the modern world (Linklater 1996b:137). They believed that globalisation would eradicate national cultures and sentiments and undermine sovereign states.

Theorists who adhere to the new approaches or debates in international relations, i.e. postpositivist alternatives such as critical and feminist theories and postmodernism, constructivism and neoliberalism, neorealism and world culture theory embrace new and diverse views on culture and its impact on international relations. For example, world culture theorists, such as Robertson (1992), view the inherent dynamics of globalisation as ongoing, open-ended and continually changing. Cultural conflict (e.g. Islamic fundamentalism) is the most common mechanism for these changes.

When one examines the perspectives on culture of selected international political theorists, one learns that some of them, and in particular the realists, foresee that the contemporary international system must, and must always, be understood in terms of endemic conflict and inequality, albeit mitigated by fragile and limited attempts at global governance which lack the coercive means to ensure global order. Functional cooperation "makes life more convenient", as Clemens (1998:529) puts it, "but will never supplant the contest of all against all".

Under these circumstances it would be easy to be pessimistic about the prospects of attaining global peace and order. Reasons for this pessimism include the fact that the fundamental political units of the world are still based on the nation states while some of the world's most powerful socio-political forces escape the boundaries of these units. In reaction to this, new forms of fundamentalism have arisen along with new forms of tribalism - all asserting the *a priori* superiority of a particular religious or cultural or political identity over all others, and all proclaiming their sectional aims and interests.

Of course, the alternative, i.e. the possibility that culture could actually be declining (integrating) on a world scale, should also be acknowledged, even though I do not share this view for reasons I shall elaborate on in the next section. Toynbee (1934:89-94), for example, saw history as the rise and fall of civilisations (world cultures?). In the long run he foresaw a reaction to Western influence, being both a counterflow of values from non-Western civilisations and a search for values within a technocratic life. The result, he felt, would be "an amalgamation of world cultures" (i.e. cultural cohesion). In terms of this, "a portion of every society is becoming a part of a worldwide culture", as Havel (199:249) noted.

According to this view, the evolving nature of the global economy is causing governments and businesses to reach past their cultural fetters and embrace globally shared models of governance, corporate structure en economy. If this is true, then cultures will decline as a factor influencing world affairs. On the other hand, authors such as Gellner (1983:121-2) state that culture and nationalism will not disappear, but "the sharpness of nationalist conflict may be expected to diminish". Hitchcock (1994:xii), for instance, maintains that "although differences over values do indeed exist, they are being exaggerated". In fact, "the common threads developing between East and West across the Pacific are far more significant than the differing values each holds dear".

5. THE IMPACT OF GLOBALISATION ON CULTURE

Globalisation, which has a vital connection with culture, captures the idea that everyone and everything on the planet is now more closely connected than ever before. However, globalisation is built on cultural foundations that are shaky and unprepared for managing the massive adjustments brought on by accelerating worldwide changes. Besides states, which are experiencing a loss of sovereignty, different state-based (national) cultures, substate cultural minorities and world cultures also have to adapt to these changes. These cultures cannot keep depending on vulnerable political states for their continuation; states now increasingly lack the capacity to ensure not only national security, but the continued maintenance of cultural identity. Globalisation is causing distances to shrink and knowledge and ideas to be shared in what can be characterised as a movement towards a 'borderless world' with a 'common culture'. This trend towards globalisation is forcing (sub)state and/or world cultures to realign across state borders, against globalisation, in order to maintain the cultural distinctiveness they espouse.

To most, globalisation is a means to address many of the world's problems, such as pollution, poverty, disease, regional conflicts, environmental degradation, etc. To others, it represents a threat not only to the independence of states, but to the continued existence of state, substate and/or world cultures. Calls are often being made and were especially made at the world Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, to "replace corporate globalisation" and for globalisation to be replaced by 'localisation'. For proponents of globalisation, on the other hand, the only practical prospect for universal peace and prosperity must be "more civilization through globalisation" (Keeley 1996:20). They reason that people who trade not only increase the wealth of everyone, but have shared interests and fewer incentives to fight, thereby reducing the chances of war.

This so-called 'positive effect' of globalisation is being challenged though by state and substate cultural minorities who deplore the impact it is having on their culture and traditions. For them globalisation leads to poverty, the further marginalisation of communities and Third World states (North-South debate), and the suppression of cultural identity. Globalisation may have weakened the sovereign power of states, but in various respects this same force is strengthening cultural groups who oppose globalisation. World events indicate that a tendency by people to form cultural groups in order to gain a sense of security, identity and belonging, is becoming more prevalent. Huntington (1996) states that "the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural."

Kegley and Witkopf (2004:165) refer to "transnational cultural domains" where people are linked by "common ancestry across national borders", sharing a common heritage and placing higher value on ideals other than patriotic loyalty to particular states. In the wake of the carefully planned and pathologically motivated suicide attack by a small group of Islamist militants on the World Trade Centre building in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. on 11 September 2001, the authors (2004:248,622) also refer to Huntington's (1996) **Clash of civilizations** thesis as convincing evidence that "almost everywhere in the contemporary world people are espousing cultural and civilizational identities". For them ethnocentrism is becoming more prevalent in the world where particular groups perceive themselves as a special civilisation and their values as inherently superior. This tendency towards particularisation and adherence to one's own culture is manifesting itself across the globe.

When appraising Huntington's argument, one only needs to look at the unfolding of recent and current world affairs. What happened in the former Yugoslavia, for example, has been widely construed as a war of civilisations between Muslim and Christian (cf. Cox 2001:131-2). Also, after the 11 September 2001 attack by Islamic extremists on the USA, many authors (cf. Mills 2002:70) now maintain that Huntington's argument might be valid and more relevant than ever. Following the bombings, President George W Bush Jnr. called for a 'crusade' against the perpetrators. With this announcement, according to Abraham (2002:5), a "crusade had been proclaimed by the leader of the now secular West against the Islamic infidel of the East. The 'Christian' world was, once again, at war with its historic adversary - Islam."

Growing identification with a particular ethnic or religious group and global inequalities are reinforcing global cultural disintegration, division and fragmentation. This fragmentation of the world into nations and communities, enveloping diverse cultures in the process, may inhibit the possibilities of a transcultural foundation for global democratic politics. For example, in Asia-Pacific an 'Asian way' of democracy is championed; in Africa indigenous democratic traditions and ideas are being reinvented while in South Africa, according to Marx (2002:61), the same sense of 'traditionalism' comes to the fore in Ubuntu. This form of 'cultural nationalism' finds expression in the 'African Renaissance' idea. If everything objectionable is connected with the 'West', and everything laudable such as the community spirit of Ubuntu, is connected with 'Africa', then the implicated struggle between Africa and Europe is self-evident.

The greatest misconception presently in Western minds is that democracy in non-Western countries will produce pro-Western administrations. This rarely happens, as Huntington (1996:94) wrote in **The clash of civilizations**. He called this the 'democracy paradox', stating that "adoption by non-Western societies of Western democratic institutions encourages and gives access to power to nativist and anti-Western political movements". Muslims tend to see Western democracy as the antithesis of Islam. Elections in Islamic countries like Algeria and Turkey have installed Islamist, anti-U.S. politicians at the helm. This the U.S. has also learnt in a hard way during its attempts at administering Iraq after the toppling of Saddam Hussein. Cultural relativism, increasingly a hostage to authoritarian politics, undermines the basis of common agreement on democracy as a global ethic and thereby furthers the potential for conflict.

Halliday (1994:106) encapsulates this trend well by stating that transnationalists often point to phenomena that support the claim of a growing common society across borders. However, he states that "within many of the flows that they identify, new forms of division, chauvinism or particularist hegemony may be arising". He further says that "(a)ny theory of the impact of international processes on the world has to encompass both elements of this process, the integrative and the fragmentary". The issue is to negotiate a "balance between globalism and appropriate cultural pride".

With the weakening of the state as actor in international relations, nationalism is changing into a form of supra and/or subculturalism that emphasises an awareness and appreciation of national traditions, religions and collective memories instead of an overtly political quest for statehood. Political nations are therefore making way for 'cultural nations'. Many nations are historically embedded: they are rooted in a common cultural heritage, religion and/or language that may long predate the achievement of statehood. One can therefore refer to a type of 'cultural nationalism' as a form of nationalism that places primary emphasis on the regeneration of the nation as a distinctive civilisation, rather than as a discrete political community based on sovereignty and self-determination. Not uncommonly, cultural nationalists often view the state as a peripheral, if not alien, entity.

I do not doubt that globalisation has a positive effect on many of the world's problems, as already indicated. However, too much emphasis is being placed on its global economic benefits, and not on the negative effects it has on the establishment of a global transcultural foundation. Compared to global economic relationships, which are unequally structured, cultural relationships are even more unequally structured. To cite one example: a few states, with the USA as the unquestionable leader, export their cultural products to the rest of the world. In this

case, *cultural* globalisation is really a one-way process of cultural imperialism. As Gibbins and Reimer (1999:32) put it: "Different cultures have always influenced each other, but never before has the process been so one-sided." The fact that American culture is being exported around the world, and that the world is becoming increasingly homogenised, according to American standards, is cause for concern. Other cultures are reacting gradually but strongly against this homogenisation process, identifying with cultural aspects which are distinctive and dear to them.

6. CONCLUSION

This article set out to examine the link between globalisation and culture. It was shown that even though processes of globalisation might be physically uniting the globe, as believed by many theorists, these processes are not necessarily producing that sense of global community on which the legitimacy of global democratic governance would depend. Indeed, as I have explained, globalisation, instead of actually uniting the world, is accelerating global cultural disintegration which, in turn, could be precipitating the potential for global conflict.

As opposed to certain theorists who believe that conflict is the result of the inherent aggressive nature of human beings (Sigmund Freud), wrong nurturing (Albert Bandura), institutional deficiencies (John W Burton), deprivation of human needs (Abraham Maslow), competition for scarce resources and exploitive economic relations between different social classes (Karl Marx), or core states exploiting peripheral states (Neo-Marxists), I am of the opinion that, currently, the main precipitating factor generating conflict lies in ascending cultural diversity as a result of globalisation. As Nnoli (2000:187) states: "Globalisation through the process of uneven development generates a series of contradictions which inevitably leads to a series of struggles at different levels."

Ironically, while one of the aims of globalisation is to secure peace through the elimination of conflict, it is actually contributing to its escalation as a result of the disintegration of culture which it engenders. As was seen in the above exposition, globalisation has a major impact on culture while culture, in turn, affects conflict behaviour. It should therefore be remembered that the neglect of cultural considerations could have dire consequences for international relations.

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