GLOBALISATION: HAS CULTURAL GLOBALISATION RESHAPED WORLD POLITICS?

ANDREW HEYWOOD

Since the 1980s, it has been impossible to examine world politics without considering the impact of globalisation (see Box 1). So-called 'hyperglobalists', indeed, have argued that globalisation has changed the contours of world politics so profoundly that the international approach to its study, in which world affairs boils down, essentially, to relations between and among states, has been rendered redundant.

However, most accounts of globalisation focus on changes that have occurred in the economic or political spheres, and have thus reflected on what are termed economic globalisation or political globalisation. This has meant that the cultural impact of globalisation has often been overlooked, something that is surprising in view of the wide-ranging and far-reaching developments with which has been associated. This article discusses, first, the sense in which globalisation the cultural dimension – what is cultural globalisation? It then examines some of the major ways in which cultural globalisation has reshaped world politics.

Box 1 - Globalisation

Globalisation is a complex, elusive and controversial term. Most simply, it can be seen as the emergence of a complex web of interconnectedness that means that our lives are increasingly shaped by events that occur, and decisions that are made, at a great distance from us. The central feature of globalisation is therefore the geographical distance is of declining relevance and that territorial borders, such as those between nation-states, are becoming less significant. By no means, however, does globalisation necessarily imply that 'the local' and 'the national' are subordinated to 'the global'. Rather, it highlights the deepening as well as the broadening of the political process, in the sense that local, national global events (or perhaps local, regional, national, international and global events) constantly interact.

What is cultural globalisation?

Cultural globalisation the process whereby information, commodities and images produced in one part of the world enter into a global flow that tends to 'flatten out' cultural differences between nations, regions and individuals. In its dominant conception, cultural globalisation is therefore seen to promote homogenisation, the production of what is, in effect, a global monoculture. Nevertheless, as with globalisation in its wider sense, cultural globalisation is a highly complex phenomenon. Although it embodies a clear tendency towards cultural 'flattening', it is also linked to diversity and polarisation. Cultural globalisation thus fosters *both* sameness and difference.

Cultural globalisation is closely related to economic globalization and the communication and information revolution. In the case of the former, cultural globalization underpins the spread of global capitalism by propagating appetites, values and lifestyles that make market economies appear 'natural' and unchallengeable. Cultural globalisation and economic globalisation can therefore be seen as two sides of the same coin. The case of the latter, the volume and speed of global cultural flows have been greatly enhanced by the advent of television, mobile phones, computers and the Internet, as well by the emergence of media empires, such as AOL-Time Warner, News Corporation, Viacom, Disney, Vivendi Universal and Bertelsmann AG).

Spread of consumerism

Cultural globalisation has most commonly been manifest in the worldwide advance of a culture of consumer capitalism, sometimes seen as 'turbo-consumerism' (see Box 2). One aspect of this has been what is called 'Coca-Colonization', a process first highlighted by French communists in the 1950s. Coca-Colonization refers, on one level, to the emergence of global goods and global brands (Coca-Cola being a prime example) that have come to dominate economic markets in more and more parts of the world, creating an image of bland uniformity. However, at a deeper level, it also captures the psychological and emotional power that these brands have come to acquire through highly sophisticated marketing advertising, allowing them to become symbols of freedom, youthfulness, vitality, happiness and so on.

Box 2 - Consumerism

Consumerism is a psychological and cultural phenomenon whereby personal happiness is equated with the consumption of material possessions. It is often associated with the emergence of a 'consumer society' or of 'consumer capitalism'. Consumer capitalism was shaped by the development of new advertising and marketing techniques that took advantage of the growth of the mass media and the spread of mass affluence. A consumer society is one that is organised around the consumption rather than the production of goods and services. Whereas 'productionist' societies emphasize the values of discipline, duty and hard work (the Protestant work ethic, for example), consumer societies stress materialism, hedonism and immediate rather than delayed gratification.

Although consumerism is sometimes seen as nothing more than evidence of deep-seated material appetites that reside within human nature, supporters of the anti-globalisation or anti-corporate movement have portrayed it in a much more sinister light. The anti-globalisation critique of consumerism has at least three strands. First, consumerism is portrayed as a device used by transnational corporation (TNCs) to expand their influence and profitability, ensuring their ascendancy within the new globalised economy. In *No Logo* (2000), Naomi Klein, the Canadian journalist, author and anti-corporate activist, thus drew attention to what she called the tyranny of 'brand culture'.

Second, consumerism has been condemned as an assault on local, regional and national distinctiveness. A world in which everything looks the same and everyone thinks and acts the same way is a world without a sense of rootedness and belonging. Third, consumerism and materialism have been associated with a process of manipulation that distorts values and denies happiness. This occurs through the tendency of advertising and marketing to create 'false' needs that, in effect, keep people in a state of constant neediness, aspiration and want.

Advance of individualism

Cultural globalisation has been associated not only with economic appetites but also with political values. This has been particularly evident in relation to the seemingly global advance of individualism (see Box 3). In traditional societies, there has typically been little idea of individuals having their own interests or possessing

personal and unique identities. Rather, people have been seen primarily as members of the social groups to which they belong: their family, village, tribe, local community and so on. Their lives and identities have therefore been largely determined by the character of these groups, in a process that changes little from one generation to the next. This, nevertheless, started to change as a result of the establishment of industrial capitalism as the dominant mode of social organization, first in western societies and, thanks to globalisation, in other parts of the world. In confronting people with a broader range of choices and social possibilities, industrial capitalism encouraged them, perhaps for the first time, to think for themselves, and think of themselves in personal terms.

Box 3 - Individualism

Individualism is the belief in the supreme importance of the individual over any social group or collective body. As such, individualism has two key implications. First, each individual has a separate, indeed unique, identity, reflecting his or her inner or personal qualities. This is reflected in the idea of individuality, and is linked to the notion that people are self-interested and largely self-reliant creatures. Second, all individuals share the same moral status as 'persons', irrespective of factors such as race, religion, nationality, gender or social position. The notion that individuals are of equal moral worth is reflected in the idea of rights, and especially the doctrine of human rights.

The spread of individualism has been linked to developments ranging from the advance of democracy (by 2003, 63 per cent of the world's states exhibited some key features of liberal-democratic governance) and the wider acceptance of human rights as the dominant normative principle of international affairs. Nevertheless, the rise of individualism should not be overstated. Individualism has been embraced most eagerly in the Anglophone world, where it been most culturally palatable given the impact of Protestant religious ideas about personal salvation and the moral benefits of individual self striving. By contrast, Catholic societies in Europe and elsewhere have been more successful in resisting individualism and maintaining the ethics of social responsibility. However, the best examples of successful anti-individualist societies can be found in Asia, especially Japan, China and Asian 'tiger' states such as Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore. Some have argued that this reflects the

capacity of so-called 'Asian values' to provide an alternative to the individualism of western liberal societies.

Cultural imperialism

Many critiques of cultural globalisation emphasize that the cultural flows that characterise the modern world take place between unequal partners, and so allow powerful states to exert domination over weaker states. In this view, cultural globalisation is a form of cultural imperialism. This imperialism tends to have either a markedly western, or more specifically American, character. The 'westernisation' model of globalisation derives the fact that the West is the home of consumer capitalism and industrial society, and is backed up by the belief that the ethic of material self-seeking is a specifically western value, stemming as it does from western liberalism.

The 'Americanization' model of cultural globalisation reflects the disproportionate extent to which the goods and images that dominate modern commerce and the global media derive from the USA. US norms and lifestyles therefore overwhelm more vulnerable cultures, leading, for instance, to Palestinian youths wearing Chicago Bulls sweatshirts. The economic and cultural ascendancy of the USA is also reflected in the 'McDonaldization' of the world, making the expansion of American-style consumer capitalism appear unstoppable.

Box 4 – Key concepts

Americanization: Either or both the political and economic dominance the USA, or the spread of American cultural values to other parts of world.

Asian values: Values that supposedly reflect the history, culture and religious backgrounds of Asian societies: examples include social harmony, respect for authority and a belief in the family.

Brand: A symbolic construct, typically consisting of a name and a logo or symbol, which conveys the promise, 'personality' or image of a product or group of products.

Cultural imperialism:The displacement of indigenous cultures by the imposition of beliefs, values and attitudes, usually associated with consolidating or legitimising economic and/or political domination.

Culture: Beliefs, values and practices passed on from one generation to another; culture is distinct from nature.

Economic globalisation: The process through which national economies are, to a greater or lesser extent, been absorbed into a single global economy.

Homogenisation: The tendency for all parts or elements (in this case countries) to becomes similar or identical.

Human rights: Rights to which people are entitled by virtue of being human; human rights are universal, fundamental, indivisible and absolute.

Hyperglobalism: The view that new, globalised economic and cultural patterns became inevitable once technology such as computerised financial trading, satellite communications, mobile phones and the internet became available

I**ndigenisation**: The process through which alien goods and practices are adapted to local conditions and needs.

McDonaldization: The process whereby global commodities and commercial and marketing practices associated with the fast-food industry have come to dominate more and more economic sectors

Political globalisation: The process through which policy-making responsibilities have been passed from national governments to regional or international organisations.

Local cultures and the cultural backlash

Nevertheless, cultural exchange is by no means a top-down or one-way process. Instead, all societies, including economically and politically powerful one, have become more varied and diverse as as a result of the emergence of a globalised

cultural marketplace. Western societies have been influenced by non-western religions, food (soy sauce, Indian curry spices, tortillas), medicines and therapeutic practices (acupuncture, yoga, Buddhist meditation) and sports (judo, karate, kick-boxing). Cultural globalisation may, moreover, adapt to local circumstances or strengthen local cultures. In developing states, for example, western consumer goods and images have been absorbed into more traditional cultural practices through a process of 'indigenisation'. Examples of this include the Bollywood film industry and the Al Jazeera television network. The process of cultural borrowing by which local actors select and modify elements from an array of global possibilities has been described by the UK sociologist, Roland Robertson, as 'glocalization'.

Where economic and cultural globalisation have imposed values and practices deemed to be starkly alien and threatening, a radical backlash has sometimes been provoked. This can be seen in the US political theorist Benjamin Barber's image of a world culture shaped by symbiotic links between what he has termed 'McWorld' and 'Jihad'. He claimed that McWorld (called after corporations including MacIntosh and McDonald's) is pressing nations into a single 'commercially homogeneous theme park', creating a 'shimmering scenario of integration and uniformity in which people everywhere are mesmerised by fast music, fast computers and fast food'. However, in certain parts of the Muslim world, the encounter with McWorld has stimulated abhorrence and helped to foster the belief that the West in general and the USA in particular are moral bankrupt, the enemies of Islam. In this light, cultural globalisation can be seen as one of the key factors that has contributed to the rise of militant
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