

HOMOGENIZATION

In global studies, the term *homogenization* refers to a possible outcome of globalization and transnational processes. It suggests a deterministic force for change which disintegrates difference and diversity with the tendency to result in uniformity, sameness, and similarity.

This process of change and its potential outcomes at the global and transnational scales are associated with the domination of the Western model, particularly in the domains of economy, culture, polity, and social relations. This approach to global and transnational relations is captured in concepts such as Westernization, Americanization, neo-colonialism, McDonaldization, imperialism, dominance, and hegemony. This argument for the mono-causal process of transformation of the world according to the agenda of global capitalism has been contested for being overly simplistic and not taking into account the many complexities that comprise global relations.

In the domain of economy, the notion of homogenization builds on ideas developed in 1970s that world economy is based on relations of production and division of labor between a small core of advanced countries, a number of semiperipheral economies, and a large pool of underdeveloped nation-states in the periphery. What came to be known as world-systems theory is concerned with capitalist relations between different nation-states and domination of the economically powerful core countries over the peripheral economies as these enter the global stage. Some have argued that this push to integrate local and national economies into a globalized economy based on neo-liberal ideas of deregulation and opening of local markets to free trade has created new kinds of institutions, business entities, and social networks that operate beyond the boundaries of nation-state. Examples of intergovernmental institutions include the World Trade Organization and the World Bank. The so-called transnational corporations are new forms of entrepreneurship which facilitate consumption of goods and service, new forms of finance and lending, and production of capital at the global level.

These are thought to constitute a new system of global economy in that these entities are not tied to any particular state territory and the global elites that run them often do not have loyalties to any particular nation-state or locale.

These transnational conglomerates constitute powerful monopolies with concentrated ownership of the whole chain of mass media production and consumption, from television, satellite, and cable to radio and film production and publishing outlets, including newspapers, magazines, and books. Through these outlets, a handful of very large transnational corporations have control over the process of cultural production and diffusion through which they are thought to promote ideas of consumerism, the culture of credit beyond one's means, and Western beliefs, ideologies, and lifestyles. Some see this as a form of cultural imperialism that threatens indigenous cultures and disrupts regional and national identities. It has been argued that homogenization of culture through the mass media, dominated by American and European values triggers cultural conflict. An example of such a view is expressed as the conflict between, on the one hand, "McWorld," modeled by the West and its popular culture of fast food, particular music styles, technologies, and art production, and on the other hand, "Jihad," or national cultures based on religious traditions. A similar argument is made in terms of conflict of civilizations where the Western culture based on Christian values is said to clash with the non-Western civilization based on Islamic fundamentalist values.

Such binary thinking also underlies the push to see social issues that result from cross-cultural contact as security problems that must be solved using military means and globally coordinated surveillance technologies and practices. These are made possible through the so-called public-private partnerships, where state agencies of social control form supra-state partnerships with private enterprise, seeking to achieve control over global migration and mobility. Such ideologies join those promoted through the monopolies of mass media conglomerates by a small elite of executives, lobbyists, politicians, financier, and entrepreneurs. These are said to constitute a world-wide network of elite social relations of power, concentration of decision-making and Western style of governance that

operates on a global scale. This style of governance follows what has been called McDonaldization of interpersonal relations where efficiency, calculability, routinization, and rationalization trump over local ties based on trust, kinship, familialism, and various local versions of loyalties and relations. These trends of economic, cultural, and social homogenization are closely related to homogenization through political means. What is referred to as political hegemony has the goal of promoting the ideology of neo-liberalism, deregulation, and disregard for law and human rights, all of which tend to strengthen the role of transnational conglomerates and their supporting institutions and ruling elites at the expense of individual nation-states.

Manifestations of homogenization, its processes as well as its effects, remain an important empirical question which is studied in specific local situations. Such contextual analysis allows for cross-cultural and historical comparisons that help illuminate the complex patterns of interconnectedness and interdependence which characterize globalization and transnational processes as well as their localized experience. In this pursuit, homogenization as a deterministic and mono-causal model seems overly simplistic. While relations of global-local contact often do have homogenizing tendencies, these processes are much more likely to create forms of relations that are hybrid, flexible, and shifting, as they draw on multiplicities of cultural, social, and economic resources available at the local and the global level in specific contexts.

Vida Bajc

See also Globalization; Transnationalism; Hybridization; World Systems Perspective; Ethnocentrism; Americanization; Shrinking World Concepts; Neocolonialism; McDonaldization, McWorld; Hegemonic Power; Governance Networks, Transnational; Corporations, Transnational;

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