

GLOBALIZATION, POSTMODERNISM AND MULTICULTURALISM: UNDERPINNING THE DYNAMICS OF CULTURE

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Abstract

This paper is an appraisal of how culture is implicated within the discourses of globalization and postmodernism. In a nut shell, it examines the cultural dimension of globalization and postmodernism. Further, this exploration adopts the disciplinary/multidisciplinary outreach of cultural studies to investigate the boundaries of culture and the controversies generated within the discourses of multiculturalism overtime. In other words, this paper interrogates the ideational contestation of the nature and scopes of culture especially within global and postmodern consideration. Thus, it underlines the centralization of the different socio-economic, historical, technological and political trends that have constituted the notion of culture chiefly from a posturing of the global. To this end, this study undersees the diverse assumptions on the specific as well as the general dimensions of global/postmodern cultures.

Keywords: *culture, cultural studies, postmodernism, multiculturalism, globalization*

Introduction

Although scholars of cultural studies persuasion have contended with the proper province of the discipline, this problematic offers the possibilities for wide range of ideas and concerns of literary and non-literary tendencies to be mediated in its discourse. Colin Sparks in Storey (1996) shares this concern when he avers that “it is extremely difficult to define ‘Cultural

Studies' with any degree of precision" (15). Sparks highlights the complexities involved in trying to shape a meaning for cultural studies. These complexities are conveyed on the principle of series of tension, conflicts, ambiguity and contingencies in the conceptualization of the term.

In view of this, Sparks like other scholars extends further a few of these projections in the following assertions: "cultural studies is a veritable rag-bag of ideas, methods and concerns from literary criticism, sociology, history, media studies etc., which are lumped together under the convenient label" (2). Spark's contention explicates one of the aspirations of cultural studies which originated from an attempt to come to concrete terms with the distinct ways in which culture is permeated and apprehended within various fields and vistas in the humanities and social sciences as history, sociology, literary criticism, anthropology and the like. This position is akin to what Abubakar Aliyu Liman (2016) expressed as "cultural studies is multidisciplinary in nature because in its discursive and conceptual moorings, it often ferrets its own theoretical and empirical ingredients from territorial spaces of contradictory fields of study as broad as Feminism, Marxism and Semiotics" (2). To Liman cultural studies is contingent in nature since it borrows heavily some of its conceptualizations from other fields. In other words, changes in the epistemology, changes in the society and changes in world economy, changes in global politics often trigger the shifting notions of cultural studies. At once, there is the prevalence of dependencies and interdependencies in the signification of cultural studies. Liman's postulation provides a definitive insight into the nature and scope of cultural studies especially within the global/postmodern dispositions.

Against this backdrop therefore, this paper is an evaluation of how ethnic pluralism is interwoven within the discourses of globalization and postmodernism. The cobweb of hobnobbing is evidently visible in how culture has metamorphosed into politics, power and media, all rolled into a single bundle. In a nut shell, it examines the cultural dimension of globalization. It further diagnoses how people, identity and reality are constructed and dominated by series of simulacrum occasioned through the leaping shifts in economy, technology and the media. On this score, this paper apprehends the ideational contestation on the nature and scope of cultural diversity as well as how its discursive and conceptual moorings are fore-grounded within the global or postmodern world. To this extent, it undersees the diverse assumptions on the specific as well as the general dimensions of global cultures.

The dynamics of culture in the global/postmodern society

At one conceptual level, the notion of globalization is a never-ending enterprise given the broad nature of the term. This presupposes that the term can be viewed from divergent vistas - politics, culture, economics and ecological conscience et cetera. Nonetheless, the notion is engendered from a more cultural dimension. Thus, the signification of globalization presumes the process of becoming a more interconnected world. It is also the process of the world economy becoming dominated by capitalist models. Robertson in Barker (2012) contends that the concept refers to “an intensified compression of the world” (157). This compression can be deciphered in terms of the institutions of modernity.

The forgoing assumption is not far from what Davis in Hugwe (2010) purports as globalization is “a planetary synthesis of cultures”. Central to Davis’ theory is that globalization is the

world's integration of cultures. In clarity, globalization to him is a phenomenon that synchronizes or compacts cultures of the world in one pack. This perspective conveys the homogeneous nature of global cultures.

In many respects, the signification of postmodernism refers to practices that react against earlier modernist assumptions. Further, postmodernism points to a set of philosophical and epistemological concerns, that is, a configuration about the nature of knowledge and truth. Barker posits that postmodern culture is a culture that has undergone transitional period of change in terms of cultural patterns shaping the contours of the future. Thus, postmodern situations substantially connote mimicry, adaptations and incorporations. In this sense, postmodernism is a culture that goes with globalization. In brief, it is an age of globalization. It is an eclectic age that seems to have incorporated a hodgepodge of media, digitization, technology, politics, economy and culture into a single whole, blurring the demarcation between these issues.

Again, this is predicated on the principles that there are commonalities in human experiences. Human cultures and experiences in a postmodern sense are actually the same. To lend credence to this theory, Barbosa (2010) contends that the “westernization” or “modernization” in globalization is a dynamic whereby the structures of post-modernity (capitalism, multiculturalism, diversity, industrialism, bureaucratism, individualism, rationalism, global incorporations etc.) are spread all over the world, normally destroying pre-existent cultures (5). Invariably, Barbosa takes a homogeneous stance on global cultures.

Given the premise above, Tomlinson (2003) extends the reach of globalization and its effects on the periphery. He

maintains that “globalization destroys localities . . . everywhere becoming blandly culturally uniform”(43). Again this buttresses the homogeneity in global cultures. It insinuates that globalization rubs minority cultures of their heritage and experiences, thereby making them assimilate alien popular cultures. By this, globalization involves a kind of subtle domination of certain cultural values. Perhaps the best known elaboration of this conception of the term comes from Spybey (1996) who observes that “globalization is sometimes described as American imperialism” (4). Spybey’s assumption connotes that globalization is the Western or Caucasian form of cultural domination of the periphery. Thus, he strongly suggests that the outcome of global cultural interaction is a product of hybridity.

At another conceptual level, Arjun Appadurai in Simon During (1993) properly articulates a slightly different vista on the notion of culture. To him, ethnic cultures in the global world are not of the same kind and have no uniform composition or structure. He rejects Davis stance of global cultures that are integrated and synchronized. In furtherance of his take on postmodern cultures, he posits that scholars must turn down the Structuralist bipolar notions of “global/local”, “north/south”, “metropolitan/non-metropolitan” which severed the world in twos. This diametrical opposition of the world and its cultural phenomenon is restrictive and limiting. Rather he adjures scholars to be heedful of the unique “flows” and “scapes” which “ceaselessly sweep through the globe carrying information, ideas, images, people, and technologies” (23).

Similarly, Appadurai posits that the content of these “flows” or “scapes” consistently changes (mutates) and their relation to one another is “increasingly distant and antagonistic” (23). What is certain about Appadurai’s is that the subject matter of these

“flows” is constantly changing and the connection between them is usually hostile or in opposition. Invariably, he celebrates globalism/globalization.

In specific terms, Appadurai extends the dynamics of culture to the new global cultural economy which has to be “understood as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order, which cannot any longer be understood in terms of centre – periphery models or simple models of push and pull or of consumers and producer” (46). In this sense, this vision broadly rejects the Structuralist model of binary opposition as a framework for comprehending the new global cultural economy. From his standpoint, the new global cultural economy must be realized as a complicated or disconnected arrangement (sequence). As such, the complexity of the current global economy deals with certain fundamental disconnection between culture, economy and politics.

Fundamentally, to comprehend the disjuncture or disconnection between culture, economy and politics, scholars of Appadurai persuasion debate on five premises or dimensions of global cultural flow or what they refer to as “Scapes”. They aptly termed “first, ethnoscapes; the second, mediascapes; the third, technoscapes; the fourth, finanscapes; and the fifth, ideoscapes” (221). These social constructs (that is, the scapes) are informed by forces as nation states, multinationals, diasporic communities, and movements of political, religious and economic nature, villages, neighborhoods and families. All these scapes constitute global cultural society (that is “imagined world”) where various ethnic groups collaborate and enter into a dialogue with one another, rubbing on their identities.

By “ethnoscapes”, Appadurai spells out in distinct terms landscape of the people, such as tourists, immigrants, refugees,

exiles, guest workers and other moving groups of people, who invariably affect a shift in the world we live. They influence the politics of and between nations to a large extent. In short, they influence global power, politics and economy. The movement of these people whether as immigrants or migrants has a way of invariably influencing those countries they move to.

By “technoscapes” he refers to the fluid nature of technology and how technology both high and low, mechanical and informational, now moves across all boundaries. Countries like China, India, Japan, Russia and Libya are now roots of multinational enterprise, providing divergent technological innovations for the world. These countries (technoscapes) are driven increasingly by the complex relationship between money flows, political possibilities and the availability of both low and highly skilled labor (222). This has contributed in shaping world politics, economy and defining world powers.

On “finanscapes” Appadurai posits that the perspective on global capital is now a more mysterious and difficult landscape to follow than ever before. This is because currency markets, national stock exchanges and commodity speculations move large sums of money through mechanical devices at a blinding speed. Worldwide financial transactions are carried 24 hours a day facilitated by the innovations of new technologies. Indeed, the financial sector is the most globalized economic practices according to Barker. For this reason, the relationship between ethnoscaples, technoscapes and finanscapes is deeply disconnected and complex.

Similarly, Appadurai’s conjecture on “mediascapes” is largely contested. To him, “mediascapes” refers to “the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspaper, magazines, television

station, film etc.) (232). Cultural artifacts are now available to public and private interests as they have consistently influenced the kaleidoscope of the world. Further still, “mediascapes” provide complex and large repertoires of images and narratives to viewers throughout the world. Thus, the lines between the “realistic” and “fictional” landscapes are blurred for the audience. To this end therefore, “mediascapes” are image-centered and narrative-based. Thus the media shapes the kaleidoscope of the world

Appadurai articulation on the notion of “ideoscapes” as the fifth dimension of postmodern culture, deals with ideologies and counter-ideologies of the states and their implications within a mixed ethnic community. “Ideoscapes” are also interconnection of images, ideas, and terms including freedom, rights, sovereignty, democracy and representations which are all considered as Enlightenment worldview or Western metaphysics with its many variants in England, France and United States. Thus, “ideoscapes” shape themselves in different national and transnational contexts.

To lend further credence to the above, Hamid Naficy (1993) maintains that the problem of today’s global culture and its interactions is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization. Global cultural interactions understood from Naficy’s vision emphasizes the rift in notions particularly those that concur with the assumption that cultures in postmodern society are of the same kind and have uniform composition or structure and those on the other side of the divide, with the view that local cultures are unrelated and are of dissimilar composition and structure.

Naficy arguably makes it very clear by asserting that often both sides of the arguments are closely connected. In identifying

with the flaws of these arguments, he contests that “what these arguments fail to consider is that at least as rapidly as forces from various metropolises are brought into new societies they tend to become indigenized in one way or the other: this is true of music and housing styles as much as it is true of science and terrorism, spectacles and constitutions.” (221). The thrust of Naficy’s insinuations is that cultural phenomenon or activities introduced in new societies are quickly adopted in many stance. What becomes paramount is that the dynamics of such adoption (indigenization) is usually very complex.

On a different front, cultural studies scholars have debated the negative impact of global cultural coexistence. With the salt of pessimism scholars have greatly associated the dynamic interaction of global cultures with the destruction of cultural identities. Predicated upon this, is a contention by Johnson Tomlinson (2003) which borders on the assumption that prior to the emergence of globalization, “there existed local, autonomous, distinct and well defined, robust and culturally sustaining connections between geographical place and cultural experience. These connections constituted one’s community – “cultural identity” (269). Tomlinson’s view comments on the position of cultural identity before the advent of globalization. To him, cultures then were clearly different, clearly separated from each other and existed independent of each other. Invariably Tomlinson opines that culture was something fragile and needed protection and preserving which could be lost. Globalization to him obliterated these differences and clearly defined boundaries.

On the contrary, around the middle of the 1980s globalization emerged, “sweeping like a flood tide through the world’s diverse cultures, destroying stable localities, displacing

peoples, bringing a market driven, “branded” homogenization of cultural experience, thus obliterating the differences between locality -defined cultures which had constituted our identities (Tomlinson 1991:270). This assumption is consistent with the view that postmodern culture involves a general process of the loss of cultural diversity.

In a fundamental sense, Tomlinson contends that the west, particularly the United States standardized version of cultures were exported worldwide and the “weaker” cultures of the developing world have been tremendously threatened and affected. This postulation greatly implicates globalization in the destruction of cultural identity. To a large extent, this invariably comments on the role of cultural imperialism in the elevation of western culture on the one hand and in the denigration of other cultures of the world on the other hand. Thus, there was a conspicuous deliberate attempt to install western culture as the standard culture of the world and to put at the center the superior and high quality nature of western culture. To this end, this defines the notion of high and low culture, weak and strong culture, good and bad culture.

At the core of global fundamentalism is the concept of deterritorialization. Deterritorialization in general, is one of the central forces of postmodern world, since it brings laboring populations into the lower-class spaces of relatively wealthy societies (During 1993). From the foregoing, During avers that one of the underpinnings of global culture is the exploitation of cheap labor from different parts of the world to facilitate the agenda of global economy. This is possible given that national boundaries and territories have been dissolved and so are trade barriers. What become of this are the teaming movements of people around the world involving new patterns of transnational

migration, identities and communities. As a result, investors from different parts of the world are unaffected by national boundaries. A new market is created by deterritorialization, for film companies, entertainment industries and travel agencies who grow exponentially on the need of the laboring populations. The movements of money in this context are the basis of new kinds of conflict. During maintains that this is because people, money and commodities are involved in a ceaseless chasing of each other around the world.

Suffice it to say from the foregoing therefore, that global cultures are implicated in each other. Particularly because the postmodern space deals with what Homi Bhabha refers to as series of tensions that compel people to appropriate certain cultural normatives, moral values and orientations in order to cope with the way in which the space is changing. In other words, the postmodern context is a labyrinthine space. It is a space that strictures ethnic diversity in such a way that all cultures are interlaced in themselves. For this reason, all postmodern cultures relate on the principle of imitation, appropriation and mimicry. To a large extent, the trajectories of global cultures or what is seemingly referred to as multi-culturalism are commingling in a rather perplexing fashion. In general terms, the postmodern nation state is first and foremost an economic territory which emerged out of the cravings of some national bourgeoisies to create their own political space where they can undertake economic activities in the guise of markets. These bourgeoisies have created a common space in which people can act as citizens. The complexity of such space has denied any room for insularity. Thus, all the boundaries such as linguistic, cultural and the like have become artificial boundaries. This has become one of the major tensions of

postmodern societies. Invariably, most societies can no longer attest for any degree of homogeneity, especially Africa which is enmeshed in petty identities.

With globalization therefore, there is a sense in which the cultures that emerge from strong economic space are complex. In other words, one of the markers of global cultures is the complex fusion of political, cultural, social, economic, psychological and historical forces deeply inherent in them. Global cultures are deeply implicated in themselves and cannot be separated. The postmodern condition is a deeply imbedded fusion that allows cultures across the globe to coalesce in a complex matrix. Given the template, multi-culturalism deals with reciprocity. All cultures coalesce into some form of identity. Therefore, one of the features of the postmodern space is the hybridity of social existence and practices. This has in return forged new identity formations. Identity formations within this space are sometimes tensed and highly problematic.

It becomes expedient to note that the postmodern space rejects the notion of a homogenous, fixed, structured and stable global culture. Again, the postmodern context in its mien is a complete rejection of solid blocs. Rather, it celebrates an understanding of a cultural space that is perpetually changing and that is affecting and affected by forces and processes within and without the society. By and large, the hybridity that has given birth to the structure of plural ethnic persuasions in a global setting has in strong terms obliterated Structuralist's binary opposition or even the dichotomy of high and low cultures, good and bad cultures, to take up the assumption that postmodern cultures are an interconnected whole. They are complex in nature given that the global society is a complex world of signification. There are correlations between them.

Their relationships are not simply one dimensional. They somehow relate on the basis of imitation, appropriations and approximations. To this end, the core tenet of culture as delineated by cultural studies scholars is that culture is consistently negotiated by the forces (as power, politics, economics etc) and circumstances within and without the society, especially those that impose convergence on issues in order to coexist.

Conclusion

Overall, this paper has outlined the significant qualities that designate globalization/postmodernism in cultural studies. In other words it looked at key issues on the cultural dimensions of globalization and postmodernism. Using the parameters of globalization scholarly interests were drawn from the dynamics of postmodern cultures and several phenomena around the nature and scope of culture were underscored. By a manner of specificity, this paper contended that the leading impulse of cultural studies was got from three main premises: global culture, economy and politics. In view of this, globalization can be deduced as postmodern culture. A kind marked out for its concerns on key questions on either the synchronization/synthesis of postmodern cultures or on the disjuncture inherent in global cultural interactions. To this end, global cultural interaction is fundamentally a very complex phenomenon on a certain principle of disconnection between politics, culture and economy. Therefore this paper has used the lens of globalization to examine how to better appraise postmodern cultural patterns, practices and flows.

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