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Globalization and Contemporary Society:

A Sociological Analysis

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Abstract

The paper is going to analyse the term globalization, its uses and impact in contemporary society through the evolution and transformation. You may not be interested in globalization, but globalization is interested in you. In the middle of the 1970s the term 'Globalization' had yet to be coined by an American Bank in their advertisement of credit card namely "American Express" and the term did not make its way into the English and German dictionary until well into the 1990s. The term globalization was probably first used as a book title in the Albrow and King edited book (1990) which was published drawing on the essays published in various issues of International Sociology the journal of International Sociological Association (1986-1990). In the year of 1990, Prof. Ronald Robertson, a sociologist at the University of Pittsburgh, introduced this concept to the Western Social Scientific Discourse. Globalization is often-discussed but seldom-defined phenomenon. At a broad level, globalization is an increase in the impact on human activities of forces that span national boundaries. These activities can be economic, social, cultural, political, technological, or even biological, as in the case of disease. Additionally, all of these realms can interact.

The concept of Globalization has become widely used in debates of Politics, Business and Media over recent year. Thirty years ago, the term globalization was relatively unknown, but today it seems to be on the tip of everyone's tongue. Globalization refers to the fact that we all increasingly live in a world, so that individuals, groups and nations become more inter-dependent. It has an enormous impact on the social sciences, including Sociology. Indeed there is hardly a sociological topic that has not been influenced by the emerging global frame of reference. For this reason, it is not possible to cover the impact of Globalization on Sociology in this single paper.

The term "global" is an indicator of change. In the 1960s, this came to be used to mean "belonging to the world" or "worldwide". Globalization offers a new opportunity for knowledge dissemination, but this does not mean that all the nations and institutions will equally benefit from it.

Keywords: Globalization, Contemporary Society, Evolution, Impact, Global.

Introduction and Definition of Globalization: Nowadays globalization is probably the most widely used word. In social sciences it is often difficult to trace the origin of concepts. Concepts, theories and ideas are often products of collective endeavours. It would be extremely difficult to identify who used the term "globalization" for the first time. In the middle of the 1970s the term 'Globalization' had yet to be coined by an American Bank in their advertisement of credit card namely "American Express" and the term did not make its way into the English and German dictionary until well into the 1990s. Prof. Roland Robertson was one of the early users of the term.

No matter who coined it first, at the dawn of the 21st century globalization as a concept, as a slogan, as a term is used more frequently than any other terms. Globalization is a heroic process; globalization is a sinister process, depending on which side of the debate one stands. Some tend to see globalization as a brakeless train crushing everything in his path, others see benefit in getting on board the train towards economic growth and modernization.

Globalization as a concept in social science has a short history. The Harper Collins Dictionary of Sociology (1991) has an entry on “globalization of production” but no entry on globalization as such. The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology (1994) has an entry on globalization together with globalization theory. It says, “Globalization theory examines the emergence of a global cultural system. It suggests that global culture is brought about by a variety of social and cultural development”. According to M. Waters, Globalization is a social process in which the constraints of geography on social and cultural arrangements recede and in which people are becoming increasingly aware that they are receding (Malcolm Waters, Globalization, 1995). The entry refers to the book edited by Martin Albrow and Elizabeth King (1990)-Globalization, Knowledge and Society. The term globalization was probably first used as a book title in the Albrow and King edited book (1990) which was published drawing on the essays published in various issues of the journal of International Sociological Association (1986-1990).

Globalization signifies a process of internationalization plus liberalization, in which the world has become a small village due to the concept of Globalization. (Refers to the process of integration of the world into one huge market. It provides several things to several people with removal of all trade barriers among countries.) For the purpose of argument in this paper, as well as understanding some of responses to globalization, it is important to define what mean by globalization. This is all the more crucial because even if we leave out the unambiguous supporters of globalization in its present form- those who hold that it is purely beneficial, and the benefits will ‘trickle down’ automatically to the poor-there are still widely differing conceptions of this process. Those who either oppose globalization, or are anxious about its potentially detrimental effects on employment and poverty encompass a wide political spectrum.

Globalization allows the transmission of knowledge at a much greater pace than in the past. However, this does not automatically imply that developing countries succeed to benefit from technological advances. On the contrary, this will strongly rely on the nature of technology and of the policies implemented in both advanced and developing countries.

Globalization, as a concept, is used to describe the process by which the world is transformed into a single arena. Globalization is not merely an economic phenomenon; rather it covers all the aspects of modern life: the economic, the cultural, the political, the humanitarian, the social, and the ecological. In relation to these aspects, the social scientists today increasingly concentrate on global phenomena.

Giddens defines the globalization in this way: “A concept of globalization is best understood as expressing fundamental aspects of time –space distanciation. Globalization concerns the intersection of presence and absence, the interlacing of social events and social relations at a distance” (Giddens, A, 1991. *Modernity and Self –Identity*, Polity Press)

Globalization is the acceleration and intensification of interaction and integration among the people, companies, and governments of different nations.

Globalization can be defined as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. (Giddens, 1990)

Globalization refers to all those processes by which the peoples of the world are incorporated into a single world society, global society. (Albrow, 1990)

Now, if taken together, we can give a general definition of Globalization: Globalization is a multi-causal and multidimensional process/ or a set of process/ that causes compression of time and space horizons, where all boundaries become permeable. It also structures a world of instantaneity, interconnectedness and interdependence and interchange ability, as well as our consciousness that the world is becoming a single place or a global arena on which we are playing.

Globalization is the process of international integration arising from the interchange of world views, products, ideas and other aspects of culture. Advances in transportation and telecommunications infrastructure including the rise of the telegraph and its posterity—the internet are major factor in globalization, generating further interdependence of economic and cultural activities.

Sociology and Globalization: Sociology has long been concerned with comparisons across societies and relation among them. Sociology is needed to have historically-oriented knowledge that integrates insights from Economics, History, Political Science, and Anthropology so that we can better able to analyse a large-scale social change over long periods of time. Sociology has been traditionally defined as the study of society. And as the boundaries of society have expanded from local community, through states to global society, sociology has become the study of the global society. This is a good illustration of how ideas, knowledge and social science expand with the changes and expansion of realities.

Globalization, through it means many things to many people, is one of the master processes of our time. Globalization as a field of sociology is a legatee of the macro-sociological interests and development. Sociology focuses its analytical lenses on the flows and processes in society whether at the local, national or global levels. In other words, sociology has a genuine claim over the field of globalization.

Therefore it may be said that there is a long-standing relationship between sociology and globalization, which gives sociology as a discipline a unique position to study all aspects of the field of globalization, a master process in human society. This does not preclude the claims of other disciplines to the subject of globalization and it reminds us the importance of each field's autonomy to venture out and explore using its own traditions and conceptual frames.

Globalization and Westernization: Westernization as a term is not equivalent to globalization. Nevertheless, westernization can be seen as an aspect of globalization. Certain institutional features and cultural traits that originated in the west were put in place in many other geographical regions lock stock and barrel under the framework of global interconnections and diffusion or forced implantation under colonial age. Yet, over time these institutions and practices mutated and assumed new meanings. Therefore, westernization can be seen as the beginning of the process. The cultural features borrowed or imitated themselves mutate in the source countries. Thus, westernization as a category has limited conceptual value. One can associate certain literary forms, genres, and traits as part of the cultural zone we vaguely call “the west”, yet these are mere influences as one can see in artistic, literary, architectural styles. For example, the great Indian film maker late Satyajit Ray was influenced by Hollywood films and the art of film making, but he did not want to replicate Hollywood movies in Kolkata. His movies were modern capturing local themes which he projected with a modern art form and technology. Hence it was truly global, or more appropriately, glocal. Presently, Singapore is establishing linkages with both Bollywood and Indian film industries as well seeking to play the role of an outsourced location for hi-tech Hollywood productions. Globalization,

like modernization, is often a fusion. Westernization as a concept has some value if used only as a descriptive rather than analytic category. As an analytic and category it is rather limited.

Some writers view globalization as the worldwide spread of “westernization”. This view is either erroneous or contains only partial truth. From a superficial point of view, various processes outwardly seem that the world is, indeed, becoming westernized. One could see the popularity of the western music, movies, and “McDonalds” as examples of westernization. More and more countries are seeing the opening of McDonalds. Some writers even use the term “Americanization” to describe these processes of cultural transmission. However, a closer look will reveal that these cultural goods have different meanings in different societal and cultural contexts with uneven impact on classes and age-groups. Some of the products are consumed without any modification, others are modified and indigenized to suit the local contexts and there are exceptional situations where the intentions are completely inverted.

Globalization and Gender Relations: Gender relations refer to the sum of social norms, convention and practices which regulate the multifaceted relationship between men and women in a given society at a given time. One pervasive trait of gender relations across different cultures consists of the power asymmetries between men and women. Women are naturally the bearers of children and to some extent necessarily involved in their care. In our globalizing world empowerment refers to the capacity of women to become more self-reliant and to increase their internal strength. The impact of globalization on gender relations is far-reaching. Increasingly involved in the world’s production and consumption process, women have been affected by globalization in the most diverse aspect of their lives and in the farthest aspect of the world. Women’s lifestyles have been dramatically affected, as have their decision-making power and their decision-implementing roles in the family. In principle, globalization also does –or ought to – challenge the traditional subordinate status of women virtually everywhere. But the potential empowerment of women is contradicted by the realities of continuing male domination of major social institutions. They suffer from extensive abuse, psychosocial stress, and somatic complaints. Poor women especially-that is 70% of all women-have the greatest responsibility for child rearing, suffer from the consequent overwork, and experience more domestic violence and sexual mistreatment. Much of this is traditional, but much can also be traced to the colonial experience.

Globalization and Culture: Culture was once a benign. High culture was something of which to boast. Culture means restraint, cultivation, taste. But the new field of cultural studies was often associated with, allied with, the pursuit of something called Multiculturalism. And multiculturalism was a political demand, a demand of groups that felt they were downtrodden, or ignored, or repressed.

The colossal use of the word globalization helps it to achieve a global status, in which culture positions itself at the centre. In practice, culture is a set of tangible and intangible elements including beliefs values, norms, material objects, rituals, technologies that shape and add meaning to the daily lives of a particular group of people. Presently, for the modern communication system, space can no longer be said to create a clear buffer between cultures. Newspaper, radio, TV and the last of all-the internet has linked up different cultures, making broad avenues for cultural exchange or cultural fusion to proceed which fathers new cultural forms, ideas and objects.

Due to spread of global culture today, many societies are facing cultural lags. The reason is that the material culture diffuses and changes quite quickly than its non-material counterpart (Ogburn, 1964). Present day TNCs (Trans National Corporation) and other foreign agencies introduce us to the new, newer and newest “materials” or “cultural products” which we are yet to think of. And that is not all. Through their advertisements they claim that if you do not buy their products you will lose

something –they try to hammer this idea into our (consumers’) minds, side by side, “intellectuals and cultural elites” function “as both the commentators and practitioners of cultural globalization”.

World culture refers to the cultural complex of foundation assumption, forms of knowledge, and prescription for action that underlie globalized flows, organizations, and institutions. It encompasses webs of significance that span of globe, conceptions of world society and world order, and models and methods of organizing social life that are assumed to have worldwide significance or applicability. Cultural implication is that globalization involves not the simple enforced distribution of a particular western lifestyle, but a more complicated dissemination of the entire range of institutional features of cultural modernity.

The impact of globalization is noticeable in popular culture as well. Whether its music, films, or TV shows, the Americanization process is slowly taking over every part of the electronic pop culture. The western culture stands as an example for on the disadvantages of the process of globalization. It has strong influence on foreign countries culture. Though the introduction of mass media and international distribution on American motion picture, the US made itself a steady position for dictating What is right, What is wrong, What is hot, What is not.... . While diminishing what was unique about each and every country, through diminishing the lack of once Identity, Patriotism and support of the native land, globalization has shown its nefarious effects.

Global Village: The term “global” is an indicator of change. In the 1960s, this came to be used to mean “belonging to the world” or “worldwide”. Marshall McLuhan (1964) uses the term the “global village”, capturing a property of the modern culture, like possibility of global communication. His idea focuses on the worldwide network of communication as a key organ of transforming local life. Promoted by powerful technologies and institutions such as the internet, satellite television, radio, and telephones, the spread of English as a common world language, common currencies such as the Euro and the Dollar, and the growth, consolidation, and ever-expanding reach of multinational corporation, McLuhan’s “global village” is, or is on the verge of becoming, a reality. Yet, if “village” is the proper metaphor, it is hardly a village at peace.

In modern society, crisis and disparity arise mainly because of uneven distribution of wealth, comfort, and assistance. Our philosophy tells that only he, who looks with equal regard upon well-wishers, friends, the hateful, the relatives, the neighbour and the righteous and the unrighteous, attains “universal self”. The centre of global village is nothing but the universal self. It would be the “ideal type” model of global village, if all living beings of the globe could derive their sense of power from the same centre.

An ideal global village with a single roof for all it’s aimed at, but the reality stands for confusion. Will increasing world inequality worsen or alleviate global conflicts? Furthermore, will increased inequality make these conflicts easier or more difficult to address in future? The people of the Third World countries are now in confusion weather they would be the beneficiaries of the global challenge or they would be the worsen victims of increased global inequality and stratification.

Mass Media and Globalization: This section is about globalization focusing on the role of media (mass). Globalization has brought about changes in the way we live. There is practically no globalization without media and communications. Yet this relationship is so obvious it is often overlooked.

Media has been central to the different forms of globalization. Indeed, the consolidation of mainstream media ownership into the hands of fewer companies concomitant with the rise of a global market place and rapid technological innovation has resulted in the widespread discussion of communications and globalization. We will discuss that globalization cannot be understood without studying the role of the media.

Mass media, of which Television is a major component of globalization, has a great impact on popular culture. Television aided by new communication technologies has been able to disseminate knowledge and information apart from providing diversion and amusement. The rapid growth of mass media (television, radio, newspaper, cinema, internet etc.) is primarily because of the technological advancement in the last century. This has resulted in dissemination of information to a large number of people who belong to different walks of life, a heterogeneous group spread across different cities, regions or nations. The importance of mass media has increased manifold because national boundaries have diminished post globalization, and news and views originating in one corner of the globe can easily flow to another corner. Globalization refers to worldwide nature of industrial production and trade, due to innovation of new information and communication technology and the instant transmission of their content across the planet. Due to globalization of media, modern societies are connected by global networks which go beyond national boundaries partly because of the least development in technology and partly because of international media structure. The capacity to transmit sounds and images at a low cost across boundaries and the rise in the global media business has helped in the process of globalization.

Conclusions: Globalization is neither good nor bad. Rather, certain aspects of the complex, and multi –faceted process of globalization have impacts that can be viewed in different ways depending on the values at stake. Individual free choice is important, but so is a society’s ability to make decision according to what is best for all of its members is consequential and momentous.

We have perhaps talked too much, and for too long, about globalization. Contemporary social realities suggest that the sprite of “we-ness” and the process of globalization as such, represent a myth. It is perhaps a tragedy that a sprite so much endowed with the promise of reconstructing of the world, instead expresses symptoms of uncertainty, fundamentalism, threat, exclusion, and identity crisis. It demands rethinking about the discourse of globalization.

Globalization offers a new opportunity for knowledge dissemination, but this does not mean that all the nations and institutions will equally benefit from it. Developing countries are not automatically excluded from the advantages. They can benefit from globalization of technology if they implement active policies designed to increase learning and improve access to knowledge and technology.

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