

“Investigating Globalizing Cultures: Its Creation, Structure, and Meanings”

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Victoria Reyes, PhD Candidate, Department of Sociology, Princeton University

INTRODUCTION

There are currently over 34,000 McDonald’s restaurants located throughout 118 countries.ⁱ In 2011, 63 percent (303/480) of the top ten films in 48 countries originated in the United States, and if we include movies that are joint-US in origin (82/480), this number rises to 80 percent (385/480).ⁱⁱ Patterns of global student transfers, social networking sites and users, book publishing, brand awareness, and cultural world heritage sites similarly reflect the dominance and the increasing centrality of a handful of countries (Reyes and Centeno 2011). The central role of American businesses and media in the world is clear, and can be used as evidence of a global culture based on U.S. hegemony. But what does “global culture” mean? Theories of what are “global culture” or “cultural globalization” and their consequences abound. They range from hegemonic McDonaldization, world polity, and cultural wealth to emphases on local meanings and adaptations. In order to advance our sociological understanding we need to subsume these seemingly disparate theories under an analytic umbrella that will guide our understanding of how the current era of globalization interacts, reinforces, and modifies cultures.

This chapter first provides an overview of the various definitions of “global culture” or “cultural globalization.” Global culture is important to understand because culture, at the individual and institutional levels, is used as a vehicle to perpetuate inequality (e.g. Bourdieu 1984 [1979]; DiMaggio 1987, 1997). I draw upon sociological conceptualizations of culture “as complex rule-like structures that constitute resources that can be put to strategic use” (DiMaggio 1997: 265), which includes aspects such as tastes, styles, skills, habits, knowledge, and repertoires that create and maintain social boundaries (e.g. Lamont and Molnar 2002) to use as a basis for the definition of “global culture.” Doing so can allow for a deeper understanding of what is global and its relationship to what is cultural. Next, I categorize four related sociological theories (world polity, cultural wealth, McDonaldization, glocalization) into four aspects of globalizing cultures – those relating to (1) its diffusion, (2) possibilities for mobility, (3) its structure, and (4) its various meanings. While there are additional approaches, it is my hope that scholars can use and refine the categorization provided in this chapter to incorporate alternative understandings and approaches.

For the discussion of each theory, I use the case study of U.N. World Heritage sites to demonstrate how each perspective emphasizes different concepts and units of analysis. I argue that these perspectives are not necessarily mutually exclusive or oppositional. Additionally, I examine which theories are appropriate to use when asking certain questions over others. These categories allow us to understand how differing research agendas relate to one another. Seeing global culture as multifaceted and understanding the role it plays at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels allows us to build and expand upon the foundation of prior work.

GLOBAL CULTURE AND CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION TO GLOBALIZING CULTURES

If globalization is the increasing interconnectedness of flows across the world what is global culture or cultural globalization?¹ Several scholars use the term cultural globalization to refer to the flow of cultural goods, products and symbols and differentiate cultural globalization from economic or political globalization.² Others use the term global or world culture to denote a uniform culture spreading across the globe either in the form of a more negative view as cultural imperialism or a more positive view such as a global village.³ Still others define global culture as an interconnectedness across local cultures comprised of both cosmopolitan elite who travel around the world and appreciate diversity.⁴ Many, though, use the term global culture and cultural hybridization interchangeably in essays on global processes and cultural economy.⁵

In this chapter, I use the term globalizing cultures to refer to a now commonly recognized view that globalized cultures are not homogenous or an imperialist diffusion of Western culture but are rather complex and multifaceted flows of cultural practices, meanings, skills, repertoires and knowledge. I use this term instead of global culture or cultural globalization because the latter suggests that culture, economy, and politics are separate and distinct spheres of analysis; however, we know that cultural is constitutive of both the economy and politics.⁶ Thus, culture cannot be separated from the economy or from politics and vice versa. Additionally, the terms “global culture” or “cultural globalization” suggests the appearance of a homogenous culture found around the globe, for example, through the imperialist diffusion of Western cultures. By using the term “globalizing cultures,” I move away from common conceptions of both global culture and cultural globalization to emphasize the malleable and context-dependent nature of cultures that are linked across the world.

THE DIFFUSION OF GLOBALIZING CULTURES

World polity scholarship shows how “world models” connect countries across the globe. These cultural world models define and legitimize the actions, policies, and organizations of nation-states, show how organizations and institutions are diffused worldwide, and can give insight into global values such as education and women’s suffrage.⁷ The world polity model suggests “contemporary constructed actors, including nation-states, routinely organize and legitimate themselves in terms of universalistic (world) models like citizenship, socioeconomic development, and rationalized justice.”⁸ Although recent literature using world polity theory has examined the role of power and inequality,⁹ this research tends to assume that all countries are embedded in a “densely

¹ Held and McGrew 2000

² e.g. Held and McGrew 2000; Held, McGrew, Goldblatt and Perraton 1999

³ Mackay 2000; Held and McGrew 2000

⁴ e.g. Hannerz 1990, 1996

⁵ e.g. Robins 2000; Appadurai 2000; Crane 2002

⁶ e.g. Zelizer 2005, Go 2008

⁷ Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997; Ramirez and Boli 1987; Boli, Ramirez and Meyer 1985; Ramirez, Soysal and Shanahan 1997

⁸ Meyer, Boli, Thomas, and Ramirez 1997:148

⁹ Hughes, Peterson, Harrison and Paxton 2009; Beckfield 2003; Beckfield 2008

interconnected global network”¹⁰ through organizational memberships of non-governmental organizations and inter-government agencies.¹¹ The focus is on the diffusion of highly rationalized world cultural models and policy scripts, and the institutional similarities found across the globe.

World polity research focuses on how and why institutions around the world are similar and how the diffusion of ideas occurs. In a 2012 article, Michael Elliott and Vaughn Schmutz examine the establishment and rise of World Heritage sites. They argue that this rise resulted from the expansion of the interconnected world polity, the diffusion of a universal concept of humanity, and the increasing use and value of science as a way to protect and preserve human progress. For example, a World Heritage site must have “outstanding universal value” regardless of the world region or country in which it is located.

GLOBALIZING CULTURES AND THE POSSIBILITY FOR MOBILITY

Scholars who use a cultural wealth lens, a relatively new perspective, focus on the mutually constitutive relationship between culture and the production, consumption, and distribution of economic activity. The key here is to understand the interaction between a given country’s symbolic resources and reputations and its economic successes. The goal is to “explore the different ways that industries become advantaged (or disadvantaged) in the global marketplace by virtue of their location and by virtue of the meanings encased in place.”¹² Cultural wealth scholars often focus on how state and other actors shape and manipulate countries’ narratives. They do so by showing how indigenous participation in markets is helped or constrained by public stories and memories of indigenous heritages¹³ and how within-country travel destinations are affected by marketing practices.¹⁴ Additionally, Rivera (2008), through an analysis of government officials’ manipulations of travel brochures and reviews, draws upon Goffman’s conception of stigma to show how government officials ‘cover’ mentions of war in Croatia and instead emphasize Croatia’s similarities to Western Europe. Here, attraction and stigmas associated with countries play a defining role in a country’s economy, particularly as it relates to the travel industry. In this sense, one aspect of cultural wealth analyses relates to the mobility of globalizing cultures – how officials can modify and transform their reputations within the constraints faced by their countries’ current reputations and locations. Orienting research questions relate to these processes of change, transformation, and entrenched stability, while the unit of analysis varies from individuals to countries.

Cultural wealth scholars have examined world heritage sites, their role in countries economies and cultural reputations, and the contestations and negotiations state officials face in trying to nominate their sites on the World Heritage list. Kowalski (2011) examines the creation of the World Heritage Convention, which outlines the process for which sites are included onto the World Heritage List and the ways in which states need to continually preserve them once they are included. Inclusion on the list is selective

¹⁰ Beckfield 2010: 1023

¹¹ e.g. Shofer and Meyer 2005; Mundy 2007; Schafer 1999; Barrett and Tsui 1999; Shandra, Shar, and London 2009; Finnemore 1993; Koenig 2008; Berkovitch and Bradley 1999; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Shandra, Leckband, McKinney and London 2009

¹² Bandelj and Wherry 2011:1

¹³ Wherry 2007; Colloredo-Mansfeld 2002

¹⁴ Corneliussen 2005:110

because it is a symbolic marker of prestige and worth, but sites also need to demonstrate “outstanding, universal” value, leading to tensions between state and UNESCO officials over control of each site or project. Kowalski shows how its establishment “was thus largely dependent on the contingent transformation of political or geopolitical interests and on their dialogical convergence” (83), how the cultural meanings and practices associated with sites are managed by bureaucracies, and states’ accumulation of sites and symbolic value depends “on the solid apparatus of experts and institutions that only dominant states have” (88).

In my own work, I investigate culture as an indicator of global inequality, and operationalize culture as UN World Heritage sites. Through a longitudinal examination of nominations and inclusions to the World Heritage list, I draw upon cultural wealth theories to differentiate between cultural and natural wealth and argue that cultural wealth and value is constructed through internal claims of countries and external validation of the international community. These appraisals of cultural value are also related to location – certain world regions are associated with higher cultural value over others. From a cultural wealth perspective, one could also examine countries’ successful and unsuccessful applications and the strategies government officials use to choose which sites to nominate and how they frame their application narratives. The emphasis in this line of research is the construction, modification, and negotiation of cultural values and its relationship to countries’ economies.

GLOBALIZING CULTURES’ STRUCTURE

Another common perspective that focuses on globalizing culture is that of McDonaldization, “the process by which the principles of the fast-food restaurant are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as the rest of the world.”¹⁵ Based on Weber’s work on rationalization and bureaucracy, McDonaldization scholars examine the diffusion of processes like efficiency, calculability (the quantitative measures of products and services including portion control and cost) predictability in products, rules, and worker behaviors, and control through queue lines and menus. McDonaldization is not limited to McDonald’s stores, fast food restaurants, or other types of restaurants or stores around the world, but scholars have shown this process also extends to the U.S. criminal justice system,¹⁶ sex industries,¹⁷ men’s body image,¹⁸ and the English school system.¹⁹ McDonaldization has two primary focal points: institutional processes and cultural aspects. Similar to world polity theories, one perspective focuses on institutional diffusion, but the second point of view shifts the focus from world polity to the cultural representations – and in some cases accusations of cultural imperialism. Here, the spread of McDonald’s restaurants represents a cultural uniformity and an infringement on local cultures.²⁰ In the section below, I discuss more thoroughly local adaptations of McDonaldization – ‘glocalization’ – but it’s important to note here that

¹⁵ Ritzer 2010: 4. For a review of literature in support, and critical, of the McDonaldization thesis, see Ritzer 2010

¹⁶ Robinson 2010; Shichor 1997

¹⁷ Hausbeck and Brents 2010

¹⁸ Monaghan 2007

¹⁹ Wilkinson 2006

²⁰ e.g. Ram 2004; Fantasia 1995

even in cases documenting differences in McDonald's menus abroad and local meanings associated with the restaurants, the more structural aspects such as the line queue, the cleanliness of the bathroom, efficiency, standards of food production and the demarcating of responsibilities into tasks that require minimum training and knowledge (similar to Marx's critique of the factory and Weber's view of bureaucracy) – heavily influence the cultural meanings of local societies. The sanitation standards raised expectations and challenged rivals' bathroom standards while the marketing towards children (together with the one-child policy of China and the little emperor/empress syndrome) substantially influenced familial consumption patterns and re-constituted household power dynamics and negotiations within China and Hong Kong.²¹ Thus these structures provide a framework and baseline of interpretation that is centered on the West.

In this sense, research on McDonaldization focuses on the structural aspects of globalizing cultures and how Western influences that permeate other countries. Here, guiding questions focus on structure, inequalities, and power. Although not using a McDonaldization framework, perspectives using world-systems analyses, which highlight structural inequalities between nations and its relationship with history and power, have similar orienting research questions. For example, using a world-systems inspired framework Sapiro (2010) found that globalization has reinforced the dominance of the English language in the book publishing market. Janssen, Kuipers and Verboord (2008), in their analysis of the coverage of international arts and culture in four countries, and Heilbron (1999) in his examination of book translations, all argue that there is an emergent cultural world-system, while De Swaan (1993) argues that there is a world-system based on language, a "world language system." The unit of analysis tends to be institutions (in the case of McDonaldization) or countries (in the case of world-systems analyses). In using this lens to examine World Heritage sites, research would focus on how most world heritage sites are highly concentrated among a handful of countries. For example, in an article I wrote and that is conditionally accepted at *Poetics*, I find that 35 percent (362/1037) of cultural nominations and 38 percent (264/695) of cultural inscriptions (sites that are included on the World Heritage list) are in Western Europe, while Italy accounts for five percent of all inscriptions, Italy and Spain account for nine percent, six countries for 24 percent (Italy, Spain, France, China, Mexico and Germany), and 13 countries for 40 percent (Italy, Spain, France, China, Mexico, Germany, India, United Kingdom, Russia, Brazil, United States, Greece, and Canada); additionally, while nominations are the driving force behind inscriptions, inscriptions are heavily influenced by the region in the world in which countries are located – countries in Western Europe are much more likely to submit nominations to the list (Reyes unpublished).

GLOBALIZING CULTURES AND MEANINGS

Whereas McDonaldization theories focus on institutional processes and cultural diffusion, which is often seen as imperial in nature, another set of researchers focus on how McDonald's are transformed by, and adapted to, local conditions "on the ground" and across the world. This focus is on glocalization, the adaptation of the global into the local or the blending of global and local.²² For example, McDonald's adapts menus to locals' tastes as well as changing norms – both with meanings of words, where "fast

²¹ e.g. Watson 2006

²² Ram 2004; Robertson 1995

food” can apply to delivery and not consumption, and with practices, where McDonald’s may represent an elite or middle class place for consumption.²³ Glocalization also extends to adaptations of sports,²⁴ advertising,²⁵ individual foods such as SPAM,²⁶ religion,²⁷ and law.²⁸ Much of sociological literature, though not drawing upon the glocalization framework, emphasizes the local meanings and adaptations of the global. For example, Hedegard (2013) shows how foreigners engage in capoeira, a popular form of martial arts, in Brazil and create meanings to this practice through interaction with locals’ bodies and linking its authenticity to dark-skinned locals. Bielby and Harrington (2004), on the other hand, examine how industry professionals adapt exported television shows to local markets through considerations on language, translation and local notions of entertainment, while Derne (2005) shows how middle-class, non-elite Indian men who consume large amounts of cable television and foreign movies simultaneously reject cultural messages within these media (e.g. love marriages, consumerism, women’s public freedoms) that do not conform to their understandings of gender, but use other messages that bolster these world views. Additionally, the global diffusion of Cricket relies, in part, on local elites’ adaptation of the game,²⁹ while condom use in Malawi is resisted because of what it signifies about relationships and sex – that one cannot experience sexual pleasure with a condom, its association is with unsafe partners, and a lack of use signifies trust and intimacy.³⁰

Many scholars have analyzed the meaning making of World Heritage sites by locals. For example, although it has differential effects on the rich and the poor, many people in the community of Amatita, part of the Agave Landscape and Ancient Industrial Facilities of Tequila World Heritage site, perceive the large-scale commercial tequila factories as opening up job opportunities and generating tourism revenue that would otherwise be unavailable.³¹ Others have shown how World Heritage sites are purposefully used for national branding efforts,³² but also have difficulty maintaining their local “authenticity.”³³ The emphasis and guiding research questions in this perspective is on local adaptations and understandings of, as well as the meanings associated with, the global.

DISCUSSION

I am not the first person to suggest that structural and cultural analyses of globalizing cultures are not incompatible.³⁴ In this chapter, I have tried to show how four types of analyses can be understood using the same rubric, and that the differences among these perspectives do not necessarily have to be in conflict with one another, but

²³ e.g. Watson 2006; Ram 2004

²⁴ Giulianotti and Robertson 2004, 2006, 2007; Jijon 2013

²⁵ Kobayashi 2012

²⁶ Matejowsky 2007

²⁷ Roudometof 2013

²⁸ Randeria 2003

²⁹ Kaufman and Patterson 2005

³⁰ Tavory and Swidler 2009

³¹ Bowen and Gerritsen 2007; Bowen and Zapata 2009

³² Morgan, Pritchard and Piggott 2003; Labadi 2007

³³ Alberts and Hazen 2010

³⁴ Ram 2004; Robertson 1995

rather these differences relate to unit of analyses and emphases on certain concepts over others. Additionally, I shift focus from the terms “global culture” or “cultural globalization” which suggest both a homogenizing cultural force diffused by Western imperialism and that the cultural, economic, and political globalization can be separated from one another to the term “globalizing cultures” in order to highlight the multifaceted aspects of culture. Culture includes tastes, styles, skills, habits, knowledge, and repertories that can be used strategically as well as create and maintain social boundaries. I argue that globalizing cultures are not just local adaptations of the global; rather, globalizing cultures signifies that culture can be strategically used and manipulated by all parties.

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ENDNOTES

ⁱ http://www.aboutmcdonalds.com/mcd/our_company.html, accessed November 10, 2013

ⁱⁱ Top 10 Feature Films Exhibited by Admissions,
<http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/ReportFolders/ReportFolders.aspx>, accessed November 10, 2013