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Reconceptualizing Cultural Globalization: Connecting the "Cultural Global" and the "Cultural Local"

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Abstract: Scholars generally are in agreement that the pace of globalization is rapidly accelerating. Globalization's impact, beyond the socio-economic and political discourses, is affecting conceptions of culture and cultural studies, and changing and restructuring spaces, global, national and personal interactions and relationships. The "texts" and artifacts borne of culture—activities, events and our conception thereof are a mechanism for the propagation of culture. Simultaneously Westernization/Americanization impacts local cultures through consumerism, which obfuscates local traditions, knowledge and experiences. This research argues that culture is a dynamic, adaptive concept and practice, "borrowing" liberally from ideological and technological innovations of other cultures and integrating these borrowed aspects into the construction and modification of culture across spatial and geographical divides to ensure particular cultures' survival. The research shows that the local affects the global, and *vice versa*. It selects local communication "texts" to show that cultures are not "victims" of globalization or the proliferation of mass media. Cultures actively adopt and integrate globalization's technological artifacts. Globalization's positive effects are dynamic and span cultural interactions and permeate structures of authority at personal, national and global levels.

Keywords: culture; globalization; internationalization; contestation; interpersonal relationships; communication; technology

1. Introduction: Parsing Cultural Studies and Globalization

How do we define cultural studies? Cultural studies scholars struggle with a succinct and inclusive definition of cultural studies. This research recognizes the breadth, depth, extent and importance of these enduring questions. However, it adopts Stuart Hall's (1986) definition of cultural studies as a mix of "the sum of the available descriptions through which societies make sense of and reflect their common experiences" ([1], p. 35). It also view's cultural studies through Hall's (1990) anthropological dimension of social practices which translate into "a whole way of life" of a people ([2], p. 59).

Sperber and Claidiere's (2008) definition of culture leverages that of Richerson and Boyd, as "information capable of affecting individuals' behavior that they acquire from other members of their species through teaching, imitation, and other forms of social transmission" ([3], p. 284). In their discussion, Boyd and Richerson allude to this view of culture as a dynamic process, holding that culture has inherited properties, including beliefs, values and attitudes, and the transmission of culture/cultural values through social interactions much as one might inherit genetic properties but with ability to choose behaviors thus evolving "divergences" and differences ([4], pp. 65–79).

Bidney (1944) defines culture anthropologically as "acquired capabilities, habits or customs; and that culture is a quality or attribute of human social behavior and has no independent existence of its own" ([5], pp. 30–31). This notion of the dependence of culture on some form of medium for it to exist is important; Bidney adds that "human culture is acquired or created by man as a member of society and that it is communicated largely by language" ([5], p. 31). I shall revisit these notions of culture, in my discussion of the adaptive nature of culture and cultural teachings with regard to communication.

Sztompka (1996) defines cultural processes as designed to "embrace the soft tissue of society, the intangible assumptions, premises, understandings, rules, and values" ([6], p. 117). Johnson defines culture as processes, values, beliefs; as the sum of human experience within certain settings, and the intersections of production in a Marxist sense. This definition encompasses culture as a sum of the social and cultural conditions of production of especially capitalist commodities and their consumption and how their principles create power differentials in societal relations ([7], pp. 48–49).

Cultural studies is not merely residual, post-modern "Marxist critical theory" but a collection of theories and ideas inclusive of Marxist critiques and other modern theoretical trends, such as constructivist and post-structuralist ([8], pp. 263–65). Conceptualizing cultural studies hinges not only on the pedagogy and study of culture but also on the definition of culture. And while theories explaining cultural studies are not concise, its study has certain, well-established parameters, empiricism, methodology and other scientific attributes (rigor) present in other arts and sciences. For example, Sperber and Claidiere (2008) advance the view that that "cultural anthropology gets by without any clear and agreed upon definition of culture" ([3], p. 283).

It is quite evident that the definitions and conceptualizations of cultural studies, whether a Marxist critical theory the influences of structuralist, post-structuralist or feminist critiques and definitions, is quite a contested notion. There is a clear fluidity and permeability of culture, cultural traditions, literature and other texts, through human interactions, communication, economic, social, political and other processes further accelerated by globalization, which is sometimes defined as globalization.

These interactions have produced structures of interdependence and interconnectedness. Interdependence occurs where one *geographical* part of society, irrespective of their cultural,

economic or social structures, depends on technology, products, knowledge and other services from other *geographical* locations.

2. Culture and Communication: Globalizing Culture?

Culture is not static. It is constantly changing, or more precisely, *agents of culture, i.e.*, human beings, are always interacting with other agents. These interactions have temporal or permanent effects on both the "originators" and the "targets" of such contacts. They are facilitated by different processes, which over time have varied from economic to social, political, and religious reasons, facilitated by transport, communication and underwritten by technology. Globalization accelerates cultures' interactions and facilitates transmission of values from one group to another.

Globalization is defined as "the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life, from cultural to the criminal, the financial to the spiritual" ([9], p. 2; [10], p. 65; [11], p. 51), and in the recent past, has rapidly accelerated ([12], p. 16; [13], p. 24; [14], p. 79). There are historic and contemporary aspects to globalization, especially as a "growing engagement between the world's major civilizations" as defined by Modelski (quoted in Held *et al.* [11], p. 51). Three main schools of thought are associated with globalization: the hyperglobalizers, the skeptics and the transformationalists. The transformationalist school is persuasive: globalization, even from its multiple definitions, is creating transnational, multiple and simultaneous group identities and memberships that exhibit characteristics of glocalization. Simultaneously, these identities transcend geography—their geography is global—while they are unbound by time and space.

How is globalization seen as affecting nationality, culture and identity? Tomlinson suggests that "globalization lies at the heart of modern culture; cultural practices lie at the heart of globalization" ([9], p. 1). This conceptualization risks defining culture and globalization in associational, parallel terms. Culture exists within specific groups before the densening of social, political and economic interconnections, but the two-way effects are clearly identifiable.

Debates on the exact nature and effects of cultural globalization show wide variance. Some view cultural globalization in terms of "the homogenization of the world under the auspices of American popular culture or Western consumerism in general" ([9], p. 327). This implies that cultures are not discerning/selective. Neither are they seen as capable of surviving the onslaught of Western/American consumerism to adapt only those features and products that are compatible with the cultures, or those that propagate the course of such cultures. While there is a significant global influence of Americanism/Western consumerism, it is not always adopted *in toto* by the target cultures. The transformationalists, on the other hand, "describe the intermingling of cultures and peoples as generating cultural hybrids and new global cultural networks" ([9], p. 327).

Held & McGrew (1999) suggest a(n) "absence of a systematic framework for describing cultural flows across and between societies" ([11], p. 52). Pieterse (1999) disagrees, conceptualizing globalization as a multi-level, multi-disciplinary occurrence with different definitions, depending on the pedagogical area. For example, Pieterse suggests that in economics, economic internalization, globalizing production and global finance characterize globalization. For international relations, increasing interstate relations and progression of global politics are evident. For cultural studies, global communications and worldwide cultural standardization—Coca-Colonization and McDonaldization ([10], pp. 65–66) are

primary indicators of globalization. This approach views globalization in multi-dimensional terms, rather than as one unitary process with net effects and outcomes wherever it is encountered. Indeed, Featherstone (1990) argues that "there may be emerging sets of 'third cultures', which themselves are conduits for all sorts of diverse cultural flows" ([15], p. 1).

Third, cultures embrace and aggregate the most critical, utilitarian elements of global cultures, especially those connected with technologically driven processes—transport and communication. And contrary to Stuart Hall's characterization of *encoder-message-decoder*, in the process of communication within a globalized culture, an individual negotiates a "third, hybrid identity" by utilizing features of all the collective identity and group memberships that they have acquired through socio-political, economic and socio-cultural processes e.g., migration, emigration, education.

3. Conceptual Framework

This research applies three primary theoretical approaches; the ultimate goal is to show culture as dynamic and adaptive processes even in the face of sustained interaction with foreign cultures. These approaches include Arjun Appadurai's modernity at large, the hybridity approach and the notion of complex connectivity. These approaches generally demonstrate that cultures are not static; indeed, they are quite dynamic. The dynamism of cultures allows them to adopt (sometimes) the best attributes of other cultures and transform them into utilitarian objects to sustain or further the culture in question. Despite using the same vignettes that transmit cultures—television or movies—cultures adopt these (technologies) rapidly and, thus, it is not necessarily the case that cultural heterogenization occurs.

Appadurai, in his 1996 seminal work, *Modernity At Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* argues that "the central problem of today's global interactions is the tension between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization. A vast array of empirical facts could be brought to bear on the side of the homogenization argument" ([16], p. 32). In acknowledging the reasoning behind homogenization but contradicting its main argument, Appadurai show the dynamism of culture and the integration of the new cultural attributes into existing culture. "As rapidly as these forces from various metropolises are brought into new societies, they tend to become indigenized on one another way: this is true of music and housing styles as much as it is true of science and terrorism, spectacles and constitutions" ([16], p. 32).

Appadurai goes on to propose "an elementary framework for exploring" the "certain fundamental disjunctures between economy, culture and politics" ([16], p. 33). These "five dimensions of global cultural flows can be termed as (a) *ethnoscapes*; (b) *mediascapes*; (c) *technoscapes*; (d) *financescapes*; and (e) *ideoscapes*" ([16], p. 32) that exhibit "fluid, irregular shapes". Appadurai adds that "these are not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision, but rather, that they are deeply perspectival constructs, influenced by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors" ([16], p. 33). Hickey-Moody adds that "exchanges between ethnoscapes, mediascapes, and ideoscapes are closely related and offer a way through which we can see the everyday life experiences" ([17], p. 72).

It is important to pay attention to the contra-argument of cultural imperialism—one that, Gordon ([18], p. 61) recounts as suggesting a concern among the developing countries "over what was perceived to be a one way flow of information and cultural goods from North to South or from East to West". A further

argument was that these countries' "cultural sovereignty was being undermined by an unfair dominance that more industrialized countries wielded on the international communication scene" ([18], p. 61). However, this view glosses over the fact that most of the developing countries were not homogeneous to begin with; in fact, as Appadurai observes, there were fears of cultural indigenization from majority groups within the nation more than there were fears of Americanization/Westernization ([16], p. 32).

The second theoretical approach is "hybridity", proposed by Marwan Kraidy (2005). Kraidy describes hybridity in terms of capturing "the spirit of our times with its obligatory celebration of cultural difference and fusion" ([19], p. 1). Acknowledging the growing and pervasive use of and description of "multipurpose electronic gadgets, designer agricultural seeds, environment-friendly cars with dual combustion and electrical engines, companies that blend American and Japanese management practices, multiracial people, dual citizens and postcolonial cultures" ([19], p. 1), Kraidy uses hybridity to refer "mostly to culture but retains residual meanings related to the three interconnected realms of race, language, and ethnicity" ([19], p. 1).

Kraidy adds that "since hybridity involves the fusion of two hitherto relatively distinct forms, styles or identities, cross-cultural contact, which often occurs across national borders as well as across cultural boundaries, is a requisite for hybridity" ([19], p. 5). Globalization, which accelerates cultural contacts between individuals, groups and nations, therefore, particularly through communication, provides the interactional forum to facilitate fusion and/or creation of hybrid cultures. Burke ([20], p. 51) writes of Edward Said's view of hybridity, in that "all cultures are involved in one another, none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous". One might add that over time, and over their interactions, cultures have been borrowing from each other dynamically.

The third framework for conceptualizing this debate is through the "cultural connectivity" lens. Tomlinson writes of proximity as "increasing global-spatial *proximity*" ('the annihilation of space by time'" (Marx) and "time-space compression" ([9], p. 3). "Proximity has its own truth as a description of the condition of global modernity, and this is generally of either a phenomenological or a metaphorical order", writes Tomlinson ([9], p. 3). "In the first case, it describes a common conscious *appearance* of the world as more intimate, more compressed, more part of everyday reckoning—for example, in our experience of rapid transport or our mundane use of media technologies to bring distant images into our most intimate local spaces. In the second, it conveys the increasing immediacy and consequentiality of real distanciated relations" ([9], p. 3). These are some of the concepts that are generally used to describe the processes and consequences of globalization (e.g., compression); one no longer needs to be in the same geographical space to hold meetings; these can be done remotely.

Tomlinson provides an example of "the transformation of spatial experience into temporal experience that is characteristic of airline journeys. Planes are truly time capsules. When we board them, we enter a self-contained and independent temporal regime" ([9], p. 3). Titley highlights another outcome of the complex connectivity developed by Tomlinson, writing that "the enduring essentialism of culture may actually be read as a reaction to the deterritorialization: a reassertion of belonging and legitimacy in the face of real perceived flows of people, finance, images and ideas" ([21], p. 14).

Even as cultures interact with others and ultimately create hybrid cultures, they adapt and reinvent themselves in effect, resituating themselves and propagating a process of self-reinvention. Ultimately, Tomlinson equates globalization with complex connectivity, writing that "globalization refers to the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependencies that

characterize modern social life" and further, that "the notion of connectivity is found in one form or another in most contemporary accounts of globalization" ([9], p. 2). One might perhaps erroneously conclude that one is the other but one of the agents of hybridity—however, the vignettes of globalization—have an effect on culture but also contribute to its adaptation processes.

3.1. Individuals, Communities and Consumption: Agency

Individuals' roles in the transmission of culture—even those participating in a globalized world—cannot be underestimated. Individual decisions and choices—*agency*—are critical to the processes of cultural globalization, wherever it is evident. McCracken argues that "cultural meaning flows continually between its several locations in the social world, aided by the collective and individual efforts of designers, producers, advertisers, and consumers" ([22], pp. 71–72). In this flow, the qualities and characteristics of the good, which reflect the origin, are transferred to the "new" individual user. The utilitarian nature of modern consumer products permeates across cultures. A television, for example, serves the same purpose in an occidental home as it would an oriental, even as the frequency, individual or communal nature of use/enjoyment potentially differs. Similarly, the availability of a consumer good expands individual choice and the need for "more" thereby facilitating the expansion of cultural exchanges.

This homogeneity of cultural experiences view (including production and consumption processes) aligns with Dicken's conception of living in a world "in which consumer tastes and cultures are homogenized and satisfied through the provision of standardized global products created by global corporations with no allegiance to place or community" ([23], p. 315). An indispensable element of the cumulative effect here is individual choice and agency: that which an individual does out of "self-interest" has effects that surpass any anticipated consequences.

The "butterfly effect" is a concept used to illustrate the effects of one small action/decision as having system-wide effects. It has generally been used to demonstrate the interconnectedness of systems in such a way that when one part of the system suffers shock or disruption, including the introduction of chaos to the system, the other parts of the interconnected system are affected, as illustrated by Shinbrot, Ditto, Grebogi, Ott, Spano and Yorke (1992) in their work "using the sensitive dependence of chaos (the "butterfly effect") to direct trajectories in an experimental chaotic system" ([24], pp. 2823–28).

Similarly, in cultural studies, individual choices and actions, where individuals exercise rational choice and attempt to maximize their utility in light of their preferences and available choices, acquisition of merchandise or other cultural texts can have lasting changes to their local experiences and way of life. An important illustration of this concept can be found in the film, *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, a humorous example of changes that "foreign objects" can bring into the "normal" that a different community may have traffic with. Similarly, the Swahili language has had to "invent" words for "texts" such as TV (*runinga*), a computer (*kompyuta*), World Wide Web (*mtandao*)—words and concepts that did not exist prior to the invention of the "texts" to which they refer.

3.2. Communication and Technology: The Mainstays of Globalized Culture

For any cultural process to transcend geographical limits and spaces, transport and communication has been instrumental in facilitating their spread. The history of transportation (either by human, animal or motorized/mechanized means) has grown hand-in-hand with the history of trade, industrialization and modernization. Indeed, cultural exchanges were facilitated by these processes, which often utilized language (sign, spoken, written) to communicate from one group to the other. Illustrious histories of the travels of Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, Vasco da Gama, Henry Morton Stanley, Johann Ludwig Krapf, among others, adorn history books and therefore propagate certain cultural traditions and our conceptualization of the same, e.g., of adventure.

The process of transport and communication has been accelerated, over man's history, by producing better and faster inventions e.g., the invention of the wheel, chariots, ocean-going vessels, steam-ships, motor-cars, airplanes, the telephone, computers and internet, among others. Indeed, as Vertovec writes on telecommunication, "international phone call volume rose from 12.7 billion call minutes in 1982, almost fourfold to 42.7 billion in 1992 and another fourfold to 154 billion by 2001" ([25], p. 219). Given this trajectory, it is reasonable to assume another fourfold increase to approximately 700 billion call minutes by 2010 will be achieved, and given the accelerating pace of globalization and communication explosion through cellular networks, satellite, fiber-optics and voice over internet protocols (VoIP), the estimate may be well short of actual figures.

As Vertovec further postulates, "this obviously has considerable impact on domestic and community life, inter-generational and gender relations, religious and other cultural practices, and local economic development in both migrant sending and migrant-receiving contexts" ([25], p. 220). During these communication processes, transmission of beliefs, ideas, thoughts, and practices occurs. Even where dilution of culture is not necessarily evident, the long-term effect may lead to not only adoption of "foreign" cultural traits, but to an assimilation of such traits. One of the most pertinent examples of this type of assimilation was practiced as a "national colonial policy" by France in Africa.

4. Case Studies: Communication—The Personal and the Global

The dominant paradigm in the construction of power relations (both in international relations, and in the global economy) has structured relations as a Global North and Global South binary, with clear differences. The historical account of the Renaissance in Europe, the conquest of "barbaric peoples" and their eventual civilization elevates the Global North's narrative and diminishes that of the Global South. The construction of communication processes is similar: the north is "developed" and the south is somewhat "primitive" (I am cognizant that the reproduction of these stereotypes only reinforces this binary). Perhaps a more accurate conception would be that of difference.

Given the different levels of development, examining literature on communication especially relating in Global South countries, which are recipients of technological, economic and ideological ideas from the north, and the targets of cultural "modernization/development/civilization" is useful. The perpetuation of this dependent relationship and differences is constantly disseminated through media: content, hardware, software, technical expertise, *etc* ([26], pp. 103–4). The diffusion of cultural ideas is packaged in four approaches, including communication effects, mass media and modernization,

diffusion of innovation and social marketing ([26], p. 104), all of which, combined, proliferate western ideas to the "south". This becomes one *method* for cultural transference, retention and transmission of attitudes, beliefs and other cultural aspects.

Often conversations around the use of cultural artifacts as socialization/cultural hegemony method have often underestimated the desirability of the very artifacts to the recipient communities. The existence and use of Global South artifacts and their usefulness and their impact on communities that *need* them is often taken for granted. Adorno and Horkheimer's discussion of cultural artifacts and the mechanical production of such objects, which leads to the loss of the aura (the artistic nature of the object), loses sight of the necessity of using the artifacts, pitted against the costs incurred of not adopting their uses, even at the expense of "diluting" culture.

The invention of the motor-car, for instance, may well have been an artistic venture by an individual. The aura of the car is not debatable, but it is difficult to argue that the mass-production of the car (as a "text") and its subsequent "transmission" to other cultures has not, on average, improved quality of life. Therefore, accepting the use of foreign cultural artifacts created either as artistic objects or for their utilitarian value, the cost associated with resisting new artifacts is often higher than the cost of adaptation to their uses.

Hall criticizes the traditional conception of (mass) communication as a process between sender/message/receiver and proposes a "complex structure of dominance" through which meaning and interpretation is formulated as communication is passed on from one source to another, through media, its meaning encoded and decoded, translated and transformed and given meaning, and *thus* "consumption" occurs ([2], pp. 166–67). The *medium* of transmission of messages often follows the traditional sender/message/receiver variant, enabled by symbols and "texts" of mass communication.

4.1. Technological Innovation and Communication: Walkmans and Webs

To illustrate dynamism and adaptive qualities of culture, this research revisits the Sony Walkman. This is an important precursor in studying the production of technology, its adaptation and utilization of existing networks, language, culture and conceptions of social norms. This is achieved through advertising and personal experiences and creates a new, global product. It then applies the Walkman analogy to the adoption and development of Swahili as an internet-access medium (a local text) by Google (a global text) and how adaptation influences both the local and the global.

In the early 1980s, originating in Japan, a new cultural artifact was introduced to the personal entertainment industry: the Walkman. Du Gay and others argue that the "Walkman" concept by itself had no meaning; however, the associations that were connoted by the "Walkman" gave it meaning. Du Gay *et al.* contend that "as well as being social animals, men and women are also [cultural] beings. We use language and concepts to make sense of what is happening, even of events which may never have happened to us before, trying to 'figure out the world', to make it mean something" ([27], pp. 14–16).

As a technological invention without functional value, the Walkman (or portable cassette player, until it gained wide following and recognition as the Walkman), was not transformative, but the connotations and interpretations that came attached to it were instrumental in its widespread use and acceptability across cultures. As Du Gay *et al.* suggest, notions associated with the Walkman included "Japanese", which stood for "superior, quality product", "technologically modern", "youth",

"advancement" and other appeals that helped the "text" find its place and wide following. Its acceptability as a personalized, individualized means of listening to music, both including and excluding the surrounding environment, and therefore its popularity, also borrowed from concepts of mass information practices, *i.e.*, advertising.

By constructing the ownership, promoting the concepts of enabling the individual to enjoy "private-listening-in-public-places" ([27]. p. 16), reproduction and identification with the urban, the busy yet connected individual was propagated. The differences separating it from other forms of entertainment (for example, portable radios), and the specific market segment constructed through advertising (young, urban people) created a meaning for "the Walkman" and therefore transformed it from a simple technological device to a representation of a modern, "hip" urban youth. The role of advertising served to give it legitimacy, publicity and validity, and allowed individuals to conceptualize themselves as being part of that identity.

Personal preferences lead to personal choices, which in turn "globalize" works of art. In the age of mechanical production and globalization, art has begun to take on specific purposes: while the iPhone is a work of art, Apple must consider how the text will find market niche and thereby be used all over the world, thereby altering the aura of an iPhone (or other similar phones) as a cultural object to emphasize its use. On the other hand, due to increasing globalization, the iPhone is a cultural text for the globalized, rather than just for the localized audience. Such artifacts then begin to enable us to conceptualize truly global culture, since the iPhone is adaptable to different languages and uses in different parts of the world.

One other example deserves mention. The World Wide Web is, as far as cultural artifacts go, a "novel" invention, less than thirty years into its development, yet it has become one of the most visible "globalizers". The advent of Google has been one of the most technology-changing modern developments, redefining how communication affects transmission of specific and global cultural texts. One of its contributions to globalizing the local and localizing the global is in scanning of out-of-print and non-copyrighted text books, journals and other media into a world-wide database, accessible by anyone who has a computer and an internet connection.

Not only does digitizing and the availability of artifacts in different languages is more likely to preserve these cultural artifacts, expand access to knowledge and remove it from the "high culture" connotation, providing avenues for greater inter-cultural understandings. This availability removes the "privilege" of any non-Swahili native's knowledge of the language. It also removes the need to be physically present to the East African region, the "geographic local" origin of the language, and long periods of immersion in the target language. Although globalization processes have made such travel easier and faster, "respatializing" the nature of learning and access, makes travel unnecessary, and individuals can acquire cultural texts from the comfort of their "local".

In developing the Google-Swahili language interface, Google collaborated with East African academics and Swahili scholars to verify maintenance of the language's integrity. The "global" came to the "local" to learn and adapt, and then the local became global after Google's interaction with the Swahili scholars. Suddenly, a language that was localized to the Greater East Africa (a few pockets of diasporic communities) found its way to global availability. Now, with a computer terminal, one can learn Swahili from anywhere in the world, as is the case with many other languages. Thus, Swahili is

re-defined through cultural artifacts that originated in the "West"—computers, internet, Google—and globalized to anyone that has access.

Does the global then affect the local and/or necessarily change the cultural purity of other cultures and their artifacts? While the Swahili language now "exists" in a different media, accessible to different people, the essence of the language and traditions has not changed; it has, however, almost ensured longevity beyond the current speakers. This is illustrated by the case of preservation of the Latin language. Language preservation, especially for extinct and near-extinct language, insures that they will be available in the future for study and/or re-introduction, even though some of the actual cultural practices may be lost forever.

Culture is not static; it is dynamic and adaptive. It "learns", "adapts" and "grows" to include "texts" that previously did not belong, integrating them and localizing their uses, thereby taking that which is global and localizing it and completing the circle. Similarly, the local often becomes globalized. Tourists visiting foreign lands often visit the local markets in search of "texts" that are representative of the cultures in the foreign countries and bring them to their own foreign "local".

4.2. Communication: The Global Is Local—The Cell Phone Revolution and Ethnic Languages

Culture studies scholars often construct mass media and mass communication channels as a tool for the control, influence and structuration of social relations. Media serves different functions; Elizabeth Hirschman and Craig Thompson highlight the importance of media and advertising as a process of socialization, normalization and reinforcement of knowledge and attitudes which are repeated through social plots, icons, heroes, locations and language (texts) familiar to audiences. They write that, "hence, the media landscape presents a recombinant culture in which new media vehicles reproduce aspects of the ideological system that were previously embraced by consumers and are consistent with consumers' understanding of their cultural meanings" ([28], p. 44).

One issue that the critiques of mass media and advertising as a persistent socialization and cultural construction miss is the function of localization (personalization) of the communication processes. The notion of privilege is indisputable in the construction and dissemination of information and messages through mass media. The initiator of any communication can therefore code information and/or the communication medium in ways that privilege their message. However, the alternative to non-communication in the information age constrains the individual's choices and experiences.

The risk of the mass-production of communication texts—be they TV and radio programs, or the transmission channels (internet, phones, faxes, radio and TV waves) may be ameliorated by the outcomes, which cultural studies rarely studies. Similarly, the localization of the message through the mass-produced artifacts, e.g., phones, is often resistant to influence, since the message is constructed by the sender and deciphered by the receiver. Mass communication channel and objects are often just conduits, with no ability to impose power differentials on the message, such as through phone use.

Cultural studies literature grapples with the intersections of mass (technological) production and the use of the products as objects of control by some privileged group or other. The means of production for the capitalist market are inseparable from the very objects produced. The benefits of mass production are often subsumed in the dialogs about control *vs.* freedom, bourgeoisie *vs.* proletariat and the desirability of the use of these mass communication methods ([29], pp. 55–58). Mass communication

allows for changes in interpersonal communication and, in some instances, circumvents the power differential and limits bureaucratic reorganization of social and political structures.

Goggin studies the parallels between the development of the cell phone and the Walkman, finding similarities in the way the use of the cell phone has grown exponentially from less than 100 million users in 1995 to approximately 2 billion in 2002 ([30], pp. 12–14). Goggin views the cell phone as internationalizing ([30], pp. 13–14), but simultaneously views the local as being global and the global being local. Such dichotomies are captured in the creative applications of cell phones for positive outcomes (e.g., finding out market prices for produce, transferring money, payment of bills) to the negative (e.g., cheating on an examination, detonating weapons of mass destruction, inciting others to violence, *etc.*) These distinctions are clearly discernible and can be supported; the cell phones are not networks without users; quite often, the users are individuals in diverse environments.

While these communication networks are interconnected, owned and controlled often locally but largely globally by multinational companies, the aspect of personalization in the use, language, habits, and other applications available through mass media (e.g., listening to music, watching video, and taking pictures) lends the cell-phone to be intensely personal in the choices that individuals make, and the applications to which these texts are put. Use of cell phones across country lines and spatially differentiated distances further supports this personalization and individualization of the use of the cell phone. Therefore, the medium can be separated from the message and although the use of a cell phone would be a novelty amongst less developed countries (since it is a borrowed invention); its use in local dialects and local spaces points to successful localization of a global phenomenon.

The full range of applications of the mobile phone is becoming clearer, yet every day, innovation changes its purpose from communication to other uses. While primarily used as a tool for communication, its applications can include entertainment, communication and education. Bracey and Culver note that while the US and Canada is more PC-centric, other countries are more inclined towards the mobile phone. They write that, "'when you lose your mobile', says one student in Japan, 'you lose part of your brain'" ([31], p. 272). Whatever its origin, the application of the cell phone has traversed cultures, time and geographic spaces to take on significant importance, thus perhaps creating truly the first global, multicultural entity that localizes the global application of common software, yet giving individuals customized, often culturally informed and locally relevant experiences.

The mobile phone's primary communication function has been widely used in the political arena to organize political activity and express dissent. The history of the mobile phone's political application dates back to the fall of the Berlin Wall and the emergence of a privatized economy. Varbanov suggests that, mobile phones, other than being a communication device, have been used in Bulgaria to highlight the transition mechanism from a socialist country, with central planning of economic and social life, to a free society ([32], pp. 126–37). Mobile phones have also been used to signify social status (which was previously undifferentiated in the Soviet sphere) and adapted to popular culture, including music, access to public services, among other uses.

Whether societies perceive themselves as individualistic or collective in their cultural beliefs, the adoption of technology is critical in the formulation of local, national, transnational, global and imagined identities. Bagchi *et al.* support this view, writing that, "IT adoption in individualistic nations will be greater as individuals pay more attention to personal lives, freedom in work and more

performance oriented and ITs such as mobile and personal computers and the internet are more supportive of these values" ([33], p. 959).

On the other hand, the use of cell phones (mobile phones) can have detrimental consequences on individuals and collectives. Discussing some of the uses of cell phones to spread "untruths" in Nigeria, Smith writes; "He [BBC Africa Service correspondent] described a recent epidemic of rumors circulating in the country, purporting that anyone who answered calls on their cellular telephones originating from several specific numbers risked madness, and even death" ([34], p. 497). In Kenya's 2007 post-election violence, management and access to health information, which was dependent on mobile phones, was affected by the inability to access cell phones [35].

The more positive and innovative personal communication through such global media includes medication management, appointment reminders and consulting personal doctors [36]. The uses and application of communication and the media therefore shows that while the construction of power through the dissemination of messages (pre-constructed by those in power to advance certain social power structures) is possible, other applications are more interpersonal, time-saving and only facilitate efficiency in communication, rather than propagation or creation of the power structures, *i.e.*, they are simply a medium.

5. Communication, Political Participation (Protest) and Color Revolutions

The proliferation of different communication methods and gadgets has made easier interpersonal communication and facilitated changes in political landscape. One of the earliest interactions between mobile communication and political actions was the 2004 Ukrainian "Orange Revolution". This revolution heralded not only popular "mass action" by social groups using social media to organize; it also showed the duality of limitation of government control and influence that communication has on personal attitudes and choices. In the Ukraine "Orange Revolution", Premier Yuschenko's supporters used both online (web) communication and mobile technology. Kuzio argues that, "the opposition made effective use of cell phones, during both the election campaign and the revolution itself. In a now-infamous video clip, recorded by an oppositionist's cell-phone camera, a university professor is seen illegally instructing his students to vote for Yanukovych" ([37], p. 127).

Elections in other contexts have not always used technologies to organize, for example in the case of Kenya in 2008 [38]. In other instances, government purposely targets such communication avenues to frustrate mass organization and promote the pursuit of tyrannical rule, as discussed by Addis on the 2009 Iranian elections. Cohen writes of Iranian youth:

> It is not uncommon for them to send messages to one another by peer-to-peer Bluetooth messaging on their mobile phones. The Bluetooth technology enables young Iranians to send messages to anyone with a wireless feature on their mobile phones, even if they don't know either their name or telephone number ([39], p. 6).

This application of cultural artifacts derived of a global mindset (for, after all, the mobile phone is a "Western" cultural text) shows clearly that cultures and communities/groups (even oppressed ones, like the Iranian youth) innovate and apply the texts and technology availed through the processes of globalization expanded concepts of social, group and interpersonal communication.

Predicting Future Trends in Global Culture—More Homogeneity or Heterogeneity?

Will the future be more homogeneous or heterogeneous, especially regarding culture and identity? The question of whether the world is moving towards being more globalized/Americanized/Westernized remains a lightning rod. What is clear is that the processes of interconnectedness and greater cultural integration through travel, commerce, migration and recreation, have brought exposure to Western "freedoms", human rights, and capitalist democracy; these interactions affect both Western and non-Western societies, causing a hybrid, rather than distinct, pure cultures.

The growing interconnectedness between peoples, places and lifestyles (otherwise known as globalization) will require not only shifting production to other countries but increasing knowledge of distant cultures and peoples. In addition, the changing demographics due to immigration, travel, leisure or temporal interactions, will have an effect on the conception of identity and culture. Whether the notion of approximately 40% of the world's population being in two countries (India and China) influences cultures to be insular in an attempt to preserve their core values and identities, or whether the inevitability of greater integration leads to a more homogeneous world remains to be seen.

6. Conclusions

The world we live in is characterized by accelerating, intensifying and deepening social, economic, cultural, religious and recreational interconnections between one geographic and cultural area of one people to another. These interconnections have led to, and been characterized by, a respatialization and re-structuring of human relations occasioned and supported by rapid developments in technology, communication and language. The argument that Westernization/Americanization is impacting foreign cultures in a way that aims to change and heavily influence foreign cultures is shown to carry some weight, but cultures are also selective of processes they adapt.

Cultures often retain their unique features even as they borrow and adopt features of other cultures they interact with. The notion that American/Western culture overwhelms other cultures based on commerce and consumption models ignores the localization of the very structures and essences of the foreign culture (e.g., cell phone use in native languages, adoption of Swahili by the Google search engine, among others). Culture and society adopts technology and fashions it to meet its needs without necessarily fundamentally changing those cultures.

Traditionally, globalization is associated with Westernization/Americanization, but cultures are indeed dynamic, and are not simply victims of globalization and Westernization. They have adopted those "texts" that allow them to be competitive and adaptive of changes occurring within the local and global contexts. If communities and cultures did not adapt, many African countries would still be using runners and smoke signals to communicate, rather than radio signals and cell phones, and the Greeks would still have marathon runners even in times of battle.

Hall argues that technology and mass media/mass communication, one of the primary tools for globalization and culturally influencing other countries, propagates a specific agenda, usually constructed by the powerful and embedded in the message as well as the mode of transmission. However, the availability of those same technological devices has enabled cultures to adopt and customize technologies for local use, including their application through language and mass media. It is conceivable, however,

that Hall's argument holds at the community, rather than the national level, where *elites* within the specific communities influence the construction of the message and further control the medium/media by which the constructed messages are delivered to the audiences.

On a global scale, cultures have increasingly utilized modern technology and other developments by adopting and integrating them with best practices, which enables inter-state communications in foreign languages, thereby supporting globalization on the one hand but also localizing and personalizing global texts (e.g., the cell phone) to local uses (e.g., communication in mother-tongues) and, further, applying these global texts to local situations both at the local and national levels (e.g., organizing the protests in Iran and Ukraine). The argument that the global becomes local, and the local becomes global holds. Globalization impacts local and global trade, commerce, leisure, entertainment, and other areas of human interaction and provides an enriching individual experience tempered and allows individuals to interact with the processes of globalization in a very personal way.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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