



Fragmentation

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However, globalisation is not only a homogenising process. Simultaneously to homogenisation, there are processes of **fragmentation** taking place in every country, all over the world. These processes of fragmentation are happening in reaction to homogenisation but also, more paradoxically, as a consequence of homogenisation.

The process of homogenisation provokes **counter-reactions** at different levels. Some of the main opposition arises because homogenisation is perceived as imposing a single dominant model onto a variety of different cultures.

In many countries, people regard the arrival of American global brands or of Hollywood movies as a threat to the stability of existing traditions or structures. The area of national or traditional cultures perceived to be under threat from globalisation depends very much on the country where it is happening. This can range from opposition to the spread of McDonald's restaurants as in France, where they are seen as symbols of "malbouffe" (literally "bad food") to the banning of Hollywood movies in some Muslim countries because they bring in Western values that offend religious sensibilities. Depending on the respective society, these reactions can be more or less intense, ranging from **boycotts and open protests** to religious **fundamentalism**.

In a few countries, such groups have been able to come to power or at least to influence their government's foreign policy. Islamic countries, especially those situated in the Middle East, are often presented as being an example of this fundamentalism, but such movements have grown up even within the United States. For example, US Christian fundamentalist groups see the global culture broadcasted by Hollywood or MTV as too internationalist and as a threat to American values. The exacerbation of this fragmentation internationally has led some authors to express fears of a "**clash of civilisations**" (Huntington, 2004).

Other groups oppose globalisation in its homogenising form from an **economic point of view**, because they regard it as mainly driven by a **neo-liberal** ideology that challenges national governments' ability to define their own economic policies, especially in the domain of public expenditure.

They also criticize the **international division of labour**, which has introduced greater **competition** between countries (and people) and which affects employment, due to firms' ability to relocate from one country to another far more easily than before. Paradoxically, groups who oppose the neo-liberal world order brought in by globalisation are themselves contributing to homogenisation, by for instance participating in a worldwide **anti-globalisation** (or **alter-globalisation**) movement that brings together organisations that had no previous history of collaborating (e.g. religious organisations, radical leftists, trade unions, environmental groups).

The dynamics of fragmentation due to globalisation are also taking place within countries. Economic competition *between* countries is having effects on the economic structures **within** countries. Sectors that are not competitive enough are relocating to other countries where they are. This also affects public service sectors or state-protected companies. In many countries, people working in these sectors are losing their jobs, and if their personal skills are unsuited to another occupation, they risk falling into poverty.

Simultaneously – and in line with neo-liberal theory – state expenditure on welfare is decreasing in industrialised countries, potentially leading to the social exclusion of citizens who are not “competitive” enough. These processes of **exclusion** are also taking place in developing countries in the South, where large parts of the population do not have (access to) the basic resources to participate in the process of globalisation.

Alongside the sectors that are the losers of globalisation, there are also the sectors that are **winning**. Globalisation is producing its winners in every country, usually within the wealthiest and most educated parts of the population. These citizens are active in the most competitive sectors of the economy, which are benefiting from globalisation (e.g. the stock market, banking, communications technology). At the upper end of the social scale, an English-speaking, internationally oriented “hyperbourgeoisie” is emerging (Duclos, 1998). These people are economically well-off, work in globally connected enterprises (mostly TNCs), and have a global lifestyle with few local roots. Often, their flats in different parts of the globe are increasingly located in gated communities and shielded from the rest of local society. They usually have weak ties to their country or neighbourhood, as demonstrated when top managers relocate their domicile to tax havens. Some authors consider that this constitutes a voluntary “social exclusion at the top” (Giddens, 2000: 116).

This fragmenting aspect of neo-liberal globalisation is well summarised by a quotation from the Zapatista Leader Subcomandante Marcos:

“Neo-liberalism doesn’t turn many countries into one country. It turns one country into many countries” (Subcomandante Marcos, 2004: 431).

Some authors, however, do consider that these dynamics of fragmentation are also having positive effects (e.g. Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2004). According to them, the fact that nation-states are losing some of their prerogatives to the benefit of a competitive private sector opens up space for greater democracy. Moreover, the loss of coherence within societies allows minorities to express themselves more freely.

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