

Navigating Globalization: Anthropological Insights on the Dynamics of Cultural Transformation in Nepal

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This article critically examines the anthropological dimensions of globalization in the context of Nepal. It draws from influential works by scholars like Harvey, Giddens, and Pieterse, highlighting anthropology's unique perspective on cultural specificity and historical processes. The discourse challenges prevailing narratives, rejecting ideas of deterritorialization and homogenization, proposing "hybridization" as an alternative paradigm. Eurocentric biases in globalization studies are scrutinized, with Frank and Wolf advocating for a humanocentric historiography. The Nepalese experience is explored through case studies by Rankin and Liechty, revealing the reciprocal relationship between global and local forces. The

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article focuses on changing consumption patterns, cultural commodification, and evolving gender dynamics. Adopting a microcosmic lens within familial contexts, it delves into globalization's impact on consumption, social media, and relationship commoditization. In conclusion, the study positions anthropology as crucial for understanding the intricate nuances of globalization in Nepal, emphasizing the need for a context-specific and inclusive approach to navigate socio-cultural transformations.

[**Keywords** : Globalization, Anthropology of globalization, Globalization narratives, Cultural dynamics of globalization, Nepal]

1. Introduction

Globalization, a ubiquitous term, has become the focal point of extensive deliberation across diverse academic realms, where scholars grapple with both consensus and controversies regarding its definition, features, and dimensions. Harvey (1989, cited in Inda and Rosaldo, 2002), conceptualizes globalization as a “time and space compression”, emphasizing the accelerated interconnectedness of the world. Giddens (1990, also cited in the same source) presents an alternative view, describing it as “time and space distancing”, highlighting the perceived distancing effects within the global landscape.

In the domain of anthropology, Pieterse (2009) diverges from these temporal and spatial perspectives, characterizing globalization as a “long-term historical process of growing worldwide interconnectedness”. This distinctive anthropological viewpoint underscores the enduring nature of globalization, positioning it within the broader historical trajectory of global interconnectedness. Anthropology, in its exploration of globalization, sets itself apart by prioritizing the examination of how individuals mediate the expansive processes of globalization in culturally specific ways (Inda & Rosaldo, 2002). This unique emphasis distinguishes anthropological studies from other disciplines, marking a departure from more generalized analyses.

Anthropologists scrutinize the intricate interplay between global forces and local cultural responses, elucidating the dynamic ways in which communities negotiate their identities amid global transformations. This prioritization of cultural specificity reflects the discipline's commitment to understanding globalization not as a uniform, homogenizing force but as a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by diverse local engagements. Inda and Rosaldo (2002)

emphasize anthropology's distinctive lens in approaching globalization, highlighting its focus on subjectivities and the nuanced ways individuals navigate the global currents. This anthropological perspective stands in contrast to disciplines that might adopt more macroscopic viewpoints, often overlooking the lived experiences of individuals within the global tapestry.

Moreover, anthropology's engagement with globalization extends beyond mere observation, delving into the participatory role of subjects in shaping the contours of globalization. By foregrounding the agency of individuals and communities, anthropology offers a holistic understanding of globalization that encompasses both its macro-level processes and micro-level impacts on people's lives. In essence, the anthropology of globalization not only conceptualizes globalization as a long-term historical process but also distinguishes itself through its emphasis on cultural specificity and the agency of individuals in navigating global transformations. This approach challenges the homogenizing tendencies often attributed to globalization and underscores the importance of understanding how diverse cultures actively contribute to and shape the global landscape. As anthropologists delve into the multifaceted dimensions of globalization, they illuminate the intricate interconnections between global forces and local realities, enriching our comprehension of this complex and evolving phenomenon.

2. Narratives of Globalization

Since the late 1980s, globalization has become one of the hot topics in academia. There are different narratives prevalent in academic arenas regarding the features of globalization. One of the popular narratives is that globalization creates the deterritorialization of culture across the globe. For anthropologists, it is only a partial truth because a specific environment can restrict the free-floating of cultural elements. In this situation, cultural "reterritorialized" is also possible (Inda & Rosaldo, 2002). For example, we can find the Nepalese community in the US, Canada, and other parts of the world. In short, the relation between culture and specific place can be weakening but the argument that culture has altogether lost its original place is not practical (Inda & Rosaldo, 2002).

Similarly, another dominant narrative of globalization treats it as homogenization and cultural imperialism of the world (Inda &

Rosaldo, 2002). In the process of cultural imperialism and homogenization, the dominant culture disseminates around the world in such a way that it creates a kind of cultural homogenization. For anthropologists, this picture of homogenizing and cultural flow from the west to the rest does not adequately address the realities of this complex contemporary world. Likewise, anthropology discards the narrative of homogenizing and cultural imperialism and treats globalization as “a process of hybridization that gives rise to a global *mélange*” (Pieterse, 2009 : 65). This suggests that the globalization process should not be taken only as so-called weak cultures blindly adopting dominant cultural traits, but rather borrows the cultural parts of different cultures which contribute to the dominant one too. Moreover, in this process different cultural traits blended into one as a process of mutual imbrication (Inda & Rosaldo, 2002).

Though many theorists also talk about the unipolar homogenization dimension of globalization, anthropologists see its plurality. The anthropologist Trouillot (2003) considers globalization from the political-economic perspective and claims that the narrative that globalization creates homogenization of the world is contradictory and superficial. He states that the concept of homogenization is a kind of half story because the world is fragmented “political-economically” as well as in terms of market. Because of globalization, the world, even the west, is fragmented into different pieces, and inequality is increasing between urban and rural, and specific geographies, especially Atlantic zones are privileged in terms of economy and consumption. For example, even within the US, there is inequality among the white and blacks, among the whites, the Asian, Hispanic, African American, and indigenous communities. Therefore, Trouillot (2003) claims that if there are fragmentations within a certain territory and even within a country then the generalization of a homogeneous world due to globalization is less meaningful.

Moreover, the narrative of the homogenization of the world by globalization is challenged by Appadurai (2002) by presenting the inherent differences and disjuncture with the global cultural economy. Following the idea of Anderson’s “Imagined Community”, he presents how people create different imaginary “scapes” which are not based on any scientific and genetic facts. In the globalization process, these imaginary “scapes” promote a kind of cultural

economy. This thing is disjunctive and contradictory from the point of view of globalization.

3. Critiques of Eurocentrism in Globalization Studies

Many anthropologists and scholars criticize the other dominant narrative of European superiority in the process of globalization by taking it as a Eurocentric view. Among them, Frank in his popular work "Reorient" (1998) raised the methodological question about the ways of the historiography of the major writers, historians, and social scientists regarding the issue of globalization. He talks about the political economy and historical trajectories of globalization by presenting the fact that there were different ups and downs in the process of globalization. In a particular historical period, Asia or Asian countries were the centers of the global political economy, and over time Europe and the US became the centers of the global political economy. The domination by the European economy over the Asian economy has not a long history. In the process of colonialism, the power and economy of the world became Europe centered. In fact, before colonialism, the economic picture of the world was different. Therefore, Frank claims that the continuity of the European economy is not always possible (Frank, 1998). There are lots of signs and indications forecasting that in the coming decades the power centers of the global economy will be Asian countries. This fact shows that historical trajectories or ups and downs are an inherent character of the globalization process.

Frank challenges the methodological ways of the historiography of great social scientists, historians, and modern social scientists particularly, Marx, Weber, Durkheim, and even Wallerstein who adopted the Eurocentric bias in writing world history (Frank, 1998). He claims that what these scholars claim in their writings as world history is not world history but only a recent history of Europe. Before the modern period, Europe was a part of Eurasia, and taking the European continent as a separate category was a deliberate construct of Eurocentric historiographies to prove the dominance of Europe over the rest of the world. In fact, even in the period from 1400 to 1800 A.D., there was no European hegemony, rather Chinese goods, trade, and marketplaces had occupied the central position in the global economy (Frank, 1998). Frank further claims that existing scholars, particularly modern historiographers have failed to recognize this fact because of their inherent Eurocentric bias. Therefore, such

Eurocentric bias has prevented scholars from taking the holistic and humanocentric global approach (Frank, 1998).

Frank further claims that the existing way of the historiography of the world is deliberate and full of Eurocentric bias. For example, we can take an example of one piece of writing to show how historiographers deliberately intended to justify the superiority of Europe over the rest of the world. In his popular writing “The Clash of Civilizations”, Huntington (1996) presumed that the world was divided into seven big civilizations, and the European civilization, particularly Judeo-Christian was the leading civilization among the others. Therefore, what we think and read about the history written by existing biased social scientists, such as world history or economic history of the world, does not cover the diversity, historical trajectories, political economy, and political systems of the world.

Frank advocates the necessity of humanocentric historiography of the globalization process and global history. In other words, we should not see and conceptualize any phenomena from a European theoretical lens. Many anthropologists see this tendency as the dark side of western modernity and believe that it erases the economy, politics, and cultural practices of the entire world. As anthropologists, we have to prefer to use the holistic methodology in a diachronic fashion. Frank’s arguments can be summarized as that if we look at the whole from the part (in this case if we look at the world from Europe) then it creates flaws in the methodology.

Like Frank, another renowned anthropologist, Eric Wolf also criticizes the methodological part of the historiography of contemporary social scientists in his writing “Europe and People without History” (Wolf, 1982). He claims that since the long historical periods Africa and Asia were integral parts of the economic and political system of the old world. At the time, there were regional linkages and connections in terms of trade, particularly slave and fur, and the European expansion that began in 1400 only extended this connection to the global level (Wolf, 1982). There was no distinct process by which European history was constructed, rather as a part of a dynamic process of global connections, European history was also constructed. He further argued that we cannot think of the existence of any societies as self-maintaining systems and as isolated forms. Therefore, the logics of the existence of “contemporary ancestors” and the “people without history” are meaningless (Wolf, 1982 : 390).

Moreover, the categorization of certain people as the people without history only reflects the mindsets of the Eurocentric view. Such accounts of history misguide the political economy and the nature of the historical trajectories of globalization.

4. Alternative Paradigms for Understanding Globalization

Unlike other arguments, Pieterse (2009) suggests adopting three paradigms for understanding the future aspects of globalization and culture. These perspectives are Samuel Huntington's idea of "The Clash of Civilizations", the theoretical lens of "MaCdonaldization" advocated by George Ritzer, and his own idea of "Hybridization" (Pieterse, 2009 : 44). As a recent development, the term "globalization from below" is also dominant among academia as a discourse of globalization (Mathews and Vega, 2012). It provides a different angle to scholars in general and anthropologists in particular about how to grasp the process of globalization from the subjects or culturally specific ways. Moreover, the advocates of "globalization from below" have raised questions on current perspectives of globalization by saying that they only talk about globalization as "globalization from above".

The process of globalization has created a reciprocal relationship between the global and the local in which the global is integrated into the local and vice-versa. Most of us heard about the idea of globalization from above and do not know about the other side of globalization, i.e., globalization from below. The "globalization from above" is related to states and chains of transnational corporations having billion-dollar budgets and lawyers having the indicators and statistics of a formal economy. On the other side, the term "globalization from below" use to indicate semi-legal or illegal flows of small amounts of capital, people, and goods without lawyers and copyrights, run under the radar of the state as an informal economy, and closely tied with the development of information and technologies (Mathews & Vega, 2012). Both of them are neither contradictory or opposite; rather they exist and function simultaneously and adopt the principles of free-market (Mathews & Vega, 2012).

The dominant narrative regarding the study of globalization which focuses on the "globalization from above" alone is not only appropriate but also inadequate to understand the multifaceted

nature of globalization. Social theorists, particularly economists, talk only about the formal process or formal economy of globalization and ignore an equally important another side of the informal economy of globalization. Therefore, anthropologists by their nature and training raise the issues related to another side of globalization, i.e., globalization from below. Moreover, they believe that the globalization from below can be studied or explored by using multi-sited ethnography and thick description which is only possible from the perspectives of anthropology (Pliez, 2012).

5. Globalization in the Context of Nepal

When we talk about the experiences of globalization in the context of Nepal, we have to focus especially on how the neoliberal economy or the political economy of globalization penetrated the consumption pattern of the local people. Moreover, such penetration can be found in the transformations of the cultural logics of food and sex, the creation of middle-class culture through the consumption of goods, and the cultural-based politics of markets.

Katharine Rankin (2004) claims that the dominant discourse of Nepal's isolation before the 1950s was only partial truth. Before the 1950s there were many foreigners in Nepal, and there was a sort of connection between Nepal to the outside world. In the case of Sankhu, a residence of the traditional Newar community was also a trade route between Tibet and Kathmandu. Moreover, Sankhu is also known as a part of the traditional Silk Road. Rankin further claims that after the 1950s the connection of Nepal to outside the world in terms of market and development increased. After the Rana regime, through the five-year plan, some of the development programs were designed and their major donors were foreigners. In addition, by giving the donation they entered Nepal, and that was the beginning of economic colonialism in Nepal. Furthermore, this was the penetration of the global political economy and globalization in Nepal. After the penetration, different financial institutions were established and the mobilization of the people increased. After the 1980s, there was a sort of deregulation of the state policy through the mechanisms of structural adjustment policy, and the program was executed (Rankin, 2004). Therefore, these events should be regarded as the turning points of the global economy, global market, and globalization process in Nepal.

In her book “the cultural politics of market” (Rankin, 2004), Rankin provides a detailed picture of how the globalization process, particularly neoliberalism changed the logic and meanings of caste and gender of the Newars in Sakhu. By blending the anthropological theory of practice with the theory of geography, she tried to explore the impacts of globalization in time and place specific consciousness, ideologies, and practices of people. Rankin claims that after the encroachment of economic liberalism, particularly in the Jorpati area of Kathmandu, carpet, garment, and tourism-related industries were opened. This situation as well as the Maoist insurgency increased the flow of people in Jorpati. The new circumstances created employment opportunities for the Newar People particularly the low caste of Sankhu. The opportunities for employment changed the class and economic status of previously poor low-caste Newars. At the same time, the newly developed commoditized regime of value is linked to the consumption and possession of modern material objects. The low-caste Newars raised their status as middle-class consumers of imported goods.

At the same time, in comparison with low caste, the high caste Newars did not have the access to the commoditized regime of value. The traditional rituals-based prestige economy becomes weak to compete with the commoditized economy of prestige. In this situation, the caste-based stigma related to low-caste people becomes blurred. Similarly, Rankin (2004) claims that the newly established commoditized economy of prestige also changed gender relations. The consciousness of fashion, cosmetics, and some sort of material objects giving in dowry become compatible with the prestige economy of money. Moreover, with the absence of males for employment in Jorpati, the females who lived in Sakhu also became temporary household heads. Therefore, Rankin tries to show how globalization and neoliberal economy politicize the culture and make a new setting or parameters for individuals’ practices.

Similarly, Mark Liechty in “Suitably Modern” also talks about globalization and its penetration in Kathmandu (Liechty, 2008). He tried to present how the consumption of media shaped the ideology, imagination, and future direction of the middle-class people in Kathmandu. He further said that the media directs the people about what should have been consumed to be modern, and creates attraction towards the commodification and consumption culture. Liechty argued that after the 1950s globalization process created a

distinct category of people having separate cultural practices and consumption patterns to be suitably modern in Kathmandu. Unlike Marxian and Weberian perspectives of class construction, he focused on the consumption patterns as the basis of class construction.

Liechty claims that globalization created morality based on separate consumption patterns and cultural practices located “in between” the urban poor’s vulgarity and corrupt elite lifestyles in Kathmandu (Liechty, 2008 : 24). He categorized this separate category of consumption as middle-class. In suitably modern, Liechty used empirical data-based generalizations to show how the middle class is constructed. In other words, he tried to show how an individual can claim that he or she belongs to the middle class. He explored the different indicators, like, fashion, youth culture and game culture, cinemas, songs, music, magazine, middle morals, enough to eat, modern Nepali, Ijjat economy, and so on, and interviewed different sectors of people to justify the existence of middle-class culture. For one instance, he interviewed many of the students and housewives. Liechty asked why you wear this type of fashion, make-up, and why you don’t use a highly expensive type of make-up. Many of the respondents told him that this (current) type suits them. It is because, if they do more than this, they will belong to either the very low class or very high class. So, they told him that the middle class should do make-up in the middle range (Liechty, 2008).

In another book, Mark Liechty shows the major transformations of the cultural logic of food and sex from basic needs to cranial commodities in Kathmandu (Liechty, 2010). Before the 1950s there was a caste-based cultural logic (even law based) of restrictions on food, and it was also taken as a private phenomenon. After the 1950s, Nepal has become an open society for all the people around the world. Since then caste-based cultural logic on food changed, and food became a public phenomenon. In Kathmandu, the legal provision of food changed with the collapse of the Rana regime. Though the food was already in the public domain in Europe and US since the 18th century, the first credit goes to USAID for taking the food from private to the public domain in Kathmandu by appointing the Newars women as cooks in their offices. After that the food gradually became private to public phenomena outside Kathmandu.

With the increasing number of foreign tourists, travelers, and newly evolved middle-class the demand for food in public places, like hotels, and restaurants increased. The foods become saleable

luxurious commodities. In a caste-based society, women should not have permission to go out, eat out, and be close to strangers. But, with increasing numbers of tourists in Kathmandu the number of hotels, restaurants, fancy shops, curio, and travel agencies increased. In this context, new job opportunities for women were also increased and emerged the situation of dehousewifization. This new situation also accepted the necessity of fashion for women. Moreover, the privately located gender body came into the public domain. In the context of food, the 1950s was the transitional point for commercial sex in Kathmandu (Liechty, 2010).

Commercial sex was brought by the British to the major cities of India during the colonial period. Liechty shows how the paradigms of food and sex were changed with the process of globalization. Liechty further claims that, after the 1950s, in Kathmandu, the concepts of food and sex were transformed from the initial or familial private domain into the cranial economy with the emergence of middle-class people. Moreover, sex and food are transformed from the private body into the public body, and the private domain into the public domain respectively. When food and sex are commercialized in Kathmandu, there are many fantasies of sex were created by the stakeholders of the sex market. For instance, whoever the girls were, they named them, and branded them as Darjeeling girls, school girls, office girls, and so on. Some of the prostitutes wore the dresses of salable professionals to attract middle-class customers. The cabin and dance restaurants become the meeting points and the place for the consumption of women's bodies (Liechty, 2010). If we see the angle of globalization from below, with the commercialization of food and sex local foods and cuisine were branded in Kathmandu. People earned money by involving the market of sexuality.

In the above paragraphs, I have talked about the multiple facets of globalization processes, and their impacts or experiences in the context of Nepal in general by citing the works of Ranking and Liechty. In the following paragraphs, I have briefly discussed the impacts or experiences of these multiple facets of globalization in a particular family and society.

6. Experiencing Globalization in a Family

As an impact of “globalization from above” living in different places the members of a family linked through social media. The consumption pattern has changed and the activities and policies of

multinational institutions have become day concerns. Similarly, thinking about democracy, terrorism, human rights, climate change, free markets, and so on has become the business. Social media has become essential, and multinational products have become a part of daily consumption. On the other hand, “globalization from below” has created access to both pirated and semi-original versions of commodities including software, digitized materials, low-price edition books, electrical gadgets, and semi-branded clothes. Similarly, both of them have also created constraints too. The above dimension of globalization has created global risk in the economy, and the consumption pattern of junk foods has created health problems among family members. The previously rarely found diseases like sugar and blood pressure have been common. Moreover, social relations have been commoditized. Similarly, globalization from below has also created many risks. Though they are cheap and easily accessible, the pirated goods are less efficient and effective and do not have any warranties and guarantees. Social relations become commoditized and mechanical.

7. Conclusion

The exploration of globalization through anthropological perspectives offers a nuanced understanding of its multifaceted nature, particularly in the context of Nepal. The varied narratives of globalization, such as “time and space compression” and “distanciation”, highlight the complexity of its impact on different cultures. Anthropology, with its emphasis on cultural specificity, sheds light on how individuals mediate global processes in unique ways, challenging the homogenizing tendencies often associated with globalization. Critiques of Eurocentrism in globalization studies, as presented by scholars like Frank and Wolf, underscore the need for a more holistic and humanocentric approach to understanding historical trajectories and economic shifts. The acknowledgment of historical fluctuations challenges the Eurocentric bias in the historiography of major social scientists, urging scholars to adopt a broader perspective. Alternative paradigms proposed by Pieterse, such as the Clash of Civilizations, McDonaldization, and Hybridization, provide diverse lenses for interpreting globalization. The emergence of “globalization from below” emphasizes the importance of studying informal economies and local perspectives, offering a counterbalance to the dominant discourse on globalization from above.

Examining globalization in the context of Nepal, the reciprocal relationship between the global and the local becomes evident. The experiences of “globalization from above” and “globalization from below” shape various aspects of Nepalese society, influencing consumption patterns, economic structures, and cultural practices. The case studies of Rankin and Liechty illustrate the transformative impacts of globalization on Nepalese communities, particularly in terms of economic liberalization, commodification of culture, and changes in gender relations. These studies highlight the interconnectedness of globalization with local dynamics, unveiling both the opportunities and risks associated with the process.

In examining the experiences of globalization within a family, the text underscores the dual nature of its impact-bringing both opportunities and challenges. Social media and multinational products connect families globally, but at the same time, global risks in the economy and health issues arise from changing consumption patterns. In fact, the anthropological lens allows for a comprehensive understanding of globalization’s intricate dynamics, emphasizing the need for a more inclusive and context-specific approach. As Nepal navigates the complexities of globalization, anthropological insights provide valuable perspectives for comprehending the intertwined forces shaping the global and the local.

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