

# **The Homogenization of Globalization: The Survival of Animistic Religions in the Philippines**

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It is my belief that, while the homogenizing view of globalization persists, there is no need preclude the heterogenizing capability of globalization. As Roland Robertson would say, 'these should be combined' and 'are mutually implicative'. Thus, the general view that globalization homogenizes is indeed ambiguous.

In the case of animistic religions, the problem is not either the homogenization or the heterogenization of globalization but rather the ways these tendencies have become features of globalization in concrete cultures. For despite globalization, animistic religions appear and express themselves in unique and ethnic manner.

By borrowing Donald Jacobs' view on the concentric understanding of culture and Bank's approach to ethnicity as real, permanent, and characteristic of a conscious person, these pages will illustrate how and why animistic religions in the Philippines persists as a re-expression of that ethnic/cultural Identity. The cases brought here particularly show how these religions survived the homogenization of colonization,

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hence, their capacity to survive the homogenization tendency of today's globalization, too.

Thus, our two opening questions: *How does Globalization affect the culture of religions?* And in turn, *How do animistic religions in the Philippines react to Globalization?*

## 1. The Ambivalence of Culture and Globalization

Globalization, though initially seen and generally understood as an economic or business activity, has evolved and is fast becoming a culture itself. Consciously or unconsciously, these globalized economic and business processes themselves have developed their own socio-political categories, communication-language patterns, and are even creating their own value system among peoples.

Today, Culture and Globalization are being used with their contested and ambiguous meanings (Tomlinson 1999, 1). These ambivalences, therefore, should make us see the many and integral elements in the very meanings of both culture and globalization (Tanner 1997, 25-29). We can not afford a one sided outlook or perspective on these (Bombongan 2006, 1-19).

It is time to recognize the complex and multi-disciplinary realities of globalization. There is indeed the need to clarify the inter-disciplinary links to avoid ambiguities. Hence, it may be tactful not to compel ourselves singly to a homogenizing view of globalization (Pieterse 1995, 45-46). We may also have to consider a heterogenizing view of globalization and perhaps also consider a view where homogenization and heterogenization are 'mutually implicative' (Robertson 1995, 25-42). This essay particularly shows the heterogenizing tendencies of globalization in relation to the animistic religions in the Philippines.

Globalization, too, has its own ambivalences. And the apparently contradicting views on globalization seem to have become a basis for such ambivalence (Shboul 2006, 56-57). For instance:

- a. Globalization is perceived to have both the capacity of dividing and integrating the world (Robertson 1995, 25-30).
- b. From the economist's perspective, globalization is a neutral phenomenon or a network society open for cultural interaction. At the same time, in a capitalist-driven world view

economy, globalization is also a coordinated economic, strategic, and cultural program attempting to subjugate the whole world to American interests and those of transnational corporations (Shboul 2006, 45).

- c. From the point of view of culture, globalization is a cultural imperialism that homogenizes. But at the same time, globalization is also a heterogenizing phenomenon involving translation, mutation, adaptation and even hybridization (Bombongan 2006, 1-19).
- d. Although the homogenizing and heterogenizing trends of understanding globalization themselves are ambivalent, these seemingly opposing views can also be seen as complementary and even interpenetrative.
- e. Seen in the dynamics of the encounters of cultures, globalization promotes a globalized culture. At the same time, globalization is also viewed as one that hastens the hybridization or glocalization of culture (Robertson 1995, 25-42).

The ambivalence of globalization is further enhanced by its concurrent positive and negative effects in the economic, socio-political and cultural life of the peoples in the world (Hooker 2006, 4-6). For instance:

- a. Globalization is seen as one that eliminates the geographical distances of peoples through technology revolution. But it is also viewed as one that promotes the world division because of the rising inequality in technology access.
- b. At the economic level, globalization is likened to invasion and colonization controlled mostly by the transnational corporations. But because of the increased competitive pressure brought by globalization, it also creates a new market for opportunities by allowing local economies to be more connected to the rest of the world (homepages.nyu.edu 2007, world web).
- c. At the political level, while globalization is a process of penetration and weakening of cultural identity, at the same time globalization is creating emerging defenses for identities that lead to cultural particularities (Shboul 2006, 58-59).

- d. At the cultural level, people can not but recognize the positive values of globalization especially the improved communication between people and increase the interchange of ideas. The emergence of this new culture with its new psychology is evident. But one can not also deny the negative cultural offerings of globalization: the promotion of a culture of consumerism and decadence (Hooker 2006, 6-7).

## 2. The Contexts of Ambivalence in Understanding the Culture of Globalization

Both culture and globalization have their ambivalences. Let us try to understand their contexts.

### *a) The Context of Language: Universality and Specificity of Culture*

Dennis Erasga cautions that researchers do not only cease to be readers of contexts but are also ambivalent and fractured contexts themselves. They tend to unconsciously read texts and contexts within their own interpretative engagement. He suggests therefore a more 'reflexive engagement of textuality' to avoid ambivalences (2007, 45-57).

Depending on the context, anthropologists and social-scientists may use and understand 'culture' analogously (Scherer and Bevans 1999, 5-6). While culture may be generally understood (Tanner 1997, 25-29), culture, understood analogously, may also refer to a very specific culture or context (Deist 2002, 102-105). And it is also in this sense that some say that culture 'by its very nature, is plural' (Beabout 2007, world web). It is therefore important to understand and distinguish the contexts and connotations of culture. Inability to recognize the analogous use and the different contexts and meanings of culture may simply result into incoherent conclusions and misunderstandings.

The following text illustrate how the word "culture" may be used analogously and with two distinct meanings:

"Culture evokes many different words, terms and concepts: food, environmental influence, architecture, art, language, relationships, sexuality, humor, sports, education, communication,

politics, economics, power structures, conflict management, traditions, values, rituals, traditions, values, religion, worship, spirituality – indeed all aspects of human effort. *There is no way of being human without participating in culture, for it is through culture that identity is created.*” (World Council of Churches 1999, 200-201).

Globalization, used in different contexts and connotations, has its ambivalences, too (Pieterse 1995, 62-63). Recognizing also its analogous use (Suess 1999, 159-166) makes us realize that the homogenizing and heterogenizing connotations of globalization are but realities of these ambivalences of contexts and connotations. Hence, we need not just focus on the universality of the homogenizing character of the culture of globalization. Similar to a coin, we can not but also look at the other side: its heterogenizing capability. The homogenization tendency of understanding globalization therefore need not necessarily exclude heterogenization (Robertson, 25-42).

#### *b) The Context of ‘Dynamics of Culture’*

The ambivalence of understanding the culture of globalization can also be seen in the context of the ‘dynamics of culture.’ As culture communicates and interacts with other cultures, social changes happen. Receiving cultures may view, act and react differently (Tomlinson 1999, 1, 13, 22-25).

There is no guarantee that a message from one culture will be received by someone in another culture precisely in the way the sender intended it (Schreiter 1999, 63): Some cultures may promptly identify strongly with the dominating or incoming culture. Others offer cultural resistance. They take a posture of resistance in order to survive because of the threat by an alien force. Others offer cultural solidarity where while they struggle to show that they are unique, they also show acceptance to the dominating or incoming culture (Schreiter 72-73).

Similarly, peoples in the same culture may also react differently to the culture of globalization.

We have to recognize the complex and multi-disciplinary realities of globalization. Indeed, there is need to clarify its inter-disciplinary links to avoid ambiguities. It may be tactful not to compel ourselves singly to a homogenizing view of globalization (Pieterse 1995, 45-46).

It may also be timely to view globalization where homogenization and heterogenization are 'mutually implicative' (Robertson 1995, 25-42).

### **3. Globalization, Religion and Ethnicity**

Globalization is not only viewed as a capitalist-driven world view economy but also as colonizing cultural program attempting to subjugate the whole world to American interests and those of transnational corporations (Shboul 2006, 25). And how does the culture globalization affect religion and ethnicity?

Culture, identity and religion are related in many different ways. For one, religion can be imprinted or intertwined with culture. Conversely, culture can grow out of a particular religion, too. Secondly, as the notion of culture designates the specific difference of each group (Suess 1999, 166), it thus implies identity. Thirdly, religion can also be a directing dimension of culture and identity, too (World Council of Churches 1999, 200-201). All these again only show the complex links and inter-relationships of culture, religion and ethnicity. Discussing the impact of globalization to religion and identity is a multi-dimensional, complex and an inter-disciplinary issue.

For instance, the power of Information Technology influences not only cultures but the religion and the identity of local communities and cultures as well (World Council of Churches 1999, 214-216). As globalization comes in contact with religion and identity, deeply held beliefs and identities are challenged (Belita 2006, 197-199). As cultures begin to shake, traditions and religion become blurred, people return to an elementary core to withstand the assaults on their beliefs. And the core might be religion and/or ethnicity (Super and Turley 2006, 15).

It may be too early to predict the fate of religion in the midst of the homogenizing tendencies of globalization. In fact, ethnicity plays a powerful role especially when society undergoes transformation. And the force of survival and resistance to social, economic, political and cultural threats may take the form of identity or group awareness (Schreiter 1999, 63). Hence, in the midst of the homogenizing culture of globalization, ethnicity may become a real basis of glocalization, too. Ethnicity, however, has its own complexities. It is also shaped by other factors like ancestry, homeland, language, culture and religion, too (Super and Turley 2006, 169).

Religion is far too complex a phenomenon. If there is anything to learn from the previous efforts of ideologies and social movements to stamp out religion, it is they have failed. Religion, academic religionists and social theorists who try to obliterate religions forget how deeply entrenched religions are in culture. As it always has been for those who adhere to it, religion is the means of living our ultimate concerns. It is the path by which most humans derive meaning itself. And it may also be a directing dimension of Identity in a concrete culture (Super and Turley 2006, 169). Donald Jacobs views that a 'religious understanding of reality is at the heart of culture'. T. F. Zuern also sees the 'essential religious character of culture' (Shorter 1988, 37).

Can the homogenizing tendencies of globalization then conquer or tame religions?

More telling is the survival and growth of those religions usually called 'primal', indigenous, or animistic. Colonialism, urbanization, industrialization, and the new information revolution have not really destroyed these traditions (Super and Turley 2006, 169). Why? How?

Prof. Jose de Mesa (2000, 73-82) sees the animistic or primal religions in the Philippines as still operating in the people's minds and hearts. Using the term 'appropriation' in lieu of adaptation or syncretism, he observed how Christianity had been localized. By the locals' active appropriation of the Western Catholicism into their cultural-religious way of feeling, thinking and behaving, Christianity simply got Filipinized. Slowly but surely, Christian thought and practice has significantly been expressed in the indigenous ways of the people.

Let some facts also speak for themselves.

- a) In a study made by Andrea Katalin Molnar, a professor from Northern Illinois University Dekalb, USA, on Southeast Asian cultures, she concluded that their indigenous traditional religions have not only adapted, accommodated and transformed the cosmologies of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. They each modified them and practiced them in their unique and culturally specific manner. Anitu, which she calls as the core aspects of indigenous belief systems and cultural worldviews or simply as "remnants of animism", are significant operators in the maintenance cultural continuity and Identity in the Southeast Asian

Region regardless of Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim or Christian persuasion (2007, 94).

- b) In a study made by Rujaya Abhakorn involving different religions like Buddhism, Brahmanism or their different sects in Northern Lao PDR, Northern Thailand, part of Shan state in Myanmar and Xishuangbanna, in Yunnan, China who have animistic beliefs and practices, ethnic differences provided their own interpretations or inputs to the end result of their acculturation (2007, 15).
- c) In the Philippines, in a study made by Nenita Pambid Domingo, she observed that despite centuries of Christianization, many marginalized Filipinos remained basically with their indigenous animistic beliefs and managed to harmonize with the catholic faith through their creation of apocryphal myths and versions. In fact, this has led to around 50 different cults. This only shows how animism expressed their uniqueness and identity and how this belief also empowered the marginalized and poor in Philippine society (2007, 49).
- d) Ana Maria Theresa Labrador also observed how the indigenous religions reacted to colonizing religions. As she was doing her research in the Philippine Cordilleras, she noticed similar practices with the other groups in Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands. She found it amazing on how contemporary people manage and harmonize two religions in their lives. She even concludes that syncretism may not even be the apt term for such a phenomenon (2007, 80).
- e) In a study made by Felix Chan Lim and Betty Dee Makani-Lim (2008, 45- 55) on the effects of globalization to religions of employees of multinational corporations in six Asian Nations, the study concluded that religion has an extraordinary influence in their lives. Although they observed that “religion in the context of culture generally remains below the threshold of conscious awareness because of taken for granted assumptions... the study recognized “the strong undertow of religion in personal culture... contributing to the cultural diversity and religious pluralism in Asia.” They even noted how some companies supported the promotions of expressions of religious practices by providing time and

space for employees, make faith an integral part of their organizational philosophy, and provide programs for spiritual development. Their study also showed that employees who respect belief systems are more motivated, less likely to compromise their values, and are more able to commit themselves to their jobs (47, 50, 53-54).

#### **4. Conclusion**

These pages aim to show how centuries of colonialism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Christianity have not really homogenized and totally destroyed animistic religions. Despite the homogenizing attempts of the colonizing culture, animistic religions return to an elementary core to withstand the assaults on their beliefs. And the force of survival and resistance to social, economic, political and cultural threats took the form of ethnicity/identity or group awareness.

Globalization, as a new form of colonizing culture may have its homogenizing tendencies. While the homogenizing view of globalization persists, the author believes that, in the case of animistic religions, globalization need not preclude a heterogenizing view. Despite centuries of the colonizing culture of religions like Christianity, the indigenous or animistic belief systems in the Philippines continued, appeared and expressed themselves in a more unique and ethnic manner.

The general view that globalization homogenizes is indeed ambiguous. □