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"International interactions always result in the homogenization of culture." Discuss this statement. (16 marks)

An international interaction is an interaction between two different bodies of people, each united in descent, history, culture, or language, and inhabiting a particular territory, but not necessarily a particular sovereign state. International interactions continue to shape the modern world as it becomes more globalized (a growing interdependence of nations through increasing and more rapid exchanges of goods, technology, and capital). Homogenization is an effect of globalization where the diversity of cultural features is reduced as more prominent cultural customs, ideas, and values become diffused and popularized, thus leading to a certain degree of uniformity. Although homogenization is one possible result from international interactions, it is not the only possible outcome. Other possible outcomes including cultural hybridity and cultural reassertion.

The assimilationist theory suggests that as cultures interact, minority cultures will eventually cede to majority cultures and the entire population thus becomes homogenized under the customs, ideas, and values of the majority culture. Assimilation can occur from both strong and weak international interactions. An example of a strong interaction is cultural imperialism, where a specific culture, or in this case nation, imposes its customs, ideas, and values onto the minority group. At a more extreme scale, this can manifest itself as cultural genocide, where the majority culture or nation seeks to completely eradicate the cultural identity of the minority culture or nation in order to ease the imposition of its own culture. Such an example can be found in the Armenian genocide, which not only displays the characteristics of a cultural genocide but has also in recent years been considered a genocide in the broader sense. During World War I, the Ottoman empire sought to homogenize its subjects under the Turkish language and the religion of Islam. Seeing the Christian Armenians as an obstacle, the Turkish government ordered the death of about 1.5 million Armenians, and destroyed numerous important libraries, architecture, and monuments in an effort to eradicate the Armenian culture, leaving all material properties to new ethnically Turkish owners. This forceful attempt decimated the Armenian population within the Ottoman empire and almost entirely eradicated any sense of Armenian national identity. As such, the Ottoman empire became homogenized along the lines of a Muslim-practicing, Turkish-speaking nation of Turkish ethnicity.

However, the assimilationist interaction is equally inclusive of weaker and less purposeful international interactions, such as the trend of Westernization, a process where minority cultures are increasingly converting to the cultural customs, norms, and practices of Western civilization. Westernization is closely associated with globalization as the Western culture is often seen as the one being propagated by the process of globalization. This is evident in the media, by the influence companies such as CNN exert on a global scale. CNN’s worldwide news coverage now extends to over 200 countries, with 1,000 affiliated organizations worldwide and 36 editorial operations. To enhance is global reach, CNN has begun partnerships with broadcasting companies in Turkey, Indonesia, and the Phillipines to enhance its global reach. The result is that Western media organizations such as CNN can passively promote Western ideals and values across the world to entice minority cultures to engage and eventually convert to the Western cultural identity. Another feature of globalization is technological standardization. One specific example of how this process has taken place is the technological standardization spearheaded by the American company Apple with its iPhone, MacBook, and iPad products. As a financially-oriented decision, Apple chooses to produce most of its products in select few places around the world such as China, mostly characterized for their cheaper labor sources. Due to the common origin of its products, as well as the incentive to promote a specific image for branding purposes, Apple products tend to remain consistent and unchanged across the world. Therefore, customers of Apple tend to have a uniform selection of products globally, and they all become participants in the cultural and technological identity of the Apple brand. The shared adoption of technology across the world contributes to a homogenized technological cultural identity.

Another theory is the acculturation theory. This theory is compatible with the assimilation theory in that it includes the assimilation of a minority culture into a majority culture. However, this only happens at a partial scale, and simultaneously there is at least some preservation of the minority cultural or national identity, resulting in hybrid cultures, or cultural hybridity. Strong evidence for acculturation can be found in the glocalization approach taken by transnational corporations such as McDonald’s, where the local customs, values, and traditions of the place of service are blended into the global standards of the larger international enterprise. In India, McDonald’s has decided to adapt to the religious customs in place, with respect to the Muslim prohibition of pork products and the Hindu view of cattle as holy animals. Therefore, instead of serving Big Macs and its other famous beef products, McDonald’s adopts Indian cuisine into its recipes in the case of the Chicken Maharaja Mac, and the McAloo Tikki (a burger with a potato-filled parry). In addition, McDonald’s continues to serve its own traditional products such as the Chicken McNuggets. Henceforth, McDonald’s growth in India to over 300 franchises demonstrates the ability of two different cultural ideals to exist in hybrid states when interacting with each other. To further this point, McDonald’s also provides select glocalized specialties such as the Kiwiburger in New Zealand, the McLobster in Canada, and Le Croque McDo in France and Belgium to satisfy local demands in accordance to their respective cultural values. McDonald’s ability to be flexible and listen to the demands of its consumers at the regional levels has benefitted them greatly as the company has grown across the world, causing hybrid cultures through its glocalization methods.

One other form of response to international interactions is the autarkist response, characterized as a strong reaction of a culture against a threat, or at least a perceived threat, from another culture. The autarkist process often leads to multiple localized cultures and ends up creating a heterogenous cultural landscape. On an international scale, this can be seen in the form of a wave of nationalist movements in response to globalization. One example of this is Brexit, the British referendum and subsequent agreement to leave the European Union, a multinational governmental organization policing trade, education, labor, and transport across multiple European nations. The European Union, since its inception, has sought to bring European Nations together in policy as well as labor bases to increase the collective strength of its member states, arguably creating a homogenous European culture, and thus the origin of the nationalist response by the British against the European Union. As part of the campaign in favor of the movement to leave the European Union, politicians engaged in a campaign to create a perception of a threat that the European Union posed to its own culture. This perception was based on conflicts with the customs and laws of the European Union, both financially and socially. Additionally, and perhaps more controversially, the movement also perceived a threat from the influx of immigrants from European Union nations posed to the United Kingdom. Despite having decided to join the EU four decades prior, the movement to leave was successful and the British public voted in favor of the exit from the British Union. This distanced the United Kingdom from the educational systems of other European nations and makes it harder for workers to be exchanged in between the United Kingdom and European Union nations. The result of autarkism is a more localized British culture, and on the wider scale of the European continent, a more heterogenous landscape as less countries are united under the shared customs, laws, and values of the European Union.

Overall, the statement that international interactions always result in the homogenization of cultures fails to consider the outcomes of hybrid cultures and heterogenous cultures which can be formed through the process of acculturation and autarkism respectively. Although homogenization is a possible, and even frequent, outcome of international interactions, it cannot be stated as the sole outcome in face of the other possibilities available, such as the cultural hybridization and heterogenization.