“International interactions always result in the homogenisation of culture.” Discuss this statement.

Theo

Culture is the way of life or characteristics of a group of people. Homogenisation of culture is when different cultural practices become intertwined, and more similar to one. It refers to reduction in cultural diversity through the popularisation and diffusion of a wide array of cultural symbols. In today’s shrinking world, due to advancements in globalisation through technology, there is a stronger amount of homogenisation of culture than ever before. A large reason for this is the increased level of international interactions, which in a lot of occasions creates a homogenisation of culture.

In countries outside of the United States, Americanisation is the intense influence of American culture on their own media, cuisine, business practices, popular culture and technology. Of the top 10 biggest global brands in the world, 7 are based in the United States of America. Coca-Cola, the number one brand, is a symbol of Americanisation. As of 2012, it is sold in every single country in the world except of North Korea and Cuba. It has overtaken market dominance away from local brands, such as Inca Cola in Peru. This has overall lead to a situation where the culture around the globe has unified, as the American culture of Coca Cola has begun to dominate. A similar example of Americanisation can be seen in the fast food industry, such as McDonalds, and in the movie industry, with Hollywood movies such as Avengers: Infinity War becoming the fastest movie ever to reach 1 billion dollars in total revenue, primarily due to its success in places like China and South America.

 A large reason for this shift in American culture is due to the increased level of interaction the United States has with the rest of the world. The United States has the largest economy in the world, and many of its most successful firms branch out to global markets in the form of Foreign Direct Investment. This is a form of international interaction that has triggered the large homogenisation of culture. The advancement of the internet has allowed streaming services to develop, allowing American TV shows and movies to be easily accessed globally, creating large international fanbases for shows like Game of Thrones and Breaking Bad. Once again, an advancement in technology has allowed international interactions to take place, resulting in the homogenization of culture.

However, global interactions do not always lead to a homogenisation of culture, as shown by some of the largely successful American companies. McDonalds is located in 119 countries around the world. However, one country it has struggled to assimilate in is the Philippines. Local fast food chain Jollibee has been a dominant force in the country since the 1970s. While its menu, featuring fried Chicken and Burgers, could be seen as an example of the Americanisation of food culture, McDonalds has failed to gain market share due to the menu of Jollibee catering more so to the cultural identity and tastes of the Philippines. A popular item on the menu is Spaghetti and tomato, a popular dish in the Philippines and a staple of fast food. The restaurant chain embraces the restaurant culture of the Philippines, and remained unique compared to the dominant Americanisation seen in other countries, preventing homogenisation of culture despite increased international interactions between the Philippines and America.

There is often a middle ground between completely unique elements of local and culture, and full on homogenisation of culture. Glocalisation is a portmanteau of the words globalisation and localisation. It is when a TNC (transnational corporations) adapts their line of products to be more successful in different cultural backgrounds. An example is Nike's Pro Hijab range, which is designed to encourage Muslim women to participate in sport. While in a way this can be seen as the homogenisation of culture towards the American brand Nike, the Hijab is an element of culture that is being preserved and remaining unique, preventing complete homogenisation. Another example is the adaptation McDonalds in India. There are 36,000 Mcdonalds franchises around the world, and in order to ensure quality and uniformity the franchisee must follow strict guidelines on operating methods and use standardised McDonald’s menus, logos and design layouts. In India, Mcdonalds’ first restaurant opened in 1996 in New Delhi and the company agreed not to sell pork or beef products. The Indian equivalent of the Big Mac, the Maharaja Mac, is made from chicken. In 2003, only 1.5% of meals were eaten out so to encourage Indians to do this more frequently prices were reduced. The Aloo Tikki burger, made using potatoes, peas and spices, could be bought for only 20 rupees (US$0.3). It is hard to consider this an example of homogenisation, as despite the diffusion of American culture in India, pure homogenisation was impossible due to the culture in India being too different to that in America. 71% of Indians are vegetarian, compared to 5% in the United states. The cultural differences have remained despite international interactions between the two countries.

Cultural uniqueness is often maintained despite international interactions due to the formation of Diaspora, the dispersion of people who share a common racial, ethnic or cultural identity from their homeland. An iconic example of a Diaspora is a China Town. The Chinese can be found in 136 countries; the largest concentrations are in Indonesia with 7.7 million and Thailand with 7.1 million. According to the 2010 US Census, the city with the largest concentration of ethnic Chinese outside of Asia is New York City with 682,265 individuals. In a China town, Chinese customs and traditions such as Chinese new year are celebrated, and Chinese business operate in a similar manner to the way they do in China. There is little loss in Chinese culture despite the global interaction of migration occurring. However, it could be argued that since the foreign country is gaining the Chinese culture, that country is becoming more like China and the culture is become homogenized. Acculturation is when a group adopts the cultural traits of another but keeps some of its own characteristics. Chinese and non Chinese people are both accepting characteristics of the other while keeping to their routes. This does mean that the culture is becoming more similar overall.

Overall, international interactions often lead to the homogenisation of culture. However, there are still limits to how similar the culture between two places can get, as shown by Mcdonalds in India, so an element of cultural uniqueness remains. In the form of glocalisation, an entirely new type of culture is formed, separate to both countries. Cultural assimilation is the process in which a minority group or culture comes to resemble those of a dominant group. An example being the cultural genocide of native Americans. But these days, despite increased international interactions, there is a greater effort to preserve different cultures when dealing with indigenous tribes in Brazil or Indonesia for example. Once again, despite global interactions occurring, the culture is remaining unique and different. This can be a conscious effort made due to mistakes in the past, or due to fundamental differences between cultures that cannot be breached, at least in the short term. It is difficult to say if eventually those differences will decrease, but due to rapid development of the world and situations like glocalisation being possible, it is unlikely the world’s culture is ever truly homogenised.