

Introduction to
Anthropology:
Holistic and Applied
Research on Being
Human

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MODULE 11: CULTURE CHANGE AND GLOBALIZATION

Culture Change

Although cultures are often discussed as if they're discrete units, cultures do not have clear and identifiable boundaries. **Culture** addresses a range of learned behaviors and traits such as language, dress, food, eating habits, rites of passage, and appropriate behaviors. Culture is also like an iceberg. We can observe much on the surface, particularly when something occurs that is obviously different from the way that we operate in our home culture, but there is much below the surface that is not evident to outsiders.

This tacit culture, or the things that are not immediately visible, like values (beliefs about what is important, right, or good) and mental maps that we have of the world, are harder to discern. However, these aspects are critical for informing our perceptions about how cultural operates, why they present the way they do, and how different aspects are related to each other. When we discuss cultures, we generally summarize common traits that apply to most individuals within that culture. The more aspects of a culture we try to clearly articulate, the less likely an individual associated with a particular

culture will match all criteria. Additionally, we must be cognizant of several considerations:

1. Cultures are reinforced by people, who have unique experiences even within that culture.
2. Cultures do not exist in isolation.
3. Cultures are not static and unchanging.
4. People may associate with multiple cultures throughout their life.
5. Culture is closely linked to systems of power that structure the relationships and distribution of resources between groups of people.

For example, you might find it difficult to articulate what characterizes “typical” American culture. If you made a list of traits that represents Americans, you might include things like the American English language, Christianity, baseball, and the right to pursuit happiness. However, such a list would be misleading because Americans speak many languages, practice different religious beliefs, play many sports, and experience challenges and impediments to their pursuits. Additionally, the importance of these traits has changed over time. The same is true of *any* cultural group.

American English became distinct from British English by the Revolutionary War. Today, more than 24 dialects of American English are identified across the U.S., demonstrating that even the English language is used and spoken in a variety of ways (see Module 12: Communication and Language). However, English is not the official language of the United States. In fact, the U.S. doesn’t have an official language. More than half of states have adopted English as their official language, but at least three states have multiple official languages — Hawaii recognizes Hawaiian Pidgin English, South Dakota recognizes Sioux, and Alaska recognizes more than 20 indigenous languages. Approximately 90% of the U.S. population speaks or understands some English, and most official business is conducted in

English, but the Census Bureau estimates that more than 300 languages are spoken within the United States. Until World War I, German was the second most common language in the United States. However, in more recent decades, other languages, such as Spanish and Vietnamese, have become increasingly common.

The popular idea that English is the official language of the United States is an example of **hegemony**. As described in the Module 12: Communication and Language, people rank different dialects as more or less correct and prestigious because groups of people who speak those dialects are also ranked. There is nothing inherently better or worse about different dialects, but they are viewed socially as a mark of status or power. Furthermore, with the uneven distribution of resources across the United States (and world; see Module 13: Economics, Politics, and Inequality), people can come to see that unevenness as natural or deserved and associate it with particular cultural traits. Despite the fallacy of these ideas, this is one way that culture works, and it normalizes stratification or hierarchy. It inherently privileges some groups over others in ways that are not readily identifiable to people within the system, particularly, if they are benefitting from it.

The United States was founded on principles of religious freedom as people fled religious persecution in Europe. However, for decades, Americans have debated the role of religion in public schools, particularly fighting to incorporate specific Christian beliefs into the classroom, while excluding other belief systems or scientific principles (see Module 4: Evolution and Genetics and Module 18: Religion). Christianity is practiced by only 71% of Americans, with Evangelical Protestant and Catholic among the most dominant denominations. However, the percentage of individuals practicing Christianity has been declining across all U.S. demographics. Today, more than a quarter of Americans practice non-Christian religions or have no religious affiliation, demonstrating that religion is not a uniting character trait of American culture.

Although baseball is traditionally considered America's pastime and was developed in the United States before the Civil War, it's not the most popular sport played or watched in the United States today. Baseball became an integral part of American identity and life during the formative years of the

country, particularly as Euro-Americans sought to differentiate themselves from their English and German counterparts. The profound impacts of this can be observed by the ubiquity of baseball phrases, such as “out in left field” or “thrown a curve ball,” used in American vernacular. However, since the 1960s, American culture has experienced dramatic changes. Among those, football has become increasingly popular and surpassed baseball as America’s pastime. In 2013, football was ranked by most adults (34%) as their favorite sport in comparison to the 16% of adults that named baseball as their favorite (see Figure 11.1).



Figure 11.1. Depiction of popular American sports, baseball (left) and football (right). Images from Wikimedia Commons.

Finally, discriminatory legislation has limited people’s ability to the pursuit happiness and divided people since the founding of the country (see Module 13: Economics, Politics, and Inequality, Module 16: Race, and Module 19: Human Rights). Home ownership, for example, has been traditionally viewed as an accomplishment that represents financial stability and fulfilment of the American Dream. However, zoning legislation impacts how people can use and occupy land. Historically, many zoning ordinances were designed to racially segregate neighborhoods and produce economic disparity. Although such findings were deemed unconstitutional and legislation has been adjusted, similar practices continue to this day under various guises. Discrimination in housing access continues to be a contentious issue in the United States.

These examples demonstrate the inefficacy of clearly articulating what it means to be American or part of any culture, including the Dine/Navajo,

Neur, Maasai, !Kung San, Tongva, Mosuo, Hmong, Afro-Brazilians, and other groups mentioned throughout this resource. Identifying a core of cultural traits focuses on commonalities, but it ignores the breadth and diversity of traits, behaviors, practices, histories, and experiences unique to the people within a culture. It also ignores the dynamic aspects of cultures and only focuses on one snapshot in time and space of a culture's existence. Cultures are constantly changing in response to internal and external stimuli.

Generalizations are necessary to condense and process complex topics, but they must not be taken as all-encompassing descriptions. Cultural generalizations, ultimately, only present a single story (see Module 1: What is Anthropology?) and can lead to caricatures or oversimplistic **stereotypes**. For the remainder of this module, we will discuss some of the ways that cultures change, and the various ways groups interact on global platforms.

Mechanisms of Culture Change

Although cultures have distinct identities, they are continuously in flux. Cultures seek to strike a balance between maintaining identity and responding to change. Change can arise within a society, between multiple societies, or from non-human forces in the environment. These changes may reflect the incorporation or loss of objects, ideas, or behaviors. For example, changes in language, religious, and sports preferences have been documented within American culture.

People from different cultures and backgrounds have interacted throughout history, circulating themselves, objects, and ideas that influence and are influenced in various ways. These influences and interactions can be deconstructed and understood using a few basic concepts such as diffusion, acculturation, and transculturation. These concepts provide simplified ways of understanding human interactions, but rarely (if ever) do these forces work in isolation.

Diffusion refers to the incorporation of new ideas and behaviors from one culture to another. For example, sushi has a long history in southeast Asia and Japan, but it has only recently infiltrated the American economy and its cuisine, leading to modifications of sushi styles adapted to local palates

(see below). Another example is how agriculture first developed in Mesopotamia but spread into Europe and Africa as other groups saw the benefits of controlling plant and animal growth (see Module 9: Development of Agriculture).

Acculturation represents the loss of culture that occurs through efforts such as **assimilation** and **syncretism**. With assimilation, one cultural traits are lost on a large-scale and replaced by the characteristics of a dominating culture. Often, this is a forced process by the dominating cultural rather than a natural loss occurring. European colonialization represents some of the most well-known and widespread assimilation efforts. In North America, indigenous students attended boarding schools, where they were required to adopt the English language, Christianity, and European styles of dress. Students were severely punished or killed for not adhering to school standards. These assimilating boarding schools are particularly poignant examples of assimilation that descendent groups are still dealing with today. Despite efforts to resist change, many indigenous groups saw a severe deterioration in cultural values, language, and beliefs within a generation (see Module 2: A Brief History of Anthropology).

In Brazil, enslaved individuals found other ways to present a face of acculturation while maintaining their core beliefs during colonialization periods. **Candomblé** is a spiritual movement practiced among some Afro-Brazilian groups that represents resistance to assimilation (see Figure 11.2). Today, more than 2 million people practice Candomblé. During the Transatlantic Slave Trade, enslaved individuals were often forced to assimilate and adopt Christian values upon arrival in the Americas. On the surface, these enslaved populations converted to Christianity, but many people were able to keep the heart of their religious beliefs alive through syncretism. Candomblé represents a fusion of west African, indigenous, and Christian beliefs, and it appeared that practitioners were adhering to Christian religions and values. For example, Catholic saints were conflated with **orixas**, or west African deities. In other words, the personalities of deities were matched with Christian saints, and enslaved people were able to continue worshiping their gods under the guise of praying to saints. For example: St. Barbara, the patron saint of miners and invoked in thunderstorms, is merged with Iansã, the deity of winds and storms, lightning, and fire.



Figure 11.2. Caetite baianas, associated with Candomble religions. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

These practices result in **cultural hybridity**, where people strive to balance the values, traditions, and practices of multiple cultures. These hybridizing practices can be seen in colonization efforts or among immigrant groups as people accommodate to new spaces and experiences, while attempting to maintain their indigenous identities. Often, one culture is relegated to a marginal identity as it combines with a new or more dominant cultural form. Language is an especially important component of cultural hybridity, and this process can be observed through the formation of hybridized **pidgin** and **creole** languages during acculturation and colonization efforts (see Module 12: Communication and Language).

However, marginalized cultures do not die easy, even in the face of assimilative practices. Candomblé, today, represents a **revitalization** movement. Revitalization movements involve the restoration of indigenous traditions, practices, or languages with the goal of regaining a community identity that has been lost or is dying. Researchers suggest that these

movements result from changing perceptions of realities, and religion often plays a pivotal role. Today, Candomblé practitioners fight for religious freedom and recognition because of its condemnation by the Catholic Church from the early days of this syncretic practice. Until the 1970s, the church and government partook in violent persecution methods of practitioners to extinguish this belief system. Since then, the number of practitioners has flourished, despite many non-practitioners viewing Candomblé as a harmful belief system because it doesn't adhere to a strict concept of good versus evil and has possession traditions.



Video 11.1. Check out the video from Washington Post presenting a look inside the world of Candomblé.

This inflamed conflict between Candomblé and Christian religions highlights the power that such cultural institutions have over people. Culture relates to power because it keeps us from seeing things that are hidden in plain sight, such as the fact that ideas of good and evil are culturally derived. Our mental maps of the world take certain relationships as normal, natural, or inevitable, but these relationships are cultural. Once we start examining outside the lens of our own culture, we can see that our cultural norms and behaviors aren't natural or universal but formed *by* culture.

Transculturation, another type of cultural hybridity, represents the co-existence of distinct cultural identities. This can refer to immigrants who adopt local languages, dress, and practices, but still maintain their original cultural identity. For example, an individual who was born in Korea may immigrate to America, learn to speak English, and wear Western clothing but still speak Korean at home, among friends, or to their relatives. They may wear Korean-style clothing in certain situations, such as rites of passage or holidays, and maintain their own religious beliefs.

Anthropology and Globalization

There is no such thing as a “pure” traditional culture that isn’t impacted or influenced by external groups or forces. Mechanisms of culture change have been in effect as long as humans have existed. Additionally, people and cultures aren’t passive recipients of change. As suggested above, people choose whether they adopt new ideas and how to modify and use new technologies. Unfortunately, early anthropologists helped romanticize “authentic” native cultures around the world as people disconnected or isolated from the rest of the world and leading “primitive” ways of life. These problematic ideas reflect popular understandings that anthropologists are working to change. These perspectives ignore the fact that no culture is or has ever been truly isolated or existed in a “pure” form.

Traditionally, the term globalization illuminates the fallout of colonialization and ongoing processes of **Westernization**. Today, we see examples of this all around us. From Pizza Huts within view of the Great Pyramid of Giza to Starbucks along the Great Wall of China, we recognize the interconnectivity of cultures across the world. Implicit in these observations, however, is the belief that there are authentic ways to engage with cultures. This harkens back to a belief in “pure” tradition and forces us to reconsider cultural interactions and their impacts.

Studying globalization from the vantage point of cultural anthropology raises questions about **homogenization** and Westernization. As more cultures become connected—their politics, economics, religions, and other structures—it raises the question if people and cultures are becoming more similar. As Westernization becomes more widespread, some worry that homogenization has become synonymous with globalization. On the one hand, people are swept up in the global economy as consumers in ways that have profoundly altered traditional livelihoods around the world. But on the other hand, a visit to the Pizza Hut that overlooks the Great Pyramids quickly reveals that this restaurant doesn’t hold much resemblance to the local Pizza Hut in a typical U.S. neighborhood. Through processes of **indigenization**, new things are adapted and made meaningful in local ways that are similar to how foods are glocalized to be locally significant.

For example, McDonald's is the world's largest fast food chain restaurant, found in more than 100 countries, and serving an estimated 68 million customers around the world every day. The menus, however, vary significantly from country to country based on preferences and cultural values (see Figure 11.3). In the United States, the Big Mac, a burger consisting of two beef patties between sesame-seed buns with special sauce, is one of their flagship products. However, this menu item (and many others) isn't acceptable in India, where beef isn't served due to religious beliefs. Instead, Indian McDonald menus feature other options like the Chicken Maharaja Mac or the McAloo Tikki. Germany offers the breaded McShrimp, Japan has a breaded seafood patty called the Gracoro Burger, and in the Philippines, you can order a McSpaghetti. These changes are examples of **glocalization**, the practice of conducting business according to local and global considerations. While the menu and theme stay true to the spirit of McDonald's, the menu is locally palatable. This extends to many aspects of life (social, political, and economic), and represents the complicated universal and local concerns that impact global interactions.



Figure 11.3. Examples of McDonald's menu items around the world, the Big Mac (left) and Maharaja Mac (right). Because beef is not frequently consumed in India, the Maharaja Mac features chicken patties. Images from Wikimedia Commons.

However, there is a difference between adapting palates versus profiting on minority groups. Such concerns arise when outsiders market and use aspects of another culture inappropriately and for their own benefit. Indian McDonald's do not market themselves as Indian cuisine; they are still McDonald's, adapted to local tastes. Modifying cuisine in a fast-food chain

is different than, say, marketing a restaurant as serving “authentic Indian cuisine” when neither the owners nor chefs have any Indian heritage or culinary training. Appreciating aspects of another culture is one thing but misrepresenting and earning money using other cultures is a form of **cultural appropriation**.

Identifying cultural appropriation can be difficult, but it often relates to imbalances in power. Cultural appropriation refers to a majority group adopting cultural aspects from a minority group without permission or giving consideration to how the majority culture profits while simultaneously exploiting the less dominant culture by emphasizing inaccurate stereotypes and/or presenting other disrespectful attitudes. One should consider who is profiting (financially and/or socially) from a cultural depiction and be attentive to how the less dominant culture reacts.

For example, clothing and jeweler designers are often accused of borrowing indigenous designs or techniques without acknowledging the indigenous cultures. The products retail with relatively high price tags, but the proceeds stay within the company and do not go to the local artisans from whom these methods were borrowed. It has been equivocated with plagiarism. In 2021, Anthropologie was one of several companies, including Zara and Patowl, who were accused of appropriating and selling clothing designed based on indigenous Mexican cultures, patterns, and symbols. The Mexican government demanded compensation for the indigenous tribes for the unethical exploitation of indigenous cultures. They also advocated that companies utilize an ethical framework and work directly with local artisans.

Finally, the idea of globalization can be expanded to include interactions between non-European groups and identify macro-scale interactions in the archaeological record. Although pre-Colonial interactions are not comparable in terms of scale and impact to later post-colonial interactions, these networks also resulted in significant local innovations. Consider the extent of the Roman Empire or the impacts of the Silk Road that stretched across Asia. These had global, multi-cultural interactions in their times. Therefore, **globalization** may be best understood as the mutually influencing articulation of global processes with local practices, where global refers to macro-scale connections from economically independent regions of

the world. Most cultures known today are or have been impacted by global processes, and interest in these distant interactions may have been fueled by trade interests, wealth accumulation, religious beliefs, and/or confirmation of political power and prestige. By recognizing the humanity and complexity of all people around the world, we can better appreciate the impacts of global cultural interactions.



Video 11.2. Check out the video from Tracy Michaud discussing impacts of globalization on tourism.

Impacts of Globalization

Globalization impacts cultures in fascinating ways. It contributes to the “shrinking” of the world and allows people to emphasize more immediate returns. It has increased the interconnectivity of the world and disclosed new ideas and practices that people might not otherwise experience. However, it can also be a double-edged sword. Globalization has exposed people to new diseases and helped pandemics, such as COVID-19, spread throughout the world. People, therefore, understandably debate whether globalization does more harm or good for a culture. In reality, it’s a double-edged sword. There are advantages and disadvantages to interacting in global communities that can lead to the homogenization and distinction of cultures. It largely depends on one’s perspective.

For example, travel by aircraft allows people to connect much sooner than most other forms of travel. In his research on the global sushi market, Theodore Bestor discussed how an appetite for sushi- and sashimi-quality bluefin tuna led to changes in global fishing markets after international environmental campaigns forced Japan to restrict their fishing operations. What was once considered a sports fish in New England, with little commercial value, soon became a prize export from the 1970–90s as the Japanese sushi business surged and spread to global markets (leading also to globalized forms of sushi around the world). This **time-space compression**, where sushi can be caught in Maine and shipped to Tokyo for sale within two days, is a common theme in globalization. Bestor follows commodity chains

and markets to demonstrate the complexities of a spatially discontinuous, but tightly connected, hierarchy of production and consumption.

We can see this in more immediate ways in our own lives. Advances in communication technologies, such as internet speeds, increases the speed of our social lives. We know within seconds about major global events thanks to the internet, despite the thousands of physical miles that may separate us from an event. In effect, increased communication and transportation speeds negate the impacts of space. We are connected, no matter the distance.

This compression also impacts production and economics (see Module 13: Economics, Politics, and Inequality). Once, goods were mass produced in a single location, such as vehicles in Detroit. However, this model is no longer efficacious in a global capitalist market. Instead, components are now produced more cost-effectively in multiple places throughout the world, leading to decreased production and consumption costs, as well as increased availability (and the subsequent economic decline of cities like Detroit). This shift to **flexible accumulation** leads to more frequent and quicker consumption. Compounding this, when people can acquire such goods through loans or credit, they can delay payments for expensive products to the future while enjoying those products in the present. In other words, this strategy allows for innovative technologies, accelerated communication and transportation, and increased profits for producers. It also leads to an unequal distribution of wealth and resources, as some regions become zones of resource extraction, and others become zones of resource consumption. There is now tremendous wealth inequality between and within nations; half the world's population is living in poverty. Things and people may travel more quickly in our global era, but this travel is shaped by profound inequality as some people can travel the world easily for work or pleasure, but others face extreme restrictions on social and spatial mobility.

We can also examine the advantages of disadvantages of globalization in other ways. Irish cultural identity, as it's understood today, emerged during the colonialization period as a means of distinguishing the Irish from the English and from Christian religions. As English values, religions, politics, and economics became pervasive throughout the country, some Irish communities sought to resist and assert their cultural nationalism through

their own language, religion, song, dance, and other practices. Irish culture was purposefully constructed to embody Irish heritage.

However, that heritage has been continually repurposed through time. By the late 1900s, Ireland's national and religious goals moved from asserting identity to emphasizing large-scale economic, political, and social advancement on the global stage. Phenomena such as Riverdance, based on traditional Irish stepdance, took the world by storm, and used Irish traditions to push the nation into global echelons. Today, Irish culture proliferates across the U.S., primarily in the form of Irish pubs, Guinness beer, and St. Patrick's Day. The culture has been highly commoditized with people of all backgrounds participating in these events and imbibing libations. And while some people lament the loss of traditional language, song, and dance suggests that this globalized expression is a farce of Irish culture, other people suggest that this repurposing and retooling has helped Irish culture stay alive when it might have otherwise disappeared through assimilation efforts.

The impacts of globalization are visible in other ways, too. The infamous Irish Potato Famine of 1845 only existed because of globalization. Potatoes have such a strong association with Irish culture, even though they were domesticated on the other side of the world (see Module 9: Development of Agriculture). Potatoes were introduced to Europe during the Colonial Period, and Ireland adopted this plant to help feed its growing population. However, they adopted one type of potato with low genetic diversity. Essentially, these plants were clones, and while identical plants can help increase crop yields in the short term, this also meant that all identical potato plants were susceptible to the same diseases and environmental challenges.

In 1845, a fungus-like organism (*Phytophthora infestans*) spread throughout Ireland's potato crops and persisted for several years. Because of their low genetic diversity, the disease destroyed up to 75% of national crops over several years, and more than a million people died of starvation or epidemic disease between 1846 and 1851, and another million people left Ireland as refugees. Although Ireland was growing other types of food that could have fed its people, these crops were being exported to England for profit. While this example highlights the continuously changing and interconnected aspects of culture and heritage on a global stage, it also demonstrates that

globalization is more than just an exchange of people, products, and ideas. It is also about cultural values, barriers, unequal distribution of global goods, and other challenges.

Examples of Globalization in the Archaeological Record

In the Americas, extensive trade networks that spanned numerous geographic and cultural regions existed at various times prior to and after European Contact. Examples include the long-distance interactions and metallurgy adoption between parts of Mesoamerica and South America, the Hopewellian Interaction Sphere that developed in the Ohio River valley, and the global fur trade.

The North American fur trade involved multi-faceted interactions between European and indigenous American groups (see Figure 11.4). It provided the foundation for economic and colonial relationships between these peoples and led to indigenous Americans entering the global economic market. European demand for furs, such as beaver and sea otter, led to competitive trade and was one of the primary motivations for extensive European exploration and settlement of North America. Indigenous Americans entered the market between the 16th and 19th centuries as the demand for animal pelts and skins grew around the world.



Figure 11.4. Stapleton’s “Raddison and Groseillers Established the Fur Trade in the Great North West, 1662.” Image from Wikimedia Commons.

In particular, the maritime fur trade rose in popularity along the Pacific coast with Russian, British, and various indigenous groups hunting and trading from the Aleutian Islands of Alaska to northern California. While English colonists settled the Atlantic coast of North America, Russian explorers ventured into Siberia, the Bering Strait, and the Aleutian Islands. Fueled by their interests in the fur trade, Russian companies expanded hunting and trapping operations along the Pacific Northwest coast, exporting an average of 62,000 fur pelts per year by the early 1800s.

Numerous Russian trading posts and forts were established in Alaska starting in the 1740s. Alaska's cold, remote location meant that Russian explorers were not disturbed by other European groups for decades. However, over time, animal populations declined in the North Pacific, sailing vessels were damaged or lost in storms, and the high costs of voyages increased. Subsequently, Russian traders moved their efforts south. Fort Ross was established in 1812, approximately 90 miles (145 km) north of San Francisco, representing the southernmost Russian settlement in North America. The fort facilitated marine fur trading and supplied more northerly Russian settlements with produce and other resources.

Fort Ross represented a business venture. It was established in the native lands of the Kashaya Pomo people, through negotiations between Russians and the Kashaya Pomo. Unlike many other European settlements in the region, there were minimal forced migrations, missionization, and acculturation efforts. Instead, Russian, Aleut, and Kashaya Pomo peoples cooperated for several decades to maintain Fort Ross and their business ventures.

This example provides insight into transculturation practices. The Kashaya Pomo and Aleut hunters were indigenous groups from California and the Aleutian Islands. The Aleutians were marine hunters who paddled the coast in skin kayaks, hunting seal and sea otters for the Russians. The Kashaya Pomo were hunter-gatherers who lived in central California, subsisting on a range of marine and terrestrial resources. They were hired by the Russians for manual labor, maintenance, and farming at the fort.

These indigenous groups entered the global fur market, but they were not forced to assimilate to work with Russian settlers. Kashaya Pomo archaeological deposits demonstrate continuity before and after Russian arrival, and archaeological sites display similar layouts, technologies and practices that remain consistent over time with food deposits suggesting similar diets. Multi-cultural influences are also seen in other ways such as European artifacts identified at sites after Russian arrival, predominantly glass and ceramic pottery. These artifacts were often modified using indigenous methods, indicating that they were incorporated and adapted to fit the Kashaya Pomo's needs. Written records also report that many Kashaya Pomo learned to speak Russian. They adopted portions of Russian culture and occasionally intermarried with Russians or Aleuts.

The core of what it meant to be Kashaya Pomo remained intact through decades of interactions. Even after the fort dissolved and Russian settlers left the area, the Kashaya Pomo remained in the area. However, as other European groups moved in later and land became privatized, significant changes were seen to the Kashaya Pomo culture as missionization and assimilation efforts became concentrated in these areas. With land access restricted and changes in local occupations and policies, many Kashaya Pomo integrated with Anglo-American lifestyles in a way that had not been necessary during the Fort Ross period.

In summary, globalization is not a new concept. Although the scale and pace of globalization has increased significantly in recent decades, people have connected on large-scale platforms throughout human history. The Russian and indigenous American interactions of the Pacific Northwest illustrate an example of mutual globalization and transculturation efforts in the archaeological record. It demonstrates how indigenous groups were influenced by global concerns, such as the fur market, and were able to articulate those concerns with their local practices. They negotiated with outside groups in a way that was mutually beneficial for all parties. Furthermore, entering the global fur market did not result in a loss of indigenous cultures for the Kashaya Pomo and Aleut groups. Instead, we can observe how they incorporated select aspects of outside cultures to facilitate these ventures.

Cultural Anthropology and Globalization

Archaeology shows the long history of interconnection, migration, and exchange that has shaped human social life. This approach helps challenge the concept of isolated culture groups, and an understanding of culture as something that is pure, authentic, traditional, and unchanging. People are enmeshed in webs of global interaction, many of which are asymmetrical, and culture can be thought of as an adaptive toolkit to survive in the world. If this is the case, how do we research these contemporary entanglements?

Globalization may not be a new concept, but we are increasingly drawn into webs of global interaction. Our skills for understanding and navigating these cross-cultural interactions need to keep pace as we encounter cultural diversity in our lives today from media and music, to pathogens and products, to interpersonal connections. These processes also play out in communities around the world, along with intense debates about the nature of social change in the face of powerful global forces.

In this context, cultural anthropologists are also adapting research strategies. **Multi-sited ethnography** is one way in which cultural anthropologists attempt to understand the global forces shaping the experiences of local communities. One example is the multi-sited ethnographic research of Amanda Poole and Jennifer Riggan on refugee policy in Ethiopia.

Over the course of three years (2016-2019), Poole and Riggan did ethnographic research to understand why programs encourage Eritrean refugees to stay in Ethiopia were not working as intended. New policies and programs were being rolled out that reflected a shift in global migration management. Countries of the global North, such as Europe and the U.S. were increasingly focused on keeping refugees away from their borders by encouraging them to remain in refugee hosting countries in the global south, like Ethiopia, which hosted over 700,000 refugees from surrounding countries in 2019. A series of global policy compacts were signed as possible solutions to the “migrant crisis” in Europe. These policies also addressed the risk to refugee’s lives by providing opportunities to work, study, and live out of refugee camps in places like Ethiopia. Eritrean refugees were a particular

population of concern because they were one of the largest groups attempting to reach Europe. In Ethiopia, new schools were being built for refugee students, some were offered scholarships to go to college, and the Ethiopian government promised work visas and other opportunities to establish lives outside of refugee camps. Given the desire of many young Eritreans to continue their education, why didn't more of them take advantage of this opportunity? Why did they risk their lives to leave?

This research brought Poole and Riggan to refugee camps in northern Ethiopia including classrooms, camp clinics, and refugee-owned businesses where they spent time talking to students and teachers, aid workers, and camp officials. They also met with policy makers in the capital city and various organizations that were working at the regional and national level and developed connections with refugees on social media to help spread these conversations across time and space. Poole and Riggan experienced, first-hand, the extremes of inequality produced in a globalizing world as they could fly easily back and forth from the U.S. to Ethiopia, but their research participants continued to face extreme forms of social and spatial containment. This containment was not just spatial but also temporal. Many were confined to refugee camps where they received basic, if inadequate, rations. Year after year, the promised work visas never materialized and were used to keep them waiting rather than pressing for better conditions or risking their lives to reach Europe. Time in the camp was stuck in a painful present, without meaningful ways to create a path towards a desired future. Although some refugees did go to college in Ethiopia and were highly successful in their education, many wound up back in the camps after graduation, unable to work legally and advance their careers or livelihoods. They wound up back at square one, but it was even more painful because they were aware of their talents and potential while simultaneously recognizing the impossibility of reaching their aspirations. One refugee graduate shared: "If you teach someone that going out in the sun is harmful, and then you send them out without shelter... Better to never know the sun is bad." The opportunity to go to school was seen as important, but refugees clarified that it needed to be tied to meaningful opportunities for progression.

From the lived experience and keen analysis of people in refugee camps in northern Ethiopia, these new global migration policies seemed less about

safeguarding refugees' wellbeing and more about keeping displaced peoples far from the borders of Europe. Young refugees were all too aware of these barriers; while schools, social media, and social networks generated the hope of a life with progress, the reality was that people were stuck in a timeless present of little opportunity along a volatile political border in a region where long-term stability was deeply in question. Globalization entails deepening connections between social, political, and economic spheres, but the nature of these connections does not entail mobility for everyone. Looking at global migration policies from the ground rather than the birds-eye view sheds light on the nature of globalization, the impacts of global migration policies, and highlights that refugees are people, which pushes back against the dehumanizing ways they are often represented as victims or statistics.

Summary

Cultures have been modified and altered as long as humans have existed and are not static concepts. They continually change in response to internal and external forces. However, people do not simply react to forces; they choose whether to adopt new ideas and how to modify and use new technologies. Furthermore, there is no such thing as a "pure" traditional culture that is unimpacted or uninfluenced by external groups or forces. Over the course of this chapter, we have discussed the variety of ways globalization has influenced the flattening and homogenization of culture, or conversely, helped people distinguish themselves on a global stage. As we face challenges on a global scale, we may all need to develop anthropological tools to confront these challenges. This involves exploring an understanding culture, practicing cultural relativism, analyzing systems of power, and reflecting on our own assumptions and cultural lenses.

Review Questions

- **T/F.** Cultures are continuously in flux; there is no such thing as a "pure" or "authentic" culture.
- **T/F.** Syncretism represents a way for people to maintain their core beliefs while presenting a facade of assimilation.
- **T/F.** Indigenization is a method of extricating a culture from global practices and returning to their traditional roots.
- **T/F.** Bluefin tuna migrated from Japanese waters to New England, necessitating the flexible accumulation of Bluefin and other sushi-grade fish.
- **T/F.** Globalization leads to the homogenization of indigenous cultures.

Discussion Questions

- In an online forum, paste a picture of something that represents your culture. In a face-to-face class, you can describe this thing. Explain how it represents your culture. Then, think about your cultural artifact in relation to the discussion of globalization. Does your artifact have a complex social life to it that links up to global processes? If so, how?
- Consider something that you ate today. Find out, if possible, where the ingredients came from and who manufactured it. What are life and work conditions like for these people? What is the environmental impact or cost of producing and shipping this product? Do you believe that we have power as consumers to shape globalization?
- Research the numerous flavors of Kit Kat chocolate bars sold in Japan. How is this an example of globalization? Can you think of other examples?

Activities

1. Global Life of a Product

Ask students to investigate the global life of a product they use every day. Consider options include coffee, chocolate, cellphones, or any other commonly used items. Describe the production, consumption, and disposal of the object (where does waste go?). The ecological footprint calculator can also be used to raise questions about how our lives, consumer culture, and patterns of resource use have a global footprint.

2. Fast Fashion

Ask students to look at their clothing tags and identify the country of manufacture for one of them (give them a heads up the class before in case they want to look before class, or bring a separate item of clothing for class). Physically sort the students into groups within the classroom based on country of manufacture to help illustrate the variety of countries represented and the countries with the most representation. This can lead into discussions about the global supply chain, multinational corporations, and fast fashion. Additionally, each group can research their country's role in the clothing industry. You can follow up with a discussion of the documentary "[The True Cost\(opens in a new tab\)](#)" (video questions below).

3. Fast Fashion Survey

Conduct a fast fashion survey in class. Duplicate this [Microsoft forms template\(opens in a new tab\)](#) for students to fill out and gather their responses.

Key Terms

Acculturation: The loss or change of culture, particularly through interactions with other cultures.

Assimilation: The loss of one culture's traits, which are then replaced by the characteristics of a dominant culture.

Candomble: A spiritual syncretic movement practiced among some Afro-Brazilian groups.

Creole: A language which develops from a pidgin as two languages merge together to create a new one, coming into existence at a precise point in time and becoming nativized by children as their first language.

Cultural appropriation: Borrowing aspects of another culture for profit without permission, acknowledgment, or understanding of cultural significance.

Cultural hybridity: A balance between multiple cultures, including the values, traditions, and practices.

Culture: The collection of learned behaviors, ideas, languages, and traditions that characterize a social group.

Diffusion: The incorporation of new ideas and behaviors from one culture to another

Flexible accumulation: The use of innovative industrial technologies to increase production in a cost-effective manner.

Globalization: The mutually influencing articulation of global processes with local practices.

Glocalization: The practice of conducting business according to local and global considerations.

Hegemony: Dominance of one social group over others.

Homogenization: The process of making things more similar or uniform.

Indigenization: How new ideas and objects are modified in locally meaningful ways.

Orixas: West African religious deities

Pidgin: A simplified form of language developed when people not sharing a common language find shared words and create a simple grammar to communicate.

Revitalization: The revival of indigenous traditions, practices, or languages with the goal of regaining a community identity that has been lost or is dying.

Stereotypes: Widely accepted but oversimplified depiction of people, objects, or ideas.

Syncretism: A form of acculturation where people maintain their core beliefs, disguised beneath a facade of assimilation.

Time-space compression: A set of processes that cause the relative spatial distance of places feel smaller ("shrinking of the world").

Transculturation: The co-existence of distinct cultural identities

Westernization: The adoption of western European practices and culture in other parts of the world, whether through influence or coercion.

Suggested Readings

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