

The Effect of Globalization on Literature

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1. Introduction

In the context of this paper the term 'globalization' refers to its effects which enable individuals and cultures to communicate easily as a result of technological developments. We can communicate with everyone, produce and search e-books, read the latest productions, edit our works and reap many other benefits of modern technology in every field of knowledge. Therefore, I believe that globalization is continuously evolving and a natural consequence of technological growth. Globalization signifies that a profound transformation is happening that "separates postindustrial societies from previous ways of life" (Tsekos 1999). Literature mirrors these profound, abundant, diversified changes in which literary production cannot be the literature of a nation. Artists nowadays view themselves as citizens of the world rather than members of isolated nations. Thus, it appears there is rapid movement toward a global culture at the expense of local cultures. This outlook toward globalization varies; some believe it increases homogeneity, which ends with "the local vanishes into the global" (Hokenson 2000: 9), while others believe that it produces diversity and heterogeneity, or at least does not undermine the national and the local because, naturally, "I can be useful to you only by not being you" (Loriggio 1995: 259). No doubt that the spread of knowledge encourages diversity, which is not the antithesis of mutual understanding between nations and individuals. Albrow and Geertz are right when the former says globality promotes the endless renewability and diversification of cultural expression rather than homogenization or hybridization"; the latter observes the world is "growing both more global and more divided, more thoroughly interconnected and more intricately partitioned at the same time" (Guillen 2001: 249, 251). The same idea is stated by Hassan (2000: 46) when he says, "I think, it is to begin to clear a space for an alternative model for the globalization of literary studies that carries within it the recognition that the world is a closely knit, although extremely diverse." Tsekos (1999) argues that globalization is not forcing humans to think alike, but rather enhancing our differences. Like many cultural and literary movements, globalization embodies the past, despite the rupture with it, as well as the novelties of the present and an outlook toward the future, and so we expect in the age of globalization the emergence of new literary forms.

2. The Definition of Globalization

Reaching a consensus on defining globalization is difficult because, "like a ghost, it eludes definition" (Hassan 2002). Guillen (2001: 237-240) quotes the definitions of globalization by many scholars in various fields of specialization to show the diversity of the authors' opinions about this term. Without getting into politics and ideologies, I think each person, group and nation defines globalization according to its impact, whether positive or negative, upon that person, group or nation. This variety of definitions shows there is a global crisis of cultural and personal identities in considering globalization as a continuation of the ideology of imperialism and colonization or, as I see it, as a cornucopia of information, innovation, modernization and freedom. Svedjedal (2000) views globalization as the consequences of advances in information and communications technology, whereas Zamora (2002) contends that it is a term referring to the changes in cultural conditions worldwide. Robertson defines globalization as referring to "both the compression of the world and to the intensification of the consciousness of the world as a whole" (Khondker 2000: 21). I define globalization simply as a movement toward a global consciousness in which the local and the international are merged, but at the same time, the local has its own identity. I think this definition helps us "overcome our false assumptions through dialogue with other cultures and other ways of construing individual and social reality" (Stackhouse 1998). Whatever the definition of globalization may be, we have to accept the reality that we live in an international and multinational world in every aspect of life, from markets and commodities to scientific and literary research.

3. Globalization has Favorable Effects on Literature

There is no doubt that globalization affects literature immensely because the authors, the distributors of the product and the readers (including scholars and critics) who consume the literary products can easily access other cultures. This impact on literature is not dark or gloomy; on the contrary, there are various bright sides to it. One of the main benefits of globalization is the creation of diversity in literature. Instead of an artist being a slave to isolation, which is a sign of stagnation, the artist comes in contact with literature from every corner of the world. These ideas are in line with our recognition that "no culture is singular..." (Hokenson 2000), and isolation means cultural bankruptcy. Nowadays, an artist, for example an Arab poet, can keep abreast with what is being composed all over the world and benefit from others' experiences. All cultures cross paths, and this enriches and invigorates every culture. Thus, to use Remark's words, "nowadays" we study "literature beyond the confines" of our countries (Loriggio 1995: 256), and so "every culture is intercultural, every language is interlinguistic..." (Stackhouse 1998: 5). Literature "may impinge upon other disciplines no less than other disciplines have impinged or impinge upon literature" (Loriggio 1995: 257) because, as Bakhtin says, "literature is an

inseparable part of the totality of culture and cannot be studied outside the total cultural context” (Skulj 2000). These intercultural activities lead to the enrichment of every literature; therefore, I do not see any type of erosion of any nation’s culture or identity. On the contrary, openness helps in the emergence of new trends, which leads to freshness in all forms of literature. Therefore, I agree with Grabovszki (1999) who says that art in the age of globalization is “freed from national, linguistic, or cultural assignments and value judgments.” To clarify the previous idea, I would like to give the following three examples. First, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Arab poets introduced free verse from English into Arabic, but, unfortunately, many scholars at that time opposed such a move, claiming the movement was a conspiracy to erode Arabic poetry. However, in the course of time, it has been recognized that the introduction of free verse has enriched and will continue to enrich Arabic poetry. Second, during the first one hundred years of the Abbasid Empire, Greek philosophy deeply influenced the Arabs’ culture and the way they thought, but no historic document has shown that anyone was against the translation of the Greek texts into Arabic or argue against its impact on Arabic culture. Third, a clear example of intercultural influences is the impact of the Arabic language and literature on the Persian language and literature in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. As a result, the Persian language, even its orthography, was transformed into something new, but the Persian language and literature preserve their unique identity, which is different from Arabic. This shows that each literature has its own identity because it is the production of unique social and historical conditions. On the other hand, isolation enhances and reinforces deficiencies in isolated cultures, and that profound connectedness opens up the possibility of mutual cultural enrichment. Today as Anderson (1997) points out, identity is created in global conditions, and in cross-cultural influences.

4. Literature is Immunized from Within

The artist’s genius is a crucial factor in the production of literary works, and the environment of globalization enriches this person’s experiences. Lyotard says, no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before....a person is always located at ‘nodal points’ of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be. Or better: one is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass. (Rowe 1996: 15).

Thus, it is true that “literature cannot be but an intercultural historical phenomenon of mutual artistic and other influences from several cultures” (Skulj 2000). However, local cultures are protected from within through the hands of the artist who, through his unique abilities and imagination, has a special identity and sanctuary. This is why aesthetic value of a literary piece cannot be outdated or outmoded; the rules that govern it cannot be acquired, and so cannot be touched. Skulj (2000) correctly points out that identity features of a given

national literature cannot be exhausted. Zamora's (2000) are similar to those of Skulj's when he says "the cultural specificity of literary fiction may serve as antidote to current processes of cultural homogenization, and to the perception of homogenization...." This is possible because an artist immunizes his local culture from within by his imagination, which is a stamp of originality, and this gives a unique national identity.

Culture has been precisely the particularizing, localizing force that distinguished societies and people from each other. Culture provided forms of local identities, practices, and modes of everyday life that could serve as a bulwark against the invasion of ideas, identities, and forms of life extraneous to the specific local region in question. (Kellner 1997: 3)

Grabovszki (1999: 24) intelligently observed the impact of "the new media" on literature, which is unlike other commercial commodities, is "astonishingly" seldom compared with other areas of knowledge.

5. Globalization Enriches Minor & National Literatures

The "impact of 'global culture' on 'locals' is far more complex and less uniform than was once assumed" (Beynon 2002). There is a constant interaction between the global and the local, which produces "unique configurations of the local and the global as the matrix for thought and action in the contemporary world" (Kellner 1997). The boundaries between the global and the local are blurred because of the increased communication among cultures. This is clear in the *Norton Anthology*, which contains texts from the Western cultures only through 1995. As a result of globalization, this policy has been changed, and as of 1995 texts from different cultures (Arabic is one of them) are included. Globalization is a process of cultural merging and mixing among cultures, and, at the same time, each culture retains its identity and is enriched by other cultures. Thus, we should conceive globalization as a kind of multi-dimensional understanding and not as an overpowering of one culture. It is a fact that "the world is becoming more global, that is, more interrelated" (Guillen 2001: 240), but this untraditional world makes many people "suspicious of this new world order fearing that it is being built on the triumphs of one or another people or culture or class" (Stackhouse 1998). It is a big mistake to consider globalization as "a camouflaged attempt to establish the hegemony of Western social theory, culture or ideology" (Khondker 2000: 28). It is clear that in this epoch, "societies are increasingly interconnected, so that events and information in one part of the world increasingly affect people and cultures in other parts of the world" (Zamora 2002). Many scholars have agreed that globalization "means no unification, the flattening or the leveling of culture" (Grabovszki 1999), despite the fact that some believe that globalization levels "cultural difference" (Zamora 2002) and the "ongoing processes of cultural globalization are tending to wipe out local cultural identities" (Goonatilake 1995; Khondker 2000: 29). It is true that English language and literature are gaining through the Internet, which is a

new and unique form of communication, but they are not replacing other languages and literature. In fact, the Internet helps create a spiritual unity among human diverse societies. Susan Nash says, "It is tempting to think that the dominant culture is American and English-speaking" but "such a statement is a rather facile" and an "over-generalization" because "the dominant culture is globalization and community-building via spatially-defined 'homesteads' and 'territories'" (1999: 11). Therefore, it is not true, as some think, that globalization implies the disappearance of all cultures of the world under the steamroller of the powerful Anglo-American culture. However, it must be admitted that the use of the English language becomes a lingua franca, and it is important to establish a presence on the Internet. Thus, if we want to make Arabic literature part of the globalized world, it is important to go to the Internet and put our literature in electronic texts, supported by historical backgrounds, notes and critical perspectives. Moreover, we need to translate our literature into English because this is the first step in globalizing our literature, but this does not imply a propaganda to convince others of our values or ideas. It is just a way to enrich inter-cultural communications with others. Without this, Arabic literature will be marginalized.

6. The Internet Enriches and Democratizes Literature

The Internet, which is one of the main features of globalization, enriches literary texts, no matter the language in which they are written. The author can ask his readers on the Web to comment on his text, and this enables him to improve it. Thus, on the one hand, readers all over the world become co-authors, and, on the other hand, writers lose their identities in the traditional sense. Their works travel digitally to all corners of the globe, and no one can claim that his/her literary production belongs entirely to a specific nation, language or literature. Therefore, all works are globalized and readers can hear voices from all over the globe. This easy access to the Internet and the expansion of knowledge gives minor literature an opportunity to extend its spheres with low costs. Numerous pieces of literary works in all languages would never have been published and circulated in the traditional form. Thus, many authors who were "marginalized or overlooked" in the past are promoted (Nash 1999: 6). Each writer has the right to publish his works in the digital space; therefore, traditional giant publishers monopolizing the production do not exist today. This is, in fact, the global democratization of literary production and distribution.

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