American Cuture And Globalisation Essay, Research Paper

The issue of American culture and its globalisation has raised a lot of controversy. Today we are able to witness an essence of American culture almost everywhere around the world by what we call cultural icons of our times. Sneakers, blue jeans, burgers, Hollywood blockbusters are only a few. To many, globalization is synonymous with Nike, Levi’s and MTV. It crowns the United States the king of pop culture. It lauds Walt Disney the new Goethe of our times. In order to understand the influence of American dominant culture throughout the globalised world, it is important to be able to resolve the difference between culture and ideology. Also, the understanding of culture defers from nation to nation which is of importance in this field. These are some of the issues we will be discussing throughout this essay. Culture is a complex term which refers to the beliefs, behaviour, language, and entire way of life of a particular time or group of people. Culture includes customs, ceremonies, works of art, inventions, technology, and traditions. This is a general definition of culture, the key word being civilisation. There are although different understandings of this term and how it is used. Our main interest at this point is the American understanding of culture. Americans tend to see culture as the fine arts – art galleries, theatre, ballet, opera. Everything else – television, films, music, magazines – is pop culture. It’s business. It’s entertainment. American officials argue that these are ”commodities” and can, indeed should, be traded like other commodities in a free and open marketplace where market forces determine who wins, who loses. It is this understanding of pop culture that has opened up a huge industry in the American market. The single biggest export industry of the United States is the entertainment industry, based in California and New York. Not surprisingly the home states of Hollywood Inc., and Madison Ave., are political heavyweights. They drive the export engine that fuels the hot-as-a-piston U.S. economy in the future. In order to make a meaning out of this globalisation process we must define and understand the concept of ideology and its relation to culture. Ideology is defined as, comprehensive system of concepts and beliefs, often political in nature, held by a group or an individual. So in this case for example it is the concepts and beliefs that are held by American people such as their own culture including lifestyle, political system, economy and social structure that form the American ideology. Now that we have defined culture and ideology we need to find and describe the fine line that exists between the two concepts. This is very difficult to achieve today as these two concepts have started to become the same thing due to globalisation. Although this is the case, it should not be forgotten that ideologies try to hide the contingent nature of thoughts and activities within a culture; that is to say, they try to convince their audiences that certain values, ideas and activities are more or less natural, and that things have always been this way, or should remain this way. To sum up: ideologies function in an attempt to make the specific or the particular seem generally applicable. All ideologies have some kind of group basis within a culture; in other words, ideologies construct and promote meanings which privilage one culture, or one section of a culture (which can be based on class, occupation, race, skin colour, gender, age, sexual preference, religious affiliation, nationality or general physicality) over another. To give a few examples, in Australia until the last 30 years, woman were excluded from many occupations and nearly all the professions because they were not considered to be capable of carrying out the required work. Also in Australia, until the 1976 referendum, Aboriginal people were not allowed to vote because they were not considered the equal of whites. Relating back to our topic, we are able to say that American culture has and is being fed throughout the world via the media, cinema, textile and other ways which has resulted in a dominance or superiority just like the cases in Australia. This is then considered something normal, natural and harmonious with the help of ideology. All these conditions were produced, perpetuated and naturalised through the circulation of ideologies.

On this analysis, ideology is not so much an effect of power located elswhere as it is a condition of power itself, or an instance of power made manifest. When Australian children return the smile of the McDonalds clown, when they admire Tom Cruise s flamboyant Top Gun heroism, they salute, in ideology, the stars and stripes. American imperiality appears natural in these signs, it goes without saying , and the Australian children are implicated in the meaning of the face and the film to become the subjects of their respective discourses. Without the role of globalisation it is not possible to speak of a term called American dominant culture. The dramatic effect of globalisation has and will be strengthening this term. People around the world have become less like themselves and more like each other. The most common name that puts this in front of our eyes is McDonald s. When a McDonald s restaurant opens in a foreign country, it represents the penetration of a foreign symbol into a host country. The adoption of that symbol invariably initiates a metamorphic transformation whereby that symbol is refined within the culture in question, including the use of the products in question and the role they play in the particular cultural setting. So with the introduction of a foreign symbol into a host country like a new McDonald s restaurant, the impact is not so dramatic and the host country does not fully take in the American culture but shapes it in a way to suit their lifestyle and tastes. For example, the food and names of the food at McDonald s in Tokyo is slightly different to those in America. Or the fact that locals were not impressed with the no food, no eskies, no bare chests rules which were widely broken and had to be abandoned at McDonald s Wonderland situated in Western Sydney. This showed that the American formula was not as international as had been hoped, and local cultural practices had to be acknowledged. That is to say, globalisation is not determined in its effects; the cultures impacted upon are not without resilience and creativity. The American culture passes through so many filters as it crosses the ocean – filters of language, values, references – that what East Europeans are receiving for example is far from what Americans think they are sending. More recently, the front-line troops in a rising French revolt against American trade practices mustered in central Paris on the 29th of September, sending a warning shot to Washington and their own Government. Small farmers, leftwing politicians, union leaders and green activists united in a show of force to demand a halt to what is increasingly seen in France as an American-led drive to rob nations of their livelihood and identity under the banner of free trade. The grassroots movement springs from old-fashioned French antipathy towards American methods, especially over food and entertainment. The spur was a series of protests by small farmers against outlets of the McDonald’s restaurant giant in late August. Culture has, for the moment at least, been defined and positioned as a trade issue be it at the elite Organization for Economic Co- operation and Development club of developed countries or the World Trade Organization where nations argue trade disputes. At its core the debate is about cultural policy, how countries individually and as an international community view the importance of cultural diversity and the means to nurture an independent identity in our brave new world of globalisation. It is about how to ensure that globalisation doesn’t lead to a loss of cultural diversity, a loss of independent identity. Even President Bill Clinton acknowledged that globalisation ”ain’t worth it if we lose the human face of the international community. The U.S. should do more than heed these warnings; it should recognize that strong cultures are in America’s self-interest. If societies feel under assault, insecurities will be magnified, leading to policy paralysis, strident nationalism and anti-Americanism.

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