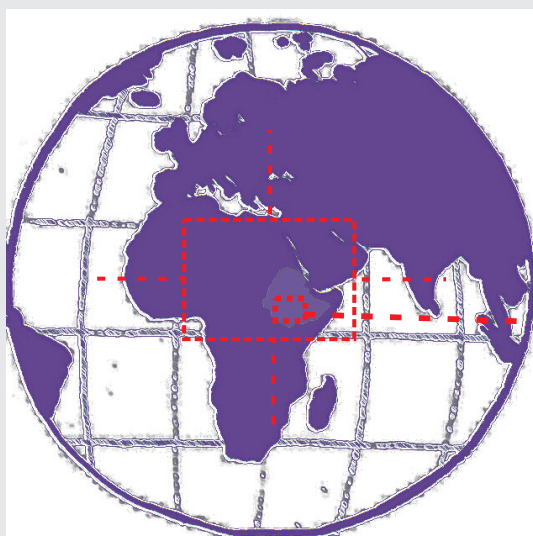


Sandra Herting

# Globalization

## A Threat to Cultural Diversity in Southern Ethiopia?



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**Globalization: A Threat to Cultural Diversity in Southern Ethiopia?**

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## **Introduction**

My interest in south Ethiopia started when I first came across an article of David Turton on the encounter between Mursi and tourists. When I went on a three week trip to south Ethiopia in March 2010, I was fascinated by its cultural diversity. At the same time, I wondered how the future of the different ethnic groups and their cultural heritage would look like in the face of globalization processes. This, finally, led me to the decision to write this study on the topic of globalization and its impacts on the cultures of south Ethiopia.

The aim of this study is to examine whether and if so, how globalization affects cultural diversity in southern Ethiopia.

There are numerous ethnic groups in southern Ethiopia of which most also speak their own language and have distinct cultural trades. Is this cultural and linguistic diversity now diminishing through globalization processes and becoming replaced by a homogenous “global culture”?

In particular, I want to focus on ongoing cultural changes and attempt to answer the following questions:

- Are the cultures of southern Ethiopia being penetrated by American popular culture?
- Are local cultural products threatened with extinction and are traditional lifestyles becoming abandoned because the people of south Ethiopia are increasingly becoming part of a “global consumer culture”?
- What impacts do international tourist arrivals have on the cultures of the different ethnic groups?
- Does the spread of the English language constitute a threat to linguistic diversity?
- Do the global spread of formal education through schooling or “modernization” efforts by development projects contribute to the elimination of indigenous knowledge systems?
- Have the activities of Christian missionary organizations led to conversion processes among the local population and thereby contributed to the decline of religious diversity in the region?

This study is structured in the following way: First, the concept of globalization is being explained briefly. Since I concentrate on the cultural dimension of globalization, I go on and give an overview of the major approaches regarding the consequences of cultural globalization. In order to give the reader an idea of the setting, I will give an insight into the wider historical, geographical and infrastructural context in which the ethnicities live. Each of the subsequent chapters deals with one or more of the above mentioned questions in detail.

For the purpose of this study I draw on examples from different ethnic groups of southern Ethiopia. The ethnicities that are mentioned in the study are: Mursi, Suri, Hamar, Banna, Bashada, Kara, Tsamai, Nyangatom, Maale, Aari, Dassanech, Arbore, and Konso. There are many more ethnic groups in southern Ethiopia that are not explicitly mentioned in this study. The choice of examples used was made according to availability of information.

In the conclusion the findings are then summarized and evaluated.

## **Methodology**

This study is primarily based on a comprehensive literature research on the topics of globalization, culture, tourism, indigenous knowledge, education, and religion in general and in particular, on the available anthropological literature to south Ethiopia.

Since I was not able to gather all the necessary information through literature research alone I additionally relied on interviews. I conducted a face-to-face interview with the ethnologist, Tina Brüderlin, who worked in the area of Hamar and Tsamai several times during the period between 2000 to 2007. Another interview via telephone was conducted with Will Hurd, who is the director at “Cool Ground“, an U.S. American organization that supports the Mursi people in developing their own conservancy and tourism project.

In order to gather further relevant information, I also contacted the ethnologist, Shauna LaTosky, who conducted field work in the Mursi region and Dr. Sophia Thubauville, who worked as director at the South Omo Research Center (SORC) in Jinka, Ethiopia from May 2009 to June 2010.

I also used the Internet as an information source. In particular, I conducted a search on youtube.com and Flickr.com in order to indicate the quantity of circulating Mursi images in the world wide web.

Even though it was not possible to conduct my own field work, the experiences and impressions I gained in the course of my journey to south Ethiopia turned out to be useful in the writing stage of my study.



## **Major approaches to cultural globalization**

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the term globalization is almost on everyone's lips.<sup>1</sup> But what exactly does "globalization" mean? Among the variety of circulating definitions, I follow Steger's definition of globalization as "the expansion and intensification of social relations and consciousness across world-time and world-space."<sup>2</sup> Globalization is also a long-term historical phenomenon that can be divided into different phases - starting much earlier than the 15<sup>th</sup> century - while the contemporary phase may then constitute a kind of accelerated globalization.<sup>3</sup>

Globalization also refers to a plurality of social processes which proceed simultaneously on several levels and in multiple dimensions in an uneven way, i.e. affecting people in different parts of the world differently.<sup>4</sup>

Having in mind that globalization takes place in different dimensions - namely the economic, political, cultural, ecological, and ideological dimension, which are interconnected<sup>5</sup> - I will concentrate on the cultural dimension in the following.

Culture is defined here as "the symbolic construction, articulation, and dissemination of meaning".<sup>6</sup> Culture, thus, is not limited to the practices and products of art, literature, music, and so on. These only constitute forms in which specific meanings are generated. Rather, culture can be characterized as a whole way of life and comprises the set of attitudes, beliefs, and values current in a society which give order and meaning.<sup>7</sup>

Cultural globalization can be understood as "the intensification and expansion of cultural flows across the globe."<sup>8</sup> Undoubtedly, these global cultural flows have effects on local cultures. The key question in this context is whether cultural globalization leads to uniformity as proclaimed by "homogenizers" or rather to hybridity as imagined by "heterogenizers".

For "homogenizers", globalization leads to increasing standardization, uniformization, Americanization, or Westernization.<sup>9</sup> Giddens, for instance, sees globalization as a consequence of modernity.<sup>10</sup> Modernity, in turn, which stands in contrast to tradition, is

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1 Featherstone/Lash 1995: 1.

2 Steger 2009: 15.

3 Nederveen Pieterse 2009: 26, 28; Robertson 2007: 9; Steger 2009: 19; Therborn 2000: 158.

4 Nederveen Pieterse 2009: 13; Steger 2009: 9, 11, 36; Therborn 2000: 154, 158; Tomlinson 1999: 13.

5 Steger 2009: 36-37.

6 Steger 2009: 71.

7 Erisman 1983: 341-342.; Tomlinson 1999: 18-19.

8 Steger 2009: 71.

9 Erisman 1983: 345; Latouche 1996: 1, 50, 53.

10 Giddens 2006: 175.

rooted in the institutions of capitalism and industrialism<sup>11</sup> – both Western “inventions”. Therefore, modernization is seen as but another name for Westernization.<sup>12</sup>

In contrast, “heterogenizers” characterize globalization as processes of cultural mixing, hybridization, syncretization, or creolization. Syncretism as one of the original notions of hybridity can best be understood as processes of religious synthesis, the fusion of religious forms.<sup>13</sup>

According to Nederveen Pieterse, globalization is a process of cultural hybridization referred to as the “mixing of Asian, African, American, European cultures”, hence, as “the making of global culture as a global *mélange*.”<sup>14</sup> Cultural forms are called hybrid because the elements in the mix derive from different cultural contexts. Since these cultures are themselves of mixed character, Nederveen Pieterse describes contemporary globalization as “hybridization of hybrid cultures.”<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, Hannerz uses a concept of creole cultures - which are the result of multidimensional cultural encounters through which cultural forms are combined in new ways - and refers to “a world in creolization”.<sup>16</sup> According to Hannerz, creolization is even said to increasingly allow “the periphery to talk back” mainly because the latter increasingly uses the same organizational forms and the same technology as the center.<sup>17</sup>

There are further approaches that describe the complex relationship between the global and the local. For Robertson, globalization is characterized by processes of the “particularization of the universal” and the “universalization of the particular”. This is revealed in his concept of “glocalization”. Robertson generalized the idea of glocalization, i.e. global localization, which has originally been a Japanese micromarketing strategy. In this way, he contests the notion that the global excludes the local. Rather, globalization involves the creation and incorporation of locality.<sup>18</sup>

According to Tomlinson's approach of “deterritorialization”, the ties of culture to place are weakened due to globalization and the resultant complex connectivity. Deterritorialization in this context means the “simultaneous penetration of local worlds by distant forces, and the dislodging of everyday meanings from their anchors in the local environment.”

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11 Giddens 2006: 12, 36, 55.

12 Nederveen Pieterse 2009: 67.

13 Nederveen Pieterse 2009: 78; Shaw/Stewart 1994: 6-7.

14 Nederveen Pieterse 2009: 83.

15 Nederveen Pieterse 2009: 86, 88.

16 Hannerz 1992: 265; Hannerz 1987: 551.

17 Hannerz 1992: 265.

18 Robertson 1996: 173, 178; Robertson 1995: 28-29, 34-35, 40.

However, Tomlinson also stresses that locality will continue to matter but that it is now transformed into a “more complex cultural space”.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Tomlinson 1999: 29-30, 148-149.