

National and Cultural Identities Module

Essay

Pilot project: Representations of globalization among Danish and French people

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Is there such a thing as a French and Danish understanding of 'globalization' and what is it? The aim of this essay is to outline the different forms the representations of globalization could take and to reveal some of their connotations. I also want to postulate that these representations are part of larger ideological discourses on national identities, of which they are both the product and the producer.

This essay presents itself as a pilot project: given the small numbers of interviewed persons – 10 Danes and 10 Frenchmen, I only seek to put forward that there is a difference between the Danish and the French way of apprehending the concept of globalization.

I am aware that the results of this study contain a number of limitations and ought therefore to be modulated. First of all, there is the issue of language. The questionnaire was conducted in French with the Frenchmen and in English with the Danes. Even if English is a second language in Denmark, widely used in academic research, the survey would have been more accurate, when it comes to representations, to have them express their responses in their mother tongue.

Secondly, identities are multiple and cannot be reduced solely to a sense of national belonging. Class, gender, and ethnicity are others identities, which can articulate with national identity and an awareness of these could be used to sharpen the analysis. In this investigation, I have tried to interview "standard" persons, even if such a concept does not exist. The interviewees represent a fair proportion of male and female middle-class adults.

Thirdly, the final part of the project presents itself as a hypothesis. It would require a much larger investigation to determine what exactly the correlations between ideological discourses on national identities and the concept of globalization are. A thorough study of media discourses would be needed, which was not possible here.

In spite of these imperfections, this essay attempts to propose a reflection on links between representations of globalization and national identities.

i. Methodology

1) The targeted group:

- 10 Danes, 10 Frenchmen
- 10 females, 10 males
- Aged between 19 and 70
- Middle class¹ (examples of jobs: secondary school teacher, engineer, civil servant, receptionist, accountant, senior manager in a large firm, self employed builder, librarian, dentist, actress, etc...)

2) Presentation of the questionnaire

The same questionnaire, in an English version for the Danes and in a French version for the Frenchmen, contains 12 questions (see Appendix 1).

The questionnaire had three purposes: to define how people understand ‘globalization’, what are the connotations they associate with it and whether these connotations are positive or negative and finally to which kind of discourses promoted about globalization they are susceptible. The method is hypothetical and deductive, i.e. I wanted to confirm my hypothesis that representations about globalization are different between Danish and French people.

My starting point is, as Manfred Steger defines it², that globalization is a rather polysemous term that includes political, economic, cultural and ideological aspects³. The open question 1 (Appendix 1) and question 2 give the interviewee the possibility to define by him or herself the concept and to emphasize the aspects he or she considers more important. Questions 5 and 6 are open enough to be understood also in economic, political, ideological or cultural sense. And it is the case, as we shall see, that, according to their own understanding, the interviewees have focused their answers on one aspect of influence or another.

Question 3 contains also economic (f-g-h-i), political (a-b-c-d) and cultural (e but also i) facets.

The second aspect of the questionnaire evaluates if the interviewee sees the global development of the world positively or negatively. Assuming that peace, democracy, economic prosperity and equality are among the basic objectives sought by Westerners, the convergence of these ideas with the idea of globalization could be an indicator to see if people have a solid or poor understanding of globalization, without asking them the question directly.

Question 4b seeks to achieve the same goal and to a certain extent question 12 also: the interviewee here has the opportunity to express his agreement or disagreement with ideas against globalization. It is true that if one has no knowledge about organizations that resist globalization (question 11) then, he or she is not able to express his personal opinion here (but actually it was the case of only 2 of the 20 polled).

¹ The term “middle class” is a very vague and broad term, especially when opposing the Danish and French societies. In Denmark, because of the social democratic policy applied for more than a century, the economic gap (income available per family after taxes) is shallow, the access to high levels of education easy. Mougel, F.C. (1999) L’Europe du Nord au XXe siècle, Paris: PUF.

² Steger, M.B. (2003) Globalization, a very short introduction, New York: Oxford University Press, preface.

³ I have assumed Steger’s opinion that it is a poor understanding of globalization to see it as primarily an economic phenomenon: (Steger, 2003: preface). However, this idea, as we shall see, is challenged in France.

Finally, the last goal of the questionnaire was to evaluate some aspects of the representations of national identities and the relationships between these representations and discourses of globalization (questions 4-7-8 and 11-12).

II- Analyzing the findings

1- What does 'globalization' mean?

If all the interviewees agree that globalization is something that happens around the world and that it creates interconnections between countries, opinions diverge on how it takes place. Although the vast majority thinks that globalization is associated with economic issues (15 of the 20 answers to question 2a) which means that global trade will increase (14 of the 20 answers to question 3f), French respondents are more inclined to define globalization mainly as economic: globalization is about "creating a global market" "exchanging wealth worldwide", whereas Danish respondents have a wider understanding: "globalization means that the world is smaller", "it will be easier to travel, to work abroad", "the world will be open to everybody" "borders will be removed". Similarly, globalization is perceived together as an economic, political, cultural and ideological concept for 4 of the 10 Danes (versus 2 French answers).

For the French respondents, globalization is also associated with culture (9 answers express concerns about cultures), and with a homogenization of the world's cultures (8 answers to question 3e). 4 of the 10 French respondents said that "globalization is: they want us to be all the same". 7 of the 10 Frenchmen (versus 3 of 10 Danes) believed that globalization means more American influence and most of them expressed concerns about what they see as a standardization of the world through the American prism. American cultural influence is seen in term of language (also quoted as being a handicap in France: "we do not speak English and we have to if we want to keep up"), products (movies, TV programs, food), and way of life ("they want to set the rules, to impose their consumption model").

If "globalization means also cultural influences from other countries" (question 6), for 7 of the 10 French respondents, it seems that it is a rather vague idea for them: 3 of them could not name a single country whose influence would be appealing in the future. Conversely the 10 Danes believe that influences would come from all over the world, and more specifically from China and India (5 responses), European countries (3 responses), and the Islamic countries (2 responses).

2- Is globalization a good or a bad thing?

From the very first question, conclusions can be drawn regarding the positive or negative connotations of the word 'globalization'. The Danish respondents tried to give an objective definition of globalization; for most of them globalization is associated with the idea of the "global village" i.e. "the general growth of the circulation of goods and persons around the world". 3 of the French polled mentioned problems or dislikes with globalization: "globalization, it's the opposite to a human world", "globalization means that everything is going to be the same, in a very totalitarian

way”, “globalization means the impoverishment of the poorer countries and the intensification of rivalries between the US and Europe.”

If we now take question 3, the positive economic consequences of globalization receive the following number of answers:

	Danes	Frenchmen
Globalization brings more economic exchanges	9	6
Globalization brings more jobs for my country	2	0
Globalization brings higher salaries	4	0
Globalization brings more products on to the market	10	5
Globalization benefits everyone	5	0

The positive political consequences of globalization receive the following number of answers:

	Danes	Frenchmen
Globalization brings stability	6	3
Globalization brings more democracy	6	4
Globalization brings more individual freedom	7	3

3- Is my country able to adapt to new global rules?

If all participants declared that their country participates in globalization (question 7), there is disagreement amongst the Danish and French respondents on the general attitude their country has towards globalization. Only 1 Danish respondent dissociates the government attitude from the people’s attitude saying that people might slow down the process while government definitely encourages it. The other 9 answered that their government (right wing) promotes the globalization. For the French respondents, answers are more shaded: 3 think that their government (right wing) encourages the process but that it is slowed down by the population who are reluctant to the idea, while 3 of them think that the government both slows down (politically or culturally) and encourages (economically) it. 3 think that the government promotes the process.

The reasons for hesitations towards globalization lie maybe on the poor scores for question 9: 7 French respondents feel their country’s capabilities to adapt to globalization are ‘acceptable’ or ‘low’, whereas 8 Danes give the answer ‘good’ or ‘excellent’.

Answers to question 10 give further explanations. Danish respondents feel that their country has various good tools to adapt to the new rules and they were prolix on this answer: “high educational level, high technological skills, people speak 2 or 3 foreign languages and are used to traveling and living abroad”; several quote also that many Danish companies have been able to relocalize – evidence of their adaptability – and that they are even eager to do so. Another argument given was the small size of their country, which has always required abilities to “deal with the big and the powerful”.

Powerful arguments, which were hardly shaded by the negative points: the first one is the attitude (referenced as ‘old-fashioned’ and belonging to the older generation) towards immigration. If globalization means, as they defined it, global movement of persons, this implies that more migrants might come to the country. “The resentment that exists against them makes Denmark less able to be global” quoted some interviewees. The second negative argument, that follows from the

first one, is “the general attitude to think that we are the best, that our country is the best: this prevent us from accepting others’ ideas” and “we have a tendency to protect ourselves”.

On the other hand, answers by the French were completely different. The advantages that France has to adapt to globalization are vague: high levels of education was quoted by only one person, as well as high levels of technology. The most redundant idea was that, because France is rich and powerful, it will be able to set some of the international rules to its convenience.

Regarding the disadvantages, the prevalent idea refers to attitude: “people don’t want it, don’t agree with it; they are not ready for it” because “they don’t know exactly what it is about, it’s confusing”. Several answers quote, and some criticize, the resistance coming from both the population and the government towards globalization associated with homogenization, Americanization and the English language. One answer concerns also the general fear of immigration which is seen as a handicap to integration in the global world (similar to the Danish answers), and another the fact that “we are loosing competitiveness, the law on the 35-hour week was a catastrophe”.

From the above results, and again given that the number of persons interviewed was few, it appears nevertheless that differences exist between the two groups interviewed. Danish respondents have a more general idea of what globalization is; for them, it could lead to a better future, for their country and for the world in general; they are confident that their country can manage to adapt to the new world order and they have a quite precise idea on the advantages their country has to do so. On the other hand, French respondents consider globalization in a much narrower sense, as being more about economics and culture. They fear that globalization means Americanization and that France will be overrun by it. They are not really confident in their country’s capabilities to adapt. A general idea that resistance either exists or is necessary emerges from their answers.

In order to try to understand why, I would now like to propose some ideas for deeper reflection. I am not suggesting that the following fully explains the differences in the responses given by the two national groups of interviewees, but merely that this is worth further investigation.

III New national identities

It is obviously very complex to explain why the answers between these 2 groups of people are so different. Identities are multiple and other considerations such as gender, age and social class, not to talk about the political background of the interviewees, must certainly be taken into account to sharpen the analysis. Nevertheless, the results of the pilot project suggest that some hypothesis can be drawn about the relationships between the representations of globalization and some elements of the national and cultural identities.

“Denmark is a small country. It always has been necessary for us to be open to the world. We always needed to trade abroad: we do not have raw materials. Politically, it always has been necessary to negotiate, to be friendly with the others in order not to be drowned by the big waves”.

The consciousness of being a small country is very present amongst the Danish responses (quoted 7 times out of 10). As the historian A.E. Helle put it, the loss of two thirds of their territory in the nineteenth century (Norway in 1814, and the two provinces of Slesvig and Holstein in 1864), affected the Danish population deeply and its politicians afterwards turned their backs on playing a larger role in the international agenda:

*“The vast majority of Danes from the first part on the twentieth century wanted to stay away from the conflicts opposing the big European powers, in order to concentrate all their energy on the construction, inside their borders, of a better, freer, more equal and more prosper society”.*⁴

Instead of trying to change international rules, the Danish policy seemed to be more about trying to adapt to them as reflected these two answers given by Danish respondents to question 10:

“Danish companies are eager to relocalize and they have proven they can do it.”
“Danish companies have rapidly been able to find cheaper countries to set up their production.”

This is reflected in two recent articles in Politiken⁵, the second Danish broadsheet newspaper. The first article explains how American companies have relocalized 3,3 millions jobs over the last 10 years and focuses on a Danish IT company, Cowi Consult, which, following the American example, has succeeded in exporting 300 jobs in India. The second article features an interview with an economics expert who explains that Danish workers do not have to fear relocalization because it is actually a good opportunity for them to specialize more and find their own niche.

*“Instead of being afraid, we should clap our hands each time a Danish company outsources abroad (...) even if, at the beginning, we might lose something in Denmark, it would also afterwards give us the possibility to specialize more in something else.”*⁶

These two articles are only two examples. Nevertheless, they could lead to the hypothesis that there are some correlations between the interviewees' answers and media discourses: globalization is maybe less frightening for Danish people because there is more of a positive discourse about globalization.

But if ideological discourses succeeded so well in “selling globalization” to quote Steger⁷, it is also because there might be a correlation between these discourses and national identities. Following in the tracks of Max Weber and the links he made between capitalism and Protestantism⁸, it seems to me that various elements in Danish history, from whose the example the above is one, tend to accredit the idea that the ‘merchants’, as Danes define themselves after the name of their capital (København: harbour of the merchants), have various resources in their history to adapt to globalization.

On the other hand, French responses to question 10 could also lead to interesting hypotheses on French national identities. The most recurrent disadvantages quoted by the French respondents are the fact that French people do not want to participate, that they slow down the process. “Resistance comes from the people” said several respondents. But the government also plays its role: 3

⁴ My translation from: Helle, A.E. (1992) *Histoire du Danemark*, Paris: Hatier, p153.

⁵ Locke L.O. and Bjerger P. (04-07-2003), ‘Virksomheder vælger hjerner i udlandet’ – ‘Vismænd: udflytning godt for Danmark’, *Politiken*, p.10

⁶ My translation from the above article.

⁷ Steger, 2003, p.95

⁸ Weber, M. (1964), *L'ethique protestante et l'esprit du capitalisme*, Paris: Plon

interviewees quoted that the French government certainly slows the globalization process with respect of culture. And indeed, so many elements of national and international French policy sustain this view. French politicians, conversely to their Danish counterparts, do believe that they have a key role to play in the international order, as the issue of the “exception française” illustrates. This is the idea defended by France that cultural productions must be exempted from the GATT Agreement of 1994. Another example at odds with the approach taken in Denmark is the official French attitude towards the use of English language⁹. In both case, the French government stands in the front line defending against ‘another world order’.

Here also, links between these historical-political elements, national identities and media discourses are interwoven and lead to a particular approach to globalization.

It is striking how different the Danish and French answers to question 4 are. As Steger¹⁰ puts it, there is an ideological discourse on globalization, which he calls ‘globalism’, “an ideology that endows the concept of globalization with neo-liberal meanings”:

“Like all social processes, globalization contains an ideological dimension filled with a range of norms, claims, beliefs, and narratives about the phenomenon itself (...) it is disseminated worldwide by a powerful phalanx of social forces located chiefly in the global North (...) Serving as the chief advocates of globalism, these individuals saturate the public discourse with idealized images of a consumerist, free-market world (...) It is important to note that globalists themselves construct these claims in order to sell their political and economic agenda.”¹¹

Five of these claims then follow and he analyzes them, putting their value in question. I have taken three of these affirmations for question 4: the majority of Danish respondents considered them true (21 answers out of 30) whereas the majority of French respondents (22 answers out of 30) considered them false. These concepts are known as the paradigms of the Chicago School, considered as the birthplace of the neo-liberal ideology. This ideology is strongly opposed in France by the discourses of anti-globalization organizations. One of the most well known anti-globalization slogans come from the group ATTAC¹² : “another world is possible”, which firmly contests the inevitability of globalization, and denounces the inequality globalization generates for the profit of the biggest transnational companies.

The presence of counter-globalism discourses could also be seen in the responses to questions 11 and 12: 2 of the 10 Danes have never heard of organizations that fight globalization. 2 of them quoted the Danish far right political party. 5 quoted ATTAC, but only 2 of them could define what their ideas were. Only 1 respondent agrees with these anti-globalization organizations, the other mainly defined them as “too radical, too idealistic, rather naïve”.

French responses for the same question were as follow: 9 out of 10 respondents quoted ATTAC, 7 quoted other organizations (such as la Confédération paysanne, some French unions: CGT, SUD, the global movement of the Altermondialistes and meetings in Seattle and Genova), 7 had an idea of what it was about, 7 saw these ideas as positive, and 1 as interesting because these organizations pose necessary questions.

It is therefore the case that ‘Globalism’ has not the same impact on the respondents. French respondents seem to be more permeable to left-wing ideas, which oppose globalization. We could

⁹ Toubon’s law of 1994 which prohibited the use of English words such as week end, Tshirt, etc...

¹⁰ Steger, 2003, p.94

¹¹ Steger, 2003, pp. 95-97

¹² for more information about this leading anti-globalist organization, see: www.attac.org

see here the influence of French anti-globalization organizations, which have been, as Bourdieu puts it¹³, at the avant-garde of the anti-globalization discourses.

Conclusion

As far as conclusions can be drawn from the above findings, I would put forward that differences between Danish and French understandings of ‘globalization’ do exist. I want therefore to suggest that ideological national discourses on globalization are different from one culture to another. Following Anthony D. Smith¹⁴, I do not think that national identity is going to be superseded, even by globalization. If French cultural and national identities seem to be strongly challenged by globalization, or at least, by the idea of globalism defined by Steger, it seems that counter-discourses on globalization have taken roots and flourished¹⁵. On the other hand, Danish national identity has found a fertile terrain in the new economic world order and it is less challenged by globalization, indeed it has fit right in.

This ought to be corroborated by more in-depth interviews, but also by a precise account of the construction of the nation-state and a thorough analysis of media and political discourses of globalization in both countries. But what is certain is that globalization shapes and is shaped by national identities and is therefore now one of the elements constituting cultural and national identities.

¹³ Bourdieu, P. (1996), ‘Speech at the inaugural Session of the Social Movement in Paris, the 23-24 November 1996’, in *Contre-feux, Propos pour servir a la resistance contre l’invasion neo-liberale* (1998) Paris: Edition Liber-raisons d’agir.

¹⁴ Smith, A.D. (1991) *National Identity*, USA Nevada: University of Nevada Press, ch7: ‘Beyond National Identity?’, pp. 153-175

¹⁵ I could also add that this counter-discourse has produced its own lexical field in French language (‘globalisation’ versus ‘mondialisation’, ‘commercialisation’ versus ‘marchandisation’, ‘anti-globalisation’ versus ‘alter-globalisation’, to quote but some of them).

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Nationality:

Gender:

Age:

Position:

- 1- What's "globalization"?
- 2- Globalization is a:
 - a. Economic concept
 - b. Political concept
 - c. Cultural concept
 - d. Ideological concept
- 3- Choose between the following couples of words the one which better fits your idea of globalization:
 - a. Stability / instability / none of them
 - b. Less national independency / more national independency / none of them
 - c. More democracy / less democracy / none of them
 - d. More individual freedom / less individual freedom / none of them
 - e. Cultural homogenisation / multiculturalism / none of them
 - f. More economical exchanges / less economical exchanges / none of them
 - g. More jobs for your country / less jobs for your country / none of them
 - h. Higher salaries for your country/ lower salaries for your country/ none of them
 - i. More products on to the market / less products on to the market / none of them
- 4- True or false?
 - a. Globalization is inevitable and irreversible
 - b. Globalization benefits everyone
 - c. Nobody is in charge of globalization
- 5- Would you say that globalization, as it is understood now, means further influence from the US? To what extent?
- 6- Would you say that globalization, as it is understood now, means further influence from other countries? Which ones? To what extent?
- 7- Do you think that your country participates in globalization?
- 8- Do you think that your country slows down or encourages the process of globalization?
- 9- How would you rate your country's capabilities to adapt to globalization?
 - a. Excellent

- b. Good
- c. Acceptable
- d. Low

10- What are the advantages and disadvantages your country has to adapt to globalization?

11- Have you heard about organisations that fight against globalization? Which ones?

12- Do you know what are their opinions? Do you agree with?