

Chapter 16

Globalization and Consumer Culture

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The world is increasingly connected by global processes. More and more local practices are motivated by distant events and have antipodal consequences. Although many of these global processes are uneven, contingent and contradictory, the economic and political interconnections are indisputable; as are the mass migrations of people, goods and especially information. While none of this is absolutely new, the tempo has reached the point that the term ‘globalization’ seems warranted. Globalization undoubtedly has cultural effects, but the question still remains open as to whether this constitutes a global culture. The theme of this chapter is that to the extent that there is a global culture, it is a consumer culture.

The birth date of this globalization is still a point of contention, even in those rare instances where globalization’s basic definition is agreed on. The debate continues as to the underlying cause of globalization: whether it is a result of modernity (Giddens 2000), capitalism (Wallerstein 1991), technological progress (Rosenau 2003) or political power (Gilpin 1987), to name a few of the usual suspects. In addition, its strength is still hotly disputed (Hirst and Thompson 1996). Nevertheless, all of these points can be left unresolved for this chapter. No matter its birth date, its cause or even whether it exists yet in any strong sense, we can still ask questions about the form that a global culture may take.

The literature on a global consumer culture is dispersed in a number of disciplines and difficult to summarize. Perhaps the greatest problem is the lack in consistency in the concept of culture. Consequently, to summarize what we know about global consumer culture first requires some ground clearing. We need to reconceptualize culture before we can look at the relation between globalization and consumer culture. Indeed, the idea of culture is so problematic that we require a theoretical analysis before we will be able to recognize the evidence for and against a global consumer culture. Following this reconceptualization will be a summary of the primary cultural attributes of globalization and an assessment as to whether they constitute a global consumer culture. Then we will look at four of the most important theoretical approaches to a global consumer culture.

Is THERE A GLOBAL CULTURE?

In 1990, the journal *Theory, Culture and Society* opened its special issue devoted to 'Global Culture' with the simple question: 'Is there a global culture?' The editor rejected the idea that there can be a global culture where culture denotes a homogeneous and integrated entity. 'The varieties of response to the globalization process clearly suggest that there is little prospect of a unified global culture, rather there are global cultures in the plural' (Featherstone 1990: 10).

The idea of a global culture can be traced back to McLuhan's (1964) divination of a 'global village'. However, as Geertz (2000: 247) notes, this global version 'is a poor sort of village . . . As it has neither solidarity nor tradition, neither edge nor focus, and lacks all wholeness'. Despite this lack of many of the characteristics that traditionally identified a culture, a number of scholars have argued that a global culture does exist. Jameson (1998: xii) sees global culture as an 'untotalized totality' with patterns of negative and positive symbolic exchanges. Appadurai (1996) pictures a deterritorialized global culture growing out of the relations between mass mediated cultural productions and migratory audiences. Robertson (1992) describes the emergence of a global 'human condition' that connects and relativizes individuals, nations and international systems. According to Waters, cultural exchanges must inevitably result in a global culture. Indeed, he argues that cultural globalization will lead economic and political globalization since, as Waters (1995: 3) pithily writes, 'material exchanges localize, political exchanges internationalize; and symbolic exchanges globalize'.

Nevertheless, although virtually all globalization scholars believe that modern culture can only be understood within a global setting, a number of them do not believe that the global setting constitutes a global culture. They admit that there is a growing flow of people, goods and media. There are increased interactions in cultural 'border zones', a reaching of the centre's cultural industries into the periphery and spreading interconnections between local culture and global economic and political forces. There are fragmenting cultures, pluralistic cultures and interconnecting cultures. These sceptics also recognize that some cultural consequences of globalization have a certain autonomy on the global level, but they argue that these fall short of constituting a global culture.

Many have rejected the idea of a global culture because of the lack of homogeneity. For example, Guillen (2001: 254), in a review of the globalization literature, concludes that 'no such thing as a global culture is emerging'. For Anthony Smith (1995), cultures emerge from and express the historical identity of the society. He argues that there is no global culture because there is no such shared global historical identity. 'Given the plurality of such experiences and identities, and given the historical depth of such memories, the project of a global culture, as opposed to global communications, must appear premature for some time to come' (Smith 1995: 180).

In the debate over the existence of a global culture, one can see a more fundamental disagreement as to what is meant by culture. For some, culture is a homogeneous set of values and internalized norms. For others, it is a shared set of symbolic resources. For yet others, it is a pattern of symbolic exchanges. Whether

or not one believes that there is a global culture is closely related to the definition of culture.

Culture is a notoriously difficult term. Contributing to this difficulty is its use in diverse disciplines, of which the analysis of globalization is only one. To simply put ‘global’ in front of ‘culture’ without a careful discussion of its meaning only compounds the difficulty. Many who have weighed in on the issue of global culture have found the phrase so difficult that they have simply avoided defining it. Roland Robertson (1992: 33) should be commended for being one of the few who have explicitly stated this tactic. However, the strategy that will be followed here is closer to Raymond Williams’ (1983: xvii), who suggests that the term ‘culture’ is a record of the ‘important and continuing reactions to . . . changes in our social, economic and political life, and may be seen, in itself, as a special kind of map by means of which the nature of the changes can be explored’. Williams used the term ‘culture’ to map and explore social changes in the Industrial Revolution. I believe we will find its transformations equally useful for understanding globalization.

In the literature on globalization, we see two different meanings of culture: (1) the meaningful aspect of social behaviour; and (2) the beliefs and practices that make a group of people distinct.¹

A typical definition for the first meaning of culture is given by Wuthnow (1987: 50), who describes culture as ‘built into all social relations, constituting the underlying assumptions and expectations on which social interaction depends’. As Sewell (1999: 39) points out, this type of culture’s pervasive nature makes it ‘a theoretically defined category or aspect of social life that must be abstracted out from the complex reality of human existence’. This is what Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952: 90) call ‘culture’ as opposed to ‘a culture’ and what Wallerstein (1990: 33) and Nederveen Pieterse (2004: 78) call ‘culture two’. I will follow Friedman’s (1994) terminology and call it *generic culture*.

Also following Friedman, I will use *differential culture* to identify the beliefs and practices that make a group of people distinct. This use of culture goes back to nineteenth-century romanticism and it has been one of the fundamental concepts of modern anthropology. Culture here refers to a local, relatively coherent, self-contained set of norms, presuppositions and practices that belongs to a localized social group and is passed on to the next generation. This is what Geertz (2000) and Benedict (1934) call ‘configurational’, and what Wallerstein (1990) and Nederveen Pieterse (2004) call ‘culture one’. As we will see below, this use of culture has been subjected to extensive criticism, but even its harshest critics still see its value. ‘There are times when we still need to be able to speak holistically of Japanese or Trobriand or Moroccan culture in the confidence that we are designating something real and differentially coherent’ (Clifford 1988).

When asking whether global culture exists, the definition of culture that we use predetermines our answer. Under the first definition, if there is global social behaviour, then there must be a global culture. Conversely, if we use the second definition, the answer as to whether there is a global culture is just as trivially ‘no’, since there is no reference group in comparison to which a global ‘tribe’ could be seen as distinct. To ask in a non-trivial way whether there is a global culture necessitates an analysis of the basis of culture’s meaning and its adaptation to the new social context of globalization, since one of the many changes associated with the globalization

process may be a transformation in the meaning of culture. This is what Tomlinson (1997: 133) suggests when he writes that ‘the globalization process is revealing both political and conceptual problems at the core of our assumptions about what a “culture” actually is’.

The necessity of rethinking culture is especially apparent in regard to differential culture. Globalization contradicts the idea of a culture tied to a particular locality and segregated from the cultures of other localities. However, for the most part, anthropology has already abandoned this meaning of culture, preferring to see culture as a process (Keesing 1994). Despite anthropology’s current uneasiness with the term, culture is commonly used outside of anthropology to refer to differences between groups. Mazzarella (2004: 347) notes the irony that ‘the culture concept’s newfound popularity often displays the kind of essentialist or substantialist tendency that drove many anthropologists in the 1980s and 1990s to disown the concept or at least to insist on a radical revision of its analytical status’.

In fact, it is precisely this meaning of culture that is usually assumed in globalization studies. Even *au courant* concepts such as hybridity and glocalization (see below) still depend on the idea of differential cultures. Without bounded, essentialist differential cultures, there would be nothing to hybridize and no place for the trans-local to be embedded. Frow (2000: 174) points out that models of globalization continue ‘to assume (and to be nostalgic for) the level of the *national* culture, which it equates with the “local”’. If this is the definition of culture, then globalization will inevitably be seen as the spread of an invasive culture to the detriment of native cultures, in other words, as cultural imperialism.

Neither does generic culture provide an adequate conception for understanding global culture. Generic culture’s focus on the meaning of social action is an important corrective to an overly positivistic social science, but it is hopelessly vague since there is nothing human that is not meaningful. As Keesing (1994: 73) observes, this meaning of culture ‘includes too much and is too diffuse either to separate analytically the twisted threads of human experience or to interpret the designs into which they are woven’. It is precisely this meaning of culture that Herbert Marcuse (1968) critiqued as ‘affirmative culture’, which pretends to a false universality in its representation of all of humanity.

Towards a new definition of culture

The idea of a global culture requires a reconceptualization of culture. This reconceptualization can begin with an analysis of what culture’s different definitions have in common. Both definitions of culture point not just to meaning, but to a system of meaning. Generic culture extends this system to a universalization of all human meaning. Differential culture refers to the system of meaning attached to a particular social group.

Culture is a system, precisely as the structuralists describe it, with elements that are interrelated in structures of hierarchy, opposition and equivalence along paradigmatic, syntagmatic, synchronic and diachronic axes. Meaning is not an attribute of an individual cultural element, rather the meaning of any element emerges from its place in the structural system. Calling culture a system implies coherence, but this need not suggest homogeneity. Cultures can be structures of difference. Even anthropology,

which has been most vulnerable to the charge of assuming cultural homogeneity, has always assumed that culture consists of structures of difference. If men wear pants and women wear skirts, this is no less a culture than if everyone wears togas.

What is not so obvious from these definitions of culture is that culture implies not only a system, but also a set of practices that constitute this system. That culture comprises both system and practice is convincingly argued by William Sewell (1999). On the one hand, culture represents ‘a realm of pure signification’ characterized by ‘internal coherence and deep logic’ (1999: 44). On the other hand, culture is a ‘sphere of practical activity shot through by willful action, power relations, struggle, contradictions and change’. Sewell points out that system and practice are complementary concepts:

The employment of a symbol can be expected to accomplish a particular goal only because the symbols have more or less determinate meanings – meanings specified by their systematically structured relations to other symbols. Hence practice implies system. But it is equally true that the system has no existence apart from the succession of practices that instantiate, reproduce, or – most interestingly – transform it. (Sewell 1999: 47)

Culture, then, is an articulation of system and practice. This helps explain the diversity of culture’s meanings. The complex of meanings reflect the tension between system and practice. However, Sewell does not seem to realize the full implications of this conception of culture. Sewell’s discussion of cultural practices indicates that he understands practice only as the *use* of culture, not its *creation*. Humans are not seen as meaning-making beings, but only as meaning-manipulating beings. In Sewell’s descriptions, meaning is made accidentally through transformations due to the ‘uncertain consequences of practice’.

A definition of culture that is adequate for understanding global culture requires a recognition that practices create meanings. Furthermore, as Sewell rightly notes, meaning implies systematically structured relations. Consequently, meaning-creating practices necessarily create the system that is at the core of the definition of culture. An analysis of global culture requires first that we identify the practices that create it. This is a shift in focus that has already occurred in anthropology.

Over the past two decades, a definite shift has occurred in the way anthropologists formulate their central concept of culture. Long-standing assumptions about shared systems of symbols and norms have not been abandoned, despite challenges to think of culture as an organization of non-shared, distributed meanings. But questions about social agents and agencies, rather than about the structural logic or functional coherence of normative and symbolic systems, now orient cultural inquiry. More and more often culture is treated as the changing outcome of ‘practice’ – interested activity not reducible to rational calculation. The production and reproduction of collectively held dispositions and understandings – the work of making culture – is taken to be problematic rather than automatic, the site of multiple contests informed by a diversity of historically specific actions and intentions. (Foster 1991: 235)

The focus should be on the practices that construct the cultural system rather than on the system’s pure autonomous transcendence. This is often referred to as a

constitutive approach to culture, and as Street (1994: 104) describes this approach, it ‘entails a recognition that culture is constantly being forged by the activities of individuals and groups; that the culture has not a single cohesive form, but is ambiguous; and that part of the reason for this ambiguity is the competing interpretations and meanings which can be derived from the available cultural resources’. Raymond Williams, one of its seminal practitioners, summarizes this new approach to culture as characterized by the ‘insistence that “cultural practice” and “cultural production” . . . are not simply derived from an otherwise constituted social order but are themselves major elements in its constitution. . . . culture is the signifying system through which necessarily (though among other means) a social order is communicated, reproduced, experienced and explored’ (1983: 12). Eric Wolf points out that the advantage of this approach is that it avoids ‘the mistake of granting these groups or cultures some “essential” existence’, while it recognizes ‘the linguistic and other strategies through which they [cultures] are negotiated and produced’ (Wolf 1997: 167).

The anthropological conception of culture has been attacked for ignoring the heterogeneity and struggle of the culture. However, in the constitutive approach, the practices that are most constitutive of the culture are precisely those struggles. Illouz and John (2003) conclude that culture is not a deep core of norms nor a set of explicit symbols, instead it is a battlefield in which actors struggle over questions of collective identity. In particular, culture is related to those struggles that take for granted the goals of the struggle. In this sense, a culture can be categorized as what Bourdieu calls a field.

It is one of the generic properties of fields that the struggle for specific stakes masks the objective collusion concerning the principles underlying the game. More precisely, the struggle tends constantly to produce and reproduce the game and its stakes reproducing, primarily in those who are directly involved, but not in them alone, the practical commitment to the value of the game and its stakes which defines the recognition of its legitimacy. (Bourdieu 1991: 58)

Culture, then, is both a system and the practices that constitute that system. An analysis of global culture does not require the identification of homogeneity, shared values or social integration. Rather it requires the identification of a set of practices that constitute a cultural field within which struggle and contestation occurs.

Given this understanding of culture, we must now address two questions: (1) can there be such a thing as a consumer culture; (2) what characteristics might we look for to identify a *global* consumer culture?

As with global culture, the existence of a consumer culture can also be given a facile answer depending on the definition of culture. For some, consumption must be cultural because it is meaningful. For others, the term consumer culture is an oxymoron – what the masses consume cannot be a true culture. However, the question being asked here is whether consumption is a set of practices that construct a system of meaning. To understand the relation between practices of consumption and a consumer culture, we would need to look at more than the obvious processes and practices of exchange. All cultures have exchanged and consumed goods. We also need to look beyond an individual object’s meaning. All cultures have found

consumption meaningful. The question is whether consumption has the double attributes identified by Sewell as system and practice. Does consumption construct, on the one hand, a realm of pure signification characterized by internal coherence and deep logic, and on the other hand, a sphere of practical activity shot through by wilful action, power relations, struggle, contradictions and change? Furthermore, does consumption provide opportunities for meaning creation, and does it provide a field in which struggle occurs over taken-for-granted goals?

Whether or not there is a global consumer culture, it certainly seems obvious that Western societies have such a consumer culture. In Western societies, consumption has become a source of systemic meaning: as identity and social status; and consumption provides opportunities for meaning creation: as self-expression and lifestyle. Consumption has become the field in which struggles occur with the taken-for-granted assumption that all problems can be solved through more, or better, consumption.

ATTRIBUTES OF GLOBAL CULTURE

Having reconceptualized culture so that we can identify a consumer culture, we will summarize what scholars have discovered about globalization and analyse whether the cultural attributes of globalization constitute such a culture.

In the debate around global culture, analysts have focused on two seemingly paradoxical trends: homogeneity and heterogeneity. Those who argue for a global culture (especially as a form of imperialism) have pointed to homogenization, while those who argue against global culture have pointed to increased heterogeneity. However, with the understanding of culture outlined above, the presence of homogeneity or heterogeneity is irrelevant to the issue of the existence of a global culture. All cultures have both homogeneity and heterogeneity. The correct question is whether these characteristics can be understood as part of a cultural system deriving from a shared set of practices. Consequently, we need to examine the discussions of homogeneity or heterogeneity to analyse whether there is evidence that they constitute a system of meaning that derives from shared practices of consumption.

Within the limits of this chapter, I will not go so far as to argue that such a global culture has now emerged. Even if we are able to show that these processes are part of consumer culture, the extent of culture is still an open empirical question. The aim in this chapter is to clarify the type of evidence and where we need to look to determine if we have a global culture.

Homogenization

Homogenization refers to the trend towards sameness and the reduction in diversity of cultures around the world. Steger (2002: 36) cites Nike sneakers on Amazonian Indians, Texaco baseball caps on sub-Saharan youths and Chicago Bulls sweatshirts on Palestinians. In such descriptions it is easy to see a homogenized global culture of standardized tastes and desires. This homogenization is sometimes referred to as

Americanization, coca-colonization or McDonaldization. However, not all of these are equally satisfactory descriptors for this trend in global culture.

Americanization is the least satisfactory term. For one thing, many of the companies spreading this homogenized culture are not from the United States. There are Benetton, Prada, Bertelsmann and many other non-US producers of culture. Even such an icon of popular culture as Bazooka gum is not made in the United States. In fact, it is transnational companies, not any one country, that are the driving force behind homogenization. Even when the company is based in the United States, there is no reason to think that the company's and the country's interests coincide. For example, the United States may have an interest in the free distribution of movies that promote the American way of life, but that is hardly in the interests of companies that make the movies. Sklair calls the focus on Americanization a mystification:

Capitalist consumerism is mystified by reference to Americanization, while Americanization, the method of the most successfully productive society in human history, gives its imprimatur to capitalist consumerism . . . to identify cultural and media imperialism with the United States, or even with US capitalism, is a profound and a profoundly mystifying error. It implies that if American influence could be excluded then cultural and media imperialism would end. This could only be true in a purely definitional sense. Americanization itself is a contingent form of a process that is necessary to global capitalism, the culture-ideology of consumerism. (Sklair 1991: 152–3)

To the extent that these transnational companies produce standardized, identical products for diverse global markets, this process might be called coca-colonization (Mlinar 1992). However, only a fraction of global products fit that model. Even Coca-Cola claims that, ‘We are not a multi-national, we are a multi-local’ (quoted in Morley, 1991: 15). As a marketing executive at Coca-Cola said, ‘It would not be in our best interest to give consumers a position that they don’t want. It’s just completely counterintuitive. . . . Trying to change the nature of cultures is not part of our success criteria. I don’t even understand what would be the motivation’ (quoted in Hunter and Yates 2002: 351). And, although the Coca-Cola drink itself is standardized, the Coca-Cola company is ‘going native’ with a variety of locally tailored teas, fruit juices and energy drinks (Yoon 2001: 34).

A more fitting description of global homogenization is McDonaldization, but it is first necessary to clearly define what this term means. While coca-colonization refers to the spread of a standard product, McDonaldization does not simply mean the spread of a particular restaurant chain. Instead it is the spread of the processes of efficiency, calculability, predictability and control which McDonald’s successfully introduced into consumption. The idea of McDonaldization is that these processes are coming to dominate more economic and cultural sectors as well as spreading globally.

Nevertheless, Ritzer (2000), the originator of the term, recognizes the many counter trends to McDonaldization, such as the small, non-McDonaldized businesses in apparent reaction against McDonaldization. In fact, alongside the expansion of McDonald’s and their ilk is the continued growth of independent restaurants motivated, at least in part, by artisanship (Fine 1996). And, of wider significance,

the strongest growth in retail sales has been at both the McDonaldized discount mega-stores (e.g. Walmart) and boutiques.

The argument can be made that this is not a trend with its anomalies or even a trend and its reaction, but rather two faces of an underlying process. This underlying process is related to the practices of consumer culture. Buying lunch at McDonald's and clothes at Walmart or dinner at the latest pan-Asian restaurant and clothes at the local boutique are not simply economic decisions, these are also cultural decisions involving a system of meaning. While it would be absurd to deny the economics involved, it would be equally wrong to deny the system of meaning involved. Even such seemingly insignificant decisions about where to eat lunch become symbolic resources in status struggles. And in such struggles, what is assumed by all competitors is that our status and identity are more tied up with the meal we buy than with the food that we grow or the meal we prepare ourselves.

To the extent that there is a homogenization of global culture, it is a peculiar homogenization. It is not the spread of American culture or a soft drink or even a rationalizing process. It is the spread of consumer culture. Global forces don't seem to be reproducing identical cultural objects. Instead they are producing a framework for a new understanding of intra- and inter-social differences. Identity and difference are being channelled into the field of consumer practices.

Heterogeneity

In contrast to global homogeneity, many scholars see increased heterogeneity. It is not simply that cultures continue to be diverse, but that globalization is increasing diversity among cultures and especially within cultures. With globalization, Western cultural objects are 'indigenized' and given new local meanings; cultures influence each other, creating new hybrids; Western culture itself becomes more influenced by peripheral cultures; and new transnational cultural groupings emerge.

Rather than the emergence of a unified global culture there is a strong tendency for the process of globalization to provide a stage for global differences not only to open up a 'world showcase of cultures' in which the examples of the distant exotic are brought directly into the home, but to provide a field for a more discordant clashing of cultures. While cultural integration processes are taking place on a global level the situation is becoming increasingly pluralistic, or polytheistic, a world with many competing gods. (Featherstone 1996: 13)

One of the trends leading to greater heterogeneity has been called glocalization (Robertson 1995). This refers to the heterogeneous reception, appropriation and response to even the most standardized global products. There is even evidence that the great homogenizing forces of Coca-Cola (Miller 1998) and McDonald's (Caldwell 2004) contribute to heterogeneity through glocalization. Similarly, Albrow (1996: 148) has referred to a 'karaoke effect', in which an idiosyncratic local performance is made against a standardized background. In such cases, globalization's homogeneity is dispelled by the local's heterogenizing power. This is not a one-way process. Some of this glocalization and karaoke effect takes the form of what

Biltiereyst and Meers (2000) call 'contra flows', in which cultural products move from peripheral to core countries.

In addition, heterogeneity is increased because of more contact and influence between cultures through global connections. The interpenetration of the global and the local as well as the interpenetration of globally connected locals has led to the proliferation of 'hybrid' forms. Some hybridization can be close to homogenization with only minimal blends of standardized products. But the hybridization of most interest to globalization scholars has to do with those cases where standard global categories, such as core/periphery, male/female, native/cosmopolitan, art/craft etc., are blurred and subverted. Nevertheless, hybrids are not a new consequence of globalization. All culture can be seen as hybrid. What globalization adds is an increased pace that makes it more difficult to hide culture's hybrid nature (Franco 1993: 136).

Not only is heterogeneity increasing because of glocalization and hybrids, but also because of the diverse and contradictory forces of globalization itself. Arjun Appadurai (1996) identifies at least five complex, overlapping and disjunctive dimensions of global cultural flows with no single organizing principle. These include: ethnoscapes, the cultural imaginary of mobile individuals; mediascapes, the world conjured in movies, television and other global media; technoscapes, the uneven distribution of technologies; financescapes, the disposition of global capital; and ideoscapes, the distribution of political ideas and values. These forces combine and disperse to increase heterogeneity, having their greatest effect on the cultural imagination.

A number of analysts have pointed not just to heterogeneity, but to polarization as an argument against a global culture. Nederveen Pieterse (2004) sees polarization as one of the three fundamental paradigms of globalization. Friedman (2002) argues that what we see is not a global culture, but the global fragmentation of cultures. This is, again, a misunderstanding of culture. Cultures can be fragmented and even polarized. What culture is not fragmentized and polarized along gender lines? The question to ask is whether this fragmentation and polarization constitutes a system of meaning, and, in particular, whether polarizing struggles occur within a field of taken-for-granted goals. If polarization is due simply to increased exposure to others, we should not call it a product of a global culture. However, a number of scholars have pointed to underlying cultural factors. Appadurai (1996) points to the increase in uncertainty as one of the factors leading to the global increase in ethnic violence. Identities that are no longer anchored in stable cultural traditions are more likely to become part of fundamentalist religious movements or ethnic-based extremism. This is precisely the argument that Samuel Huntington makes in *The Clash of Civilizations*.

There are a number of ways in which polarization can be seen as a product of a consumer culture. First, an identity connected to a consumer culture is much less stable and more uncertain than one connected to a local culture. Second, I argue below that global consumer culture emphasizes culture as a valuable resource even as it destabilizes culture as a source of traditions. This can lead to resistance in the name of culture that can easily become polarizing (Yúdice 2003: 6). Finally, Sklair points out that global consumer culture increases resentment because it cannot fulfil the promises that it makes to the world's poor:

Once the culture-ideology of consumerism is adopted, poor people cannot cope economically, and a mode of resistance must develop. In the Muslim case this mostly manifests itself in religious extremism, whose target is as often Americanization as it is consumerism as such. (Sklair 1991: 158)

Heterogeneity and even polarization are not evidence against the existence of a culture. Underlying the heterogeneity may be the double attributes of system and practice. Polarization may be a manifestation of the strategic struggles that constitute a cultural field.

GLOBAL SYSTEMS OF COMMON DIFFERENCE

The question as to whether globalization increases cultural homogeneity by establishing common codes and practices or whether it increases a heterogeneity of newly emerging differences seems now, to many analysts, to have been answered. Globalization does both. What appears to be a dichotomy is, in fact, complementary. To the extent that a global culture is emerging, it does not appear to be eliminating diversity, instead it is providing a common framework for heterogeneity. Globalization makes people more different but in a similar way. It creates a mixed system, where people are homogenized into similar individuals, ethnicities and nations who want different things:

the apparent increasing global integration does not simply result in the elimination of cultural diversity, but, rather, provides the context for the production of new cultural forms which are marked by local specificity. If, in other words, the global is the site of the homogeneous (or the common) and the local the site of the diverse and the distinctive, then the latter can – in today's integrated world-system – only constitute and reconstitute itself in and through concrete reworkings and appropriations of the former. (Ang 1996: 155)

Ulf Hannerz (1990: 237) describes globalization as characterized by 'an organization of diversity rather than by a replication of uniformity'. Richard Wilk (1995) calls it 'structures of common difference'. In his study of beauty pageants in Belize, Wilk discovered that the migration of beauty pageants to the Caribbean could not be said to have led to homogeneity since the participants strongly stressed their national and individual differences. Nevertheless, Wilk argues that they have learned to assert their distinctiveness through a common medium, the beauty pageants, and their distinctiveness is therefore framed within global structures of common difference. 'The global stage', argues Wilk (1995: 111), 'does not consist of common content, a lexicon of goods or knowledge. Instead it is a common set of formats and structures that mediate between cultures; something more than a flow of things, or of the meanings attached to things, or even the channels along which those things and meanings flow.' Such formats and structures 'put diversity in a common frame, and scale it along a limited number of dimensions, celebrating some kinds of difference and submerging others'. Thus, there is indeed greater heterogeneity, but it is in the context of and, to a large extent, in response to the homogeneity of a consumer culture. As Jonathan Friedman (1994: 211) points out, 'what appears

as disorganization and often real disorder is not any the less systemic and systematic'.

Consumer culture is one of the primary forces that both propels increased heterogeneity and channels it into common differences. A global consumer culture encourages glocalization, hybridization and diversity because the local provides a valuable resource for our supra-local exchanges and therefore leads to increased heterogeneity of content along with homogeneity of form. Robertson recognizes this:

Global capitalism both promotes and is conditioned by cultural homogeneity and cultural heterogeneity. The production and consolidation of difference and variety is an essential ingredient of contemporary capitalism, which is, in any case, increasingly involved with a growing variety of micro-markets (national-cultural, racial and ethnic; general; social-stratification; and so on). At the same time micromarketing takes place within the contexts of increasingly universal-global economic practices. (Robertson 1992: 173)

The connection between micro-marketing and global heterogeneity should not be a surprise since the very term glocalization, so pervasive in globalization scholarship, began as 'one of the main marketing buzzwords of the beginning of the nineties' (Tulloch 1991: 134). In addition, critics of the use of hybridity in postcolonial studies have strongly pointed out its connection to consumer capitalism (Ahmad 1995). Hutnyk (2000: 36) reminds us, 'Hybridity and difference sell; the market remains intact.'

Global culture seems to track the trend among global consumer goods that marketers have already recognized. Although there are some global brands, one business analyst observed that this 'does not mean that there is a global consumer for companies to target. International cultural differences are by no means disappearing and, in the late twentieth century, individualism is as strong a world force as internationalism. Consumer goods are becoming more, rather than less, focused on the individual' (Fitzgerald 1997: 742). Robertson (1992: 46) also makes this connection: 'global marketing requires, in principle, that each product or service requires calculated sensitivity to local circumstances, identities, practices and so on'. However, the individuals focused on by global marketing are, as one business leader put it, 'heteroconsumers'. 'People who've become increasingly alike and indistinct from one another, and yet have simultaneously varied and multiple preferences' (Levitt 1988: 8). Not only do traditions become glocalized as an 'invention of tradition' (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) to appeal to the consumer tastes of tourists, but identity itself becomes a form of consumption shaped by a global consumer culture.

Every social and cultural movement is a consumer or at least must define itself in relation to the world of goods as a non-consumer. Consumption within the bounds of the world system is always a consumption of identity, canalized by a negotiation between self-definition and the array of possibilities offered by the capitalist market. (Friedman 1994: 104)

Even the resistance to global homogenization has assumed this same homogenization of form. The products of global consumer culture are resisted, but always

through a form of consumption. Axford (1995: 160), for example, notes that, 'in France the relative artistic merits of the motion-picture version of *Germinal* versus those of *Robocop* have been thematized as a defence of indigenous national culture versus the shallowness and meretriciousness of Americanized global cultures'. We see a similar effect in the marketing of such soft drinks as Mecca Cola and Qibla Cola, which target the European Muslim community and position themselves as an expression of anti-Americanization (Hundley 2003). The idea is that individuals are to express their contempt for America and its associated consumer society through the consumption of products that are produced, packaged and marketed in a way that is deeply dependent on consumer culture. Likewise, Foster (2002) describes the people of Papua New Guinea as using consumption to create a local identity in opposition to the identity attached to global brands. In these and many other cases, the homogenization of consumer culture is resisted by consumption, itself a form of homogenization (Goodman 2004).

Our new definition of culture allows us to see that homogeneity and heterogeneity within consumer culture are not contradictory. Instead, these common differences constitute the system of global culture. Consumer practices create and reproduce this system. Consumption provides opportunities for meaningful expression as well as resources for identity and social position. In addition, consumption structures a cultural field within which struggle and contestation occurs.

COMMODIFICATION OF CULTURE

One of the most prominent features of global consumer culture is its propensity to transform other cultures into commodities or resources for commodities. Anthony Smith describes this relation between consumer commodities and culture:

Standardized, commercialized mass commodities will nevertheless draw for their contents upon revivals of traditional, folk or national motifs and styles in fashions, furnishings, music and the arts, lined out of their original contexts and anaesthetized. So that a global culture would operate at several levels simultaneously: as a cornucopia of standardized commodities, as a patchwork of denationalized ethnic or folk motifs, as a series of generalized 'human values and interests', as a uniform 'scientific' discourse of meaning, and finally as the interdependent system of communications which forms the material base for all the other components and levels. (Smith 1990: 176)

Strangely, Smith uses this insight to argue against the existence of a global culture, which only underlines the importance of our reconceptualization of culture. For Smith (1990: 177), consumer culture cannot be a real culture because it is not attached to a locality and history and because it is a patchwork of decontextualized elements. Once we realize that all cultures are patchworks; that no culture is ever homogenous; and that many cultures have fabricated their history, then we must look elsewhere for evidence of culture. We can see indications of culture in Smith's description of the hierarchy of levels of meaning, interdependent system of communications and the standardized form of its diversity.

Cultural difference becomes a resource for consumer culture, which draws upon diverse cultures for its ever-changing, new-and-improved content. Yúdice

(2003: 3–4) notes that ‘Culture is invested in, distributed in the most inclusive ways, used as an attraction for capital development and tourism, as the prime motor of the culture industries and as an inexhaustible kindling for new industries dependent on intellectual property.’ Despite its appetite for diversity, consumer culture demands that this diversity take standardized forms and genres.

What becomes increasingly ‘globalized’ is not so much concrete cultural contents (although global distribution does bring, say, the same movies to many dispersed locals), but, more importantly and more structurally, the parameters and infrastructure which determine the conditions of existence for local cultures. (Ang 1996: 153)

Taylor (2000) describes how exotic musical elements from diverse cultures are appropriated and used as background for television advertisements. Wood (2000) describes the transformation of the daily lives of Zapotec weavers as they adapt to the consumer demands of tourists and international art markets. Little (2000) illustrates how private households can be transformed into public stages to exhibit and perform Mayan culture for tourists. And even the history of colonial repression and tribal resistance becomes staged as a tourist attraction (Bruner and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1994). Not only do cultures provide resources for consumer forms, but the culture itself becomes a signifier for consumption. For example, Edmondson (1999) describes how the cosmetics company, L’Oreal, uses different cultures – Italian elegance, New York savvy and French beauty – to distinguish its different lines. In old theories of modernization and development, culture was what stood in the way of modernization. Now culture is seen as a resource, if not for accomplishing modernization, at least as a chit to be traded in a global system for more material needs.

These effects demonstrate the remarkable power of consumer culture and further indicate why a reconceptualization of culture is so necessary. Indeed, Daniel Miller (1995) argues that the limited definition of culture has prevented anthropologists from recognizing the importance of consumption:

as long as there was an explicit or even implicit culture concept as a definitional premise of anthropology, then consumption not only did not, but in a profound sense could not, arise within the discipline. It lay too close to the usually unstated core justification for the project of anthropology as the establishment of an ‘other’ constituted by holistic and unfragmented culture against which modernity – that is the form of society from which the anthropologist had come, could be judged as loss. (Miller 1995: 265)

If culture is understood as homogeneity or essential difference, we miss the protean effects of consumer culture. Within the context of consumer culture, cultural elements represent an individual choice in a cultural supermarket to be mixed and matched to suit our individual style. These cultural resources and individual choices are connected in a global system of meaning that is created and reproduced through the practices of consumption. This global system of common difference must be the starting point for any understanding of the relation between globalization and consumer culture.

THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO GLOBAL CONSUMER CULTURE

Globalization cannot be understood without the category of consumption. Practically every analysis of globalization has recognized consumption, but only a few have made consumption an explicit part of their theory. In the discussion above, I have drawn on some of the theories that have focused on the connection between consumer culture and globalization. It is also useful to summarize four of the most important theories.

Leslie Sklair (1991) was one of the first to propose a theory of globalization that put consumer culture at the centre. Sklair forcefully argued for the need of a transnational or global approach to replace a state-centred one. He proposed transnational practices as the proper focus for a sociology of the global system, categorizing those practices into three levels: the economic level represented by the transnational corporation; the political level represented by a transnational capitalist class; and the most innovative part of his theory, the culture-ideology of consumerism. It is consumerism that is 'the nuts and bolts and the glue that hold the system together' (1991: 95).

The culture-ideology of consumerism is characterized by a belief that 'the meaning of life is to be found in the things that we possess. To consume, therefore, is to be fully alive, and to remain fully alive we must continuously consume' (Sklair 1998: 197). Sklair's focus on consumerism as a culture moved the analysis away from the homogenization of products towards a focus on the spread of a cultural system of desires. Sklair was one of the first to realize that a global consumer culture depends on commodification and the particular thing that is commodified is irrelevant.

Within this culture, people see themselves and others primarily as consumers rather than as citizens, and political action is reduced to providing the resources for consumption. Nevertheless, consumer culture has tremendous political effects including, Sklair argued, the fall of the Soviet Union. Resisting globalization is much more difficult than resisting American homogenization. Because of globalization's dependence on consumer culture, the counter movement to globalization must reject consumerism, a difficult proposition to 'sell'.

A second theorist who has dealt with the relation between consumer culture and globalization is Néstor García Canclini. Mixing theory with ethnographic research, García Canclini has examined the effect that globalization has had on handicrafts and fiestas (1993) and on art, literature, music and urban culture (1995). García Canclini argues that globalization is not characterized by homogenization, but by fragmentation and recomposition into hybrid cultural forms. These hybrid forms help to subvert such accepted dichotomies as native/foreign, high/popular, art/craft and traditional/modern. García Canclini points to the deep effect of such hybrids. 'Just as our commodities are manufactured with diverse parts from foreign places, so is our culture and, to that extent, our identities' (2001).

García Canclini argues that 'consumption is good for thinking'. Consumption is one way for people to make sense of the world by wearing objects, displaying them in homes and communicating with them. Interpretive communities of consumers ('ensembles of people who share tastes and interpretive pacts in relation to certain

commodities') are replacing old groupings based on nations. A culture ordered by consumption is necessarily a global culture, since consumption now involves global trade. Consequently, our social and individual identities are constructed in relation to global processes of consumption.

For García Canclini, the most important focus of research should be on the relation between citizens and consumers. In a global consumer culture, the two roles are intertwined, so that consumption 'to a certain extent constitutes a new mode of being citizens' (2001: 26). Consumption in a consumer culture is not just the satisfaction of individual need, but rather participation in a complex socio-cultural interaction that apportions resources and produces relations of solidarity and distinction. Certainly, consumer choice is not the same as democratic participation, but people increasingly see consumption as a replacement for citizenship. The problem is that this new mode of social choice is dominated by for-profit corporations and no new models of consumer involvement have emerged that would provide a satisfactory replacement for citizen participation. 'If consumption has become a site from which it is difficult to think, this is the result of its capitulation to a supposedly free, or better yet ferocious, game of market laws' (2001: 45). However, for García Canclini, the political effects of a global consumer society are not yet determined. Interpretative communities of consumers may provide the basis for a kind of citizen participation.

If García Canclini is still optimistic about an emerging global consumer culture, Benjamin Barber (1995) is less so. Barber recognizes the twin trends of homogeneity and heterogeneity in a globalizing world, but he sees little hope in either of them. He calls the homogenizing trend McWorld – a consumer oriented capitalist global culture. He calls the heterogenizing trend Jihad, and means by this the particularizing force of religious, ethnic and tribal separatism. Neither is good for democracy. McWorld weakens the nation-states which Barber argues are the only vehicles for democratic citizenship. Jihad is an exclusionary and reactionary development with fanatical authoritarian tendencies.

McWorld once held the promise of undermining political extremism by spreading democratic ideals and making isolation impossible. Barber admits that McWorld has indeed eliminated isolationism, as well as spread economic and political stability, but it has also spread an inescapable message of 'secularism, passivity, consumerism, vicariousness, impulse buying, and an accelerated pace of life' (1995: 60). It has replaced nations with 'one homogenous global theme park, one McWorld tied together by communications, information, entertainment, and commerce' (1995: 4). But the consumer freedoms promised by McWorld are not the same as democratic ideals. The response of markets to individual consumer choices cannot take into account social needs. To make matters worse, the reigning neoliberal, laissez-faire ideology of McWorld paints any attempt by nations to defend themselves from the excesses of McWorld as anti-democratic.

Barber argues that McWorld cannot fulfil democratic ideals, but it often does not even deliver its promised consumer paradise:

With a few global conglomerates controlling what is created, who distributes it, where it is shown, and how it is subsequently licensed for further use, the very idea of a genuinely competitive market in ideas or images disappears and the singular virtue that

markets indisputably have over democratic command structures – the virtue of that cohort of values associated with pluralism and variety, contingency and accident, diversity and spontaneity – is vitiated. (Barber 1995: 89)

What Barber calls ‘Jihad’ is a backlash against McWorld. By Jihad, he does not mean to indicate only, or even primarily, the Islamic reaction, but any of the ‘communities of blood rooted in exclusion and hatred’. Jihad begins by promising the soul that is missing in McWorld, but ends up promoting intolerance and hatred.

Although McWorld and Jihad are in seeming opposition, Barber argues that the two forces are complementary. McWorld and Jihad feed off one another. McWorld opposes the state in favour of the global and Jihad opposes the state in favour of the tribal. Both are opposed to the democratic participation of citizens. McWorld needs Jihad to provide the sense of belonging and identity that is missing in the global market. Jihad needs McWorld’s technological advances to be able to organize. This is why Barber argues that it is not really Jihad vs McWorld, but Jihad *and* McWorld or even Jihad *through* McWorld.

Unlike García Canclini, Barber sees consumers and citizens as innately in conflict. ‘Capitalism seeks consumers susceptible to the shaping of their needs and the manipulation of their wants, while democracy needs citizens autonomous in their thoughts and independent in their deliberative judgments’ (1995: 15). This is what makes Barber’s analysis so pessimistic and his suggested alternatives so unrealistic.

Neither as optimistic as García Canclini nor as pessimistic as Barber, George Ritzer’s (2004) theory reveals both threatening and promising trends in globalization. Ritzer dissects the categories of homogeneity and heterogeneity into two sets of oppositions: nothing vs something and glocalization vs globalization. ‘Nothing’ refers to those things that are the true products of homogenization. It is not American culture that is being disseminated, but a nothing culture of centrally conceived and controlled forms devoid of any distinctive substantive content. Something is just the opposite: those distinctive things that are conceived and controlled locally.

Usefully, Ritzer separates the things themselves from the processes of globalization. Glocalization we already know, but Ritzer introduces another, and in many ways opposed, process: globalization. In contrast to the power of the local in glocalization, Ritzer recognizes the power of capitalist enterprises to impose their cultural objects on the local. Using these terms, we can see that what has been called homogenization in the globalization literature is the globalization of nothing: the profit-driven spread of a centrally conceived and controlled standardized culture. Whereas, what has been called heterogeneity is the glocalization of something.

Ritzer accepts the inevitability of globalization, but he sees its human impact as still undetermined. He discusses positive and negative consequences of the globalization of nothing, as well as the possibilities for new forms of heterogeneity. For the latter, glocalization may increase, or there is the possibility that profit-driven businesses will be induced to distribute indigenously conceived and controlled objects with distinctive cultural properties. In any case, the future, according to Ritzer, belongs to the consumer, although he doubts that any of us will be happy with the world that our consumption is creating. There is no place in Ritzer’s theory for

Barber's oppositional citizen or even for García Canclini's explorations of the new possibilities for citizenship through consumption.

Each of these theorists provides a new perspective on a global consumer culture. They also provide the sensitizing concepts that will guide further research. The culture-ideology of consumerism, hybridity, McWorld and globalization are as much conceptual tools as they are empirical facts. And, indeed, this is equally true of global consumer culture. The way in which we understand the history of globalization, its current state and its feared or welcome future depends as much on our theoretical framework as on the facts on the ground. This realization should not lead to nihilistic scepticism, but to a recognition of the power of theories to revision our history, reframe the present and open up new alternatives for the future.

CONCLUSION

None of the above is an argument that there is now a global consumer culture. It may exist, but that is a question that requires a great deal more research. Instead, this chapter means to clear away some of the conceptual difficulties that hinder our ability to determine whether there is a global consumer culture. It is useless to sit in our armchairs and theorize about the state of the world. But it is equally useless to look for evidence of a global consumer culture, when we don't know the meaning of the phrase. The theoretical argument here is that to the extent that there is a global culture, it will be a consumer culture. This theory is meant to direct the empirical investigation to the underlying practices that would give rise to such a culture.

Nevertheless, it is clear that the extent of a consumer culture will always be limited. Consumption requires money and in the current state of the world and for the foreseeable future much of humanity will not have the money to actively participate in a global consumer culture. This, of course, does not mean that the poor will be absolutely barred from participation, but it will be as spectators who are invited to admire the seductive goods through the window of a locked door. And, indeed, this may be one of the primary sources of the Jihad that Barber warns of.

It will also take more research to understand the consequence of a global consumer culture. Many intellectuals assume it will be deleterious, but we mostly rail from within the belly of the beast. It could be nothing more than the complaint of a tourist that the picturesque poverty has been replaced by a Western-style prosperity. We should not forget the benefits of a consumer culture. Rational people want material goods and there is nothing ignoble about that. Societies driven by consumption have fed more people, clothed more people and housed more people than any in history. But neither should we ignore the disadvantages of a consumer society. The freedom of the individual consumer has limited the freedom of the community. The societies that have fed, clothed and housed people have also damaged the environment and created more trash than any others in history.

If we wish to place limits on a global consumer culture, it will take, not just more empirical research, but the development of better theories. A culture's dependence on everyday practices and its implicit, taken-for-granted core demands a theory that will analytically separate what is practically conjoined, that will make explicit what

is implicit and that will provide alternatives for what seems natural or inevitable. The theories that we have looked at here have pointed us to the sites for empirical research. It is likely that further theories will point us to sites for social action.

Note

- 1 There is a third meaning of culture which is the set of symbolic objects produced by explicitly cultural industries (Goodman 2005). While this definition has provided a productive framework for work in the sociology of culture, especially the 'production of culture' approach, it has had little or no impact on the study of global culture.

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