Global Culture: An Introduction

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Is there a global culture? If by a global culture we mean something akin to the culture of the nation-state writ large, then the answer is patently a negative one. On this comparison the concept of a global culture fails, not least because the image of the culture of a nation-state is one which generally emphasizes cultural homogeneity and integration. According to this line of reasoning, it would be impossible to identify an integrated global culture without the formation of a world state — a highly unlikely prospect. Yet if we move away from the static polarity suggested by our original question and try to employ a broader definition of culture and think more in terms of processes, it might be possible to refer to the globalization of culture. Here we can point to cultural integration and cultural disintegration processes which take place not only on an inter-state level but processes which transcend the state-society unit and can therefore be held to occur on a trans-national or trans-societal level. It therefore may be possible to point to trans-societal cultural processes which take a variety of forms, some of which have preceded the inter-state relations into which nation-states can be regarded as being embedded, and processes which sustain the exchange and flow of goods, people, information, knowledge and images which give rise to communication processes which gain some autonomy on a global level. Hence there may be emerging sets of 'third cultures', which themselves are conduits for all sorts of diverse cultural flows which cannot be merely understood as the product of bilateral exchanges between nation-states. It is therefore misleading to conceive a global culture as necessarily entailing a weakening of the sovereignty of nation-states which, under the impetus of some form of teleological evolutionism or other master logic, will necessarily become absorbed into larger units and eventually a world state which produces cultural homogeneity and integration. It is also misleading to regard the emergence of third

cultures as the embodiment of a logic which points to homogeni-
zation. The binary logic which seeks to comprehend culture via the
mutually exclusive terms of homogeneity/heterogeneity, integra-
tion/disintegration, unity/diversity, must be discarded. At best,
these conceptual pairs work on one face only of the complex prism
which is culture. Rather we need to inquire into the grounds, the
various generative processes, involving the formation of cultural
images and traditions as well as the inter-group struggles and inter-
dependencies, which led to these conceptual oppositions becoming
frames of reference for comprehending culture within the state-
society which then become projected onto the globe.

Postmodernism is both a symptom and a powerful cultural image
of the swing away from the conceptualization of global culture less
in terms of alleged homogenizing processes (e.g. theories which
present cultural imperialism, Americanization and mass consumer
culture as a proto-universal culture riding on the back of Western
economic and political domination) and more in terms of the
diversity, variety and richness of popular and local discourses, codes
and practices which resist and play-back systemicity and order.
Modes of understanding which operated within a strict symbolic
hierarchy and a bound context are now asked to accept that all
symbolic hierarchies are to be spatialized out and that the context is
boundless. The focus on the globe is to suggest that a new level of
conceptualization is necessary. Yet the conception of culture as
having escaped the bounded nation-state society also points to a
limit, the image of the globe as a single place, the generative frame
of unity within which diversity can take place. At the same time, the
temptation of the postmodern mood is to eschew such theoretical
complications and to regard the changes which point to a global
culture as opening up another space onto which can be inscribed
speculative theorizations, thin histories and the detritus of the exotic
and spectacular. The challenge for sociology, still attempting to
come to terms with the upsurge of interest in culture in the 1980s
which has seen a lowering of the boundaries between it and the other
social sciences and the humanities, is to both theorize and work out
modes of systematic investigation which can clarify these globali-
zing processes and distinctive forms of social life which render prob-
lematic what has long been regarded as the basic subject matter for
sociology: society, conceived almost exclusively as the bounded
nation-state.[1]

The argument that the rise and development of sociology has been

too dominated by the special case of the rise of the modern nation-state, in which the particular characteristics of a national integration process have been generalized into a model of social integration, in which society becomes the key frame of reference for sociology, is gaining wider acceptance (see in this collection the pieces by Robertson, Arnason, Mennell and Turner). Wallerstein (1987), for example, has argued that this identification of sociology with the study of society should be rejected on two counts. Firstly, it developed in the nineteenth century as part of an antithetical tandem, the other half of which was the state, in which society was seen as a substratum of manners and customs which held people together. Secondly, this 'artificial' division between the political and social — and we should add the economic — which gave rise to the separate disciplines of politics, sociology and economics in the nineteenth century, should be rejected in favour of a more integrated social science approach combined with history: a historical social science.[2] Yet it is a mistake to regard sociology as being solely preoccupied with the nation-state society: an interest in global and universal processes can be traced back at least as far as the Enlightenment. Furthermore there exist important sub-traditions within sociology which have endeavoured to follow the broader approach which Wallerstein endorsed. We find various blends of the social sciences, history and philosophy not only content to universalize Western models of modernization, rationalization, industrialization, revolution and citizenship to the rest of the world, a world conceived as bound together by a universal history; but also the universalization of an egalitarian concern with doing justice to particularities and differences, with *humanity*. From the point of view of those at the forefront of the upsurge of interest in culture and perspectives such as postmodernism, the assumptions of the rationalization, modernization and industrialization models are to be treated with suspicion. In effect, the assumption is that we have moved beyond the logic of the universal 'iron cage' rationalization process (Haferkamp, 1987). As Margaret Archer argues, in her contribution, the various brands of industrialization, convergence and post-industrialization theory which were popular in the 1960s and 1970s subordinated culture to structural development and shelved the question of the relationship between culture and agency. Likewise, in his article in this collection, Alain Touraine argues that the idea of revolution which has been at the heart of the Western representation of modernization entailed a belief in the logic of the system, a society without actors.

From the vantage point of the late twentieth century it seems that the era of revolution is now finally over. It is these issues plus an increasing sensitivity to the particularities and 'exhaustion' of Western modernity, in a global circumstance in which other cultural and civilizational traditions are becoming impossible to ignore, that has led some to argue that sociology's basic undergraduate teaching programme should shift from revolving around local societies to focus on internationalization and global issues (Tiryakian, 1986).

Within the French tradition the emphasis on the idea of humanity, the new universal secular religious ideal which can be traced back to Saint-Simon and Comte, came to full development in the later writings of Durkheim. For Durkheim, as societies expanded and increased in complexity, the degree of social and cultural differentiation developed to the point at which, even for members of the same society, the only thing they retained in common was their humanity. This 'idea of the human person', which developed out of individualist morality, was for Durkheim the natural successor to Christianity (Lukes, 1973: 338ff.). For Durkheim the sacredness of the person could become one of the few cultural ideals capable of providing a crucial point of unification for an increasingly differentiated, yet interdependent, world. In his contribution, Tenbruck discusses a related cultural ideal, the dream of a secular ecumene, which also can be traced back to the grounds of Christendom. The idea of a secular ecumene which gained its historical dynamic from the French Revolution has undergone transformations into the powerful cultural imagery of socialism, with its dream of a global culture and, in the post-war era, the equally potent ideal of 'development' — both of which set off a whole series of global cultural struggles.

The debates about the place of culture in world-systems theory brings to the fore many of the issues we have just raised. It is Wallerstein's reiteration of one of his central tenets, in his piece on culture and the world system, that the world-system is 'based on a particular logic, that of the ceaseless accumulation of capital' which raises questions about his conceptualization of culture. Boyne's argument that Wallerstein still employs a view of culture as merely derivative and reactive to the 'brute and disinterested objectivism of world-systems theory', meets an equally forceful defence in his exchange with Wallerstein. A similar criticism is made by Worsley who wishes to contest Wallerstein's conflation of the 'three worlds'

into his central concepts of core and periphery. For Worsley, Wallerstein's model is another variant of political economy which does not sufficiently take culture into account; he remarks that 'without the cultural dimension it is impossible to make sense of a modern world in which nationalism, religion and inter-ethnic hostility has been far more important than internationalism and secularism'.

This argument is developed further by Bergesen in his contribution 'Turning World Systems Theory on its Head'. Bergesen argues that there is a common neo-utilitarian basis to both world-systems analysis and international relations theory which neglects the power relations and cultural relations which preceded the inter-state system. (Bergesen's argument here is analogous to the culturally embedded economy arguments of Durkheim about the non-contractual basis of contract and Simmel's quest to 'build a storey beneath historical materialism', variants of which can also be detected in the work of Weber and Marx.) For Bergesen, Wallerstein commits the individualist error of working from parts to wholes in which the sub-units, the individual states, are assumed to acquire their definitive properties prior to participation in the world-system. Rather, he argues 'for the vast majority of the world's states, the international system preceded their existence and moreover made that existence possible in the first place'. A system which was forcefully created through conquest and colonization, through power not exchange. Likewise international relations theory focuses on inter-state relations and neglects the international state system in the form of culture (independent diplomatic languages — Latin then French — and systems of representation linked to the Church and dynastic families in the Middle Ages) which arose alongside state action and made it possible.

Bergesen's argument can also be related to the theory of globalization developed by Robertson in which nation-states are not seen to simply interact but to constitute a world, a global context in which the world becomes a singular place with its own processes and forms of integration (see also Moore, 1966). Robertson, whose piece in this collection extends the argument he has developed over a number of years, emphasizes the autonomy of the globalization process, which should be seen not as the outcome of inter-state processes, but to operate in *relative* independence of conventionally designated societal and socio-cultural processes. For these reasons Robertson maintains that the term globalization is preferable to

internationalization (literally inter nation-state exchanges) as it draws attention to *the form* within which the world becomes 'united'. It points to the process of global compression which has led to the current high degree of global complexity and intensified cultural conflicts over 'the definition of the global situation'. A globalization process which could, in theory, have rendered the world into a singular place through a variety of trajectories: through the imperial hegemony of a single nation or power bloc, or the triumph of a trading company, the universal proletariat, a form of religion, or the world-federalist movement. All these are historical possibilities which could have produced various blends and forms of cultural integration and differentiation. All of them, as well as the current phase of the globalization process, could be said to entail the production of global cultures. For Robertson the phase of accelerated globalization has taken place since the 1880s. The shift towards the idea of the homogeneous unitary nation-state was itself one aspect of this process and should not be misunderstood as an impediment, for it was itself an idea which became rapidly globalized. Also significant have been: the increase in the numbers of international agencies and institutions, the increasing global forms of communication, the acceptance of unified global time, the development of global competitions and prizes, the development of standard notions of citizenship, rights and conception of humankind.

This globalization process which points to the extension of global cultural interrelatedness can also be understood as leading to a global ecumene, defined as a 'region of persistent culture interaction and exchange' (Kopytoff, 1987: 10; Hannerz, 1989). A process whereby a series of cultural flows produce both: *firstly*, cultural homogeneity and cultural disorder, in linking together previously isolated pockets of relatively homogeneous culture which in turn produces more complex images of the other as well as generating identity-reinforcing reactions; and also *secondly*, transnational cultures, which can be understood as genuine 'third cultures' which are orientated beyond national boundaries. As Appadurai remarks in his piece, the complexity of the global cultural flows now taking place cast doubt on the continuing usefulness of centre-periphery models. Appadurai suggests we can conceive of five dimensions of global cultural flows which move in non-isomorphic paths. Firstly, there are *ethnoscapes* produced by flows of people: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles and guestworkers. Secondly, there are

technoscapes, the machinery and plant flows produced by multi-national and national corporations and government agencies. Thirdly, there are *finanscapes*, produced by the rapid flows of money in the currency markets and stock exchanges. Fourthly, there are *mediascapes*, the repertoires of images and information, the flows which are produced and distributed by newspapers, magazines, television and film. Fifthly, there are *ideoscapes*, linked to flows of images which are associated with state or counter-state movement ideologies which are comprised of elements of the Western Enlightenment world-view — images of democracy, freedom, welfare, rights etc. While Appadurai has emphasized the disjunction between these cultural flows, it should be added that states, multinationals — as well as other agencies, institutions and interest groups — will attempt to manipulate, channel (close or open up) the cultural boundaries of others to these flows with varying degrees of success in relation to their relative power resources. We will now look in more detail at some of the trans-national cultural flows, and then turn to the hermeneutic problems entailed.

The changes in the world economy which have taken place in the 1970s and 1980s, which some have referred to as a new phase of capitalism 'disorganized capitalism' or 'post-Fordism' (Lash and Urry, 1987; Offe, 1985; Lipietz, 1987), are generally represented as entailing the de-monopolization of economic structures with the deregulation and globalization of markets, trade and labour. The globalization of capital flows with 24-hour stockmarket trading, which gained pace after the 'Big Bang' of October 1986, not only deregulated local markets and made local capital vulnerable to the strategies of corporate raiders, it necessitated new norms for the market too. The globalization of capital, Dezalay remarks in his contribution to this collection, also entailed the globalization of the market in services to finance, commerce and industry. A new category of professionals: international lawyers, corporate tax accountants, financial advisers and management consultants were required as the various business and financial interests sought to chart and formalize the newly globalized economic space. This reintroduction of competition and market imperatives in the world of law led to a process of homogenization and interconnection between national legal systems. The breaking down of barriers favoured the strongest performer: the North American law firms which had already experienced the emergence of 'mega-law firms'

and the creation of 'law factories'. In this sense the globalization of the market for legal services was in many ways an Americanization. It also made space for a new generation of lawyers — less tied to the quasi-aristocratic ideals and disdain for marketing characteristic of the gentleman lawyers. Now the emphasis was upon technical competence, aggressive tactics and a meritocratic ethos which made the new lawyers perfect auxiliaries to the new breed of corporate raiders. A similar process of deregulation and globalization occurred within related professional activities such as architecture and advertising. To these we could add a range of specialists in the film, video, television, music, image and consumer industries which King refers to as 'design professionals'. This coterie of new specialists and professionals not only work outside the traditional professional and organizational cultures of the nation-state, they experience the problems of inter-cultural communication at first hand. This, plus the necessity of moving backwards or forwards between different cultures, various imperfect proto-'third cultures' necessitate new types of flexible personal controls, dispositions and means of orientation, in effect a new type of habitus. They not only operate in a compressed global space made possible by new means of communication, but frequently work in and inhabit a specific type of urban space: the redeveloped inner city areas. King (1990) refers to these as global or 'world cities', cities in which the global financial and banking services and culture industries are concentrated. Yet in practice, as Hannerz (1989) points out, global cultural centres whether of the traditional type (e.g. focal points of high culture and fashion such as Paris) or new forms of popular culture industries (e.g. film and television in Los Angeles, Bombay and Hong Kong) do not necessarily correspond to economic (e.g. Tokyo) and political (e.g. Washington) centres. Although there are of course instances in which all three functions are concentrated together (e.g. New York, London).

One consequence of these changes is that more and more people are now involved with more than one culture, thus increasing the practical problems of interculture communication. As Gessner and Schade point out, intercultural communication has developed as a new research area since the end of the late 1960s to investigate the practical problems and misunderstandings encountered by private persons, agencies and organizations which are brought into contact for a variety of reasons such as, for example, cross-border legal disputes. While such people, and the cultural specialists and profes-

sionals we have mentioned, may as a consequence develop 'third cultures' for transnational communication, it is by no means clear that this necessarily entails the generation of a cosmopolitan outlook.[3]

Indeed, as Hannerz suggests in his article in this collection, we can envisage a range of responses between the polarities of localism (territorially anchored or 'bounded' cultures involving face-to-face relations among people who do not move around a great deal) and cosmopolitanism (transnational cultural networks extended in space in which there is a good deal of overlapping and mingling which encourages an orientation to engage with the other). Some of the people who travel widely, such as businessmen and expatriates, are often locals at heart who do not really want to leave home. For these there is an expanding literature of do-it-yourself travel guides on how to find home comforts abroad and how to avoid the embarrassment of unintended cultural insults and *faux pas* towards foreign hosts. The majority of present-day tourism is of the 'home plus' (sun, sea, sand, wildlife, etc.) variety, in which new and potentially disturbing experiences are strictly controlled. As Zygmunt Bauman argues, most tourism seeks to reduce hermeneutic problems by directing tourists to special enclaves in which functional mediators play the boundary maintaining role. In contrast we can posit varieties of cosmopolitanism, such as in diplomacy, in which the other culture is largely mastered and there is the capacity to communicate the fruits of this competence to others via third languages, such as diplomatic languages. A further example of cosmopolitanism is the transnational intellectuals who keep in touch via global cultural flows and who are not only at home in other cultures, but seek out and adopt a reflexive, metacultural or aesthetic stance to divergent cultural experiences.

One complication to the local–cosmopolitan dichotomy, is the stranger. For Bauman the stranger — someone who comes today and stays tomorrow — cannot be integrated into the cosmopolitan/local, friend/enemy forms of sociation; indeed the stranger introduces a disturbing indeterminacy into attempts at classificatory clarity. Within the urban environments of modernity, the alien or stranger appears inside the lifeworld and refuses to participate in the state's construction of an 'imagined community', its efforts to eliminate strangers and redefine them as friends through nationalistic assimilation policies. Yet for Bauman these attempts to attain cultural uniformity and homogeneity ultimately fail. Modernity

with its project of imposing order on the world and social engineering projects reaches its limits and state-led cultural crusades are abandoned. The shift towards a contemporary postmodern culture, Bauman holds, offers a greater chance of tolerance as we move into an era in which national and cultural boundaries are constantly re-drawn and crossed more easily.

The resilience of the *ethnie*, the ethnic cores of nations, the pre-modern traditions, memories, myths, values and symbols woven together and sustained in popular consciousness, is emphasized by Anthony Smith in his contribution. Yet, for Smith like Robertson, this does not necessarily lead to tolerance for the globalization process and the intensification of contacts and sense that the world is one place also brings nations closer together in cultural prestige competitions. A world of competing national cultures seeking to improve the ranking of their states, offers the prospect of global 'cultural wars' with little basis for global projects of cultural integration, *lingua francas*, and ecumenical or cosmopolitan 'unity through diversity' notions, despite the existence of the necessary technical communications infrastructures. The latter, especially the global mass media, have been characterized by some theorists as offering the spectre of cultural homogenization often in the form of 'cultural imperialism' or 'Americanization'. Schiller (1985), for example, regards transnational corporations as breaking down national broadcasting and telecommunications entities so that they can saturate the defenceless cultural space of the nation (see Schlesinger, 1987). While particular television programmes, sport spectacles, music concerts, advertisements may rapidly transit the globe, this is not to say that the response of those viewing and listening within a variety of cultural contexts and practices will be anything like uniform (Featherstone, 1987; forthcoming; Wernick, forthcoming). Friedman, in his article, discusses some interesting examples of the ways in which groups in various national contexts in different parts of the world handle consumer commodities and tourism through a variety of strategies to re-constitute identity.

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. Yet, as several contributors have pointed out, the intensity and rapidity of today's global cultural flows have contributed to the sense that the world is a singular place which entails the proliferation of new cultural forms for

encounters. While this increasingly dense web of cosmopolitan –
local encounters and interdependencies can give rise to third cultures
and increasing tolerance, it can also result in negative reactions and
intolerance. John O'Neill, for example, discusses the global panic
generated by AIDS, as leading to both an intensification of the sense
that the world is one place which must pull together to fight off
threats to world order, and at the same time, a de-globalizing
reaction arising from the difficulty of sealing off the nation-state
from global viral flows. In a similar vein, Beyer points to the ways in
which the globalization of religion produces a situation in which
there are no outsiders who can serve as a repository of evil. With
globalization, the person who was unequivocally outside now
becomes a neighbour, with the result that the inside/outside distinc-
tion fails. This can lead to responses of ecumenicism, tolerance and
universalism in which everyone is included, or resistance to globali-
zation in the form of counter movements, such as the various non-
Western fundamentalisms which react against 'Westoxication' or,
in the West, seek to embark on a neoconservative programme of
de-differentiation to restore Western Christendom. In this context
the analogies between a national culture and global culture again
break down. While we can refer to the process of formation of
national identities and the role of intellectuals in mobilizing the
ethnie in attempting to develop a unified national culture, we are
made painfully aware of the alternative traditions and histories, the
layers of local cultures which were suppressed as a result of this pro-
ject. It becomes impossible to talk about a common culture in the
fuller sense without talking about who is defining it, within which
set of interdependencies and power balances, for what purposes,
and with reference to which outside culture(s) have to be discarded,
rejected or demonified in order to generate the sense of cultural
identity.[4] To contemplate this on a global level means imaginatively
to construct an 'outside' to the globe, the sphere of global threat
captured only in the pages and footage of science fiction accounts of
space invaders, inter-planetary and inter-galactic wars. In addition
the transnational cosmopolitan intellectuals (serving which masters
we might ask?) would have a long way to go to re-discover, formu-
late and agree upon global equivalents to the *ethnie*.

  It is also all too evident that discussion of a global culture is
generated from within a particular time and place and practice. This
one within a Western European academic setting in English, as we
move towards the end of the twentieth century. It is hard for us to

imagine from the centrality of our English academic discourse, as Walter Benjamin (1968: 80) remarks, having to think of the problems of translating our language into that of non-Western languages and how this might effect their sense of place within the world (Polier and Roseberry, 1989). Yet it is all too clear that the Indian scientist or intellectual in New Delhi who wishes to develop contacts to exchange information with his Japanese opposite numbers, must do so in English. We are slowly becoming aware that the West is both a particular in itself and also constitutes the universal point of reference in relation to which others recognise themselves as particularities (Sakai, 1988). The debates about how to characterize Japan on the Western continuum of pre-modernity, modernity and post-modernity bring this problem into prominence. While economically Japan has become a major global presence, global culture flows into and, especially out of, Japan have been well regulated. The extent to which the talk of a new 'age of culture' in Japan in the 1980s (see Harootunian, 1989) will materialize into a self-confident global cultural project, remains to be seen. Nevertheless, we are becoming aware that the 'orientalization of the world' (Maffesoli, 1988) is a distinct global process — although the task of unpacking the range of cultural associations summoned up by this concept, and their place in the continuing struggles to define the global cultural order, has yet to begin.

Notes

1. Zygmunt Bauman (1989: 152) makes this linkage explicit when he writes 'the models of postmodernity, unlike the models of modernity, cannot be grounded in the realities of the nation state'.

2. It is interesting to note that in this argument for an integrated historical social science Wallerstein has no place for psychology. For an approach which also seeks to go beyond the nation-state-society frame of reference but argues for integrated social science which includes psychology, see Moscovici (1988 and forthcoming). Elias (1978, 1982, 1985) has also developed historical and processual approaches which

synthesize many of the accustomed 'levels' and 'territorial domains' of social science, including the psychological and sociological, which are normally kept apart (see also, Elias, 1969).

3. Third cultures may lead to a process of routinization and formalization of contacts in order to reduce ambiguity given the high demands such encounters place upon individuals' personal accomplishments. Yet it is also possible that processes of informalization and the 'formalization of informalization' may occur once the contacts have become less emotionally threatening (see Wouters, 1986; forthcoming).

4. For an account of the problems of participating in the writing of a world history — the project of writing a revised version of the officially described *History of the Scientific and Cultural Development of Mankind* sponsored by UNESCO which pulled together historians from all parts of the world — see Burke (1989).

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