Part I

Thinking the Global

This first part of our reader presents several general theoretical efforts to map the global condition. These articles suggest, much as we did in our introduction, that the picture of globalization as a homogenizing, one-way flow of culture from the West to the rest does not adequately capture the complex realities of the contemporary world. Hannerz's chapter, for example, points out that while the circuits that connect the West to the rest of the world are no doubt the chief conduits of the global traffic in culture, they are certainly not the only important circuits around. One also has to contend with those that bring the culture of the periphery to the center as well as with the ones that interconnect the countries of the Third World with one another. Appadurai's piece suggests that the global cultural economy is a complex, overlapping, and disjunctive order, one best understood in terms of the relationship among five dimensions of global cultural flows: ethnoscapes (the moving landscape of people), mediascapes (the distribution of the electronic capabilities to disseminate information), technoscapes (the global configuration of technology), financescapes (the disposition of global capital), and ideoscapes (a chain of ideas composed of elements of the Enlightenment worldview). Finally, the article by Gupta and Ferguson is concerned with exploring the production of difference in a world of culturally, politically, and economically inter-twined and interdependent spaces. The aim of these chapters is thus to present a nuanced view of the globe, one that highlights the multiple routes of culture and the fact that globalization is not in any simple way producing a world of sameness.

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1

Notes on the Global Ecumene

Ulf Hannerz

Cultural interrelatedness increasingly reaches across the world. More than ever, there is now a global ecumene.[1] To grasp this fact, in its wide range of manifestations and implications, is the largest task now confronting a macro-anthropology of culture. These notes are devoted to two of the issues involved: they identify the nature of center–periphery relationships in cultural terms, and scrutinize the notion that the world is becoming culturally homogenized.

Culture and Center–Periphery Relationships

Until the 1960s or so, acknowledgements of the fact that 'we are all in the same world' were mostly pieties, with uncertain political and intellectual implications. Since then, in the social sciences, the globalizing tendency has usually involved a view of asymmetry; key conceptual pairs have been center (or core) and periphery, metropolis and satellite.[2] Asymmetries are present in the global social organization of meaning as well. But what kind of asymmetries are they? How closely aligned are the asymmetries of culture with those of economy, politics, or military might? How do center–periphery relationships in the world affect structures of meaning and cultural expression?

   In political and military terms, the world [during much] of the twentieth century [had] two superpowers, and whatever freedom of movement other countries [exercised], whether great or small, it [tended] ultimately to be constrained by this arrangement. In economic terms, the century has by and large seen the United States in a dominant position, with a number of lesser powers grouped around it, varyingly in ascent or decline. In cultural terms, are there other powers than these?

The question at least has two sides (which may be to simplify matters). There is that cultural production in the periphery which is somehow in response to the political and economic dominance of the center. Here the world system as defined in political and/or economic terms is obviously given cultural recognition of a sort. On the other hand, there is the issue of cultural diffusion. What defines the center–periphery relationship here are above all asymmetries of input and scale. When the center speaks, the periphery listens, and on the whole does not talk back.

In this case, the cultural centers of the world are not by definition identical with political and economic centers. Are they in practice? Let us consider this in gross terms, as an issue of the overall cultural influence of nations. It can be argued that the center–periphery relationships of culture are not, at least at any particular point in time, a mere reflection of political and economic power. In the American case, the congruence is undeniable. The general cultural influence of the Soviet Union in the world [in the decades of its greatest strength], on the other hand, [remained] modest compared with its political and military power. Among the lesser powers, Britain and France may at present be stronger as cultural than as economic and political centers; this is perhaps debatable. Japan, on the whole, keeps a low cultural profile in the world, despite its economic success. Most of what it exports does not seem to be identifiably marked by Japaneseness.

If the global pattern of center–periphery relationships in culture thus has some degree of separateness, it is easy to see in some instances what is behind a greater cultural influence. To a degree the present cultural influence of Britain and France reflects the fact that the old-style colonial powers could more or less monopolize the center–periphery cultural flow to their domains. In large parts of the world this still makes London or Paris not just *a* center but *the* center. In old settler colonies, historical ties are yet closer, as links of kinship and ancestry also connect the periphery to a specific center. In Australia, when critics refer to 'the cultural cringe', it is the deference to things English they still have in mind. Language is obviously also a factor which may convert political power into cultural influence, and then conserve the latter. As people go on speaking English, French and Portuguese in postcolonial lands, in postcolonial times, old center–periphery relationships get a prolonged lease on life. If all this means that the center–periphery relationships of culture tend to exhibit some lag relative to present and emergent structures of political and economic power, it might also mean that Japan could yet come into greater cultural influence in the world.

One might speculate that people also make different assumptions, in a metacultural fashion, about the nature of the relationship between themselves and their culture. By and large, Americans may not expect that the meanings and the cultural forms they invent are only for themselves; possibly because they have seen at home over the years that practically anybody can become an American. The French may see their culture as a gift to the world. There is a *mission civilisatrice*. The Japanese, on the other hand – so it is said – find it a strange notion that anyone can 'become Japanese', and they put Japanese culture on exhibit, in the framework of organized international contacts, as a way of displaying irreducible distinctiveness rather than in order to make it spread. (Notably, many of those who engage in introducing aspects of Japanese culture to the world are alien culture brokers.[3])

Staying with the conception of cultural centers as places where culture is invented and from which it is diffused, however, one cannot be satisfied with only the very generalized picture of the relative standing of a handful of countries as wholes. Too much is missing, and too much is assumed. Countries do not always exercise their influence at the same level across the gamut of cultural expressions. American influence is at present very diverse, but perhaps most conspicuous in science, technology and popular culture; French influence on world culture is rather of the high culture variety, and in fields like upmarket food and fashion; there is widespread interest in the organization and culture of Japanese corporations. In such more specialized ways, places like the Vatican and the Shia holy city of Qom also organize parts of the world into center–periphery relationships of culture, for certain purposes. As far as asymmetries of cultural flow are concerned, there is likewise the notable instance of the Indian film industry, offering entertainment for large parts of the Third World.

In this context one should also keep in mind that particularly in such fields as science and technology, the spread of knowledge between nations can be actively prevented, for reasons of economic, political and military advantage. Indeed, there are signs that large-scale restrictive management of knowledge is on the increase.[4] Often it is primarily a part of competitive relationships between centers, but it constrains the cultural flow between center and periphery as well, maintaining the advantage of the former.

It is another characteristic of the structure of center–periphery relationships that it has many tiers. Some countries have a strong influence in their regions, due to a well-developed cultural apparatus – Mexico in Latin America, for example, and Egypt in the Arab world. A shared language and cultural tradition can be important in this way, at the same time as a sizeable domestic market for cultural products can give one country an advantageous position in having something to export to the rest of the region. Such regional centers may base their production on meanings and forms wholly internal to the region, or they may operate as cultural brokers, translating influences from first-tier centers into something more adapted to regional conditions.

World cultural flow, it appears, has a much more intricate organization of diversity than is allowed in a picture of a center–periphery structure with just a handful of all-purpose centers. A further issue, obviously, if one tries to arrive at a kind of present-day global cultural flow chart, is to what extent the peripheries indeed talk back; which would in large part be a question of the cultural influence of the Third World on the Occident.

Reggae music, swamis, and Latin American novels exemplify the kind of counter-currents that may first enter one's mind; culture coming fully developed, as it were, from periphery to center, and at the same time culture which the periphery can give away, and keep at the same time. There are indeed instances like these. Yet judging by them alone, however much more desirable one would find it to be able to speak of world culture in terms of equal exchange, the conclusion can at present hardly be avoided that asymmetry rules.

But then there are also other kinds of cultural transfers from periphery to center, which in themselves exemplify asymmetry in other manners. One involves particular embodiments of meaning; objects of art, ritual or other significance, which may not

be readily replaceable at the periphery, but which are at one time or other exported, due to the superior economic and political power of the center, and absorbed by its museums or other collections. Here one may see indeed a tangible impoverishment of the cultures of the periphery – often especially in terms of immediate access to the best in one's cultural heritage, as what is removed is what the center defines as capital-C culture of the periphery. This is now a field of controversy, with the representatives of the periphery insisting upon the moral right to demand the decommoditization and repatriation of artifacts to their own countries.[5]

There is likewise the kind of periphery-to-center transfer in which people like anthropologists can come to play a part. Much knowledge concerning the periphery is more available in the center than in the periphery itself, and especially to the specialists on the periphery from the center, because of the greater capacity of the center to organize and analyze knowledge in certain ways. The center may extract the raw materials for this knowledge, so to speak, from the periphery, but as such, it may at the same time remain there, for again, informants and others need not give up the knowledge that they give away. But the process of refining the materials often only occurs in the knowledge institutions of the center, and it is not at all certain that the final product gets back to the periphery. Sometimes, this kind of center–periphery asymmetry is labeled academic imperialism; as we see, it entails a flow in the opposite direction of that usually thought of as cultural imperialism.

Anyway, all this is in gross terms, as a way of beginning to look at cultural management at the most inclusive level. In fact, one does not get very far by talking about the influence of nations, for nations as such, as corporate actors, have only a limited part in the global cultural flow. They may appear in guises such as the USIA, the Fulbright Commission, the British Council, and the Alliance Française, and interact in their own terms in organizations such as UNESCO. Much of the traffic in culture in the world, however, is transnational rather than international. It ignores, subverts and devalues rather than celebrates national boundaries. When we talk about American influence or French influence or Mexican influence, we throw together a great many kinds of asymmetrical relationships, perhaps with a number of symmetrical ones for good measure. A more precise realization of how contemporary world culture is constituted can only result when we take them apart again.

Some Questions about Alarmism

The forecast that the center–periphery flow of culture will lead to the disappearance of cultural differences in the world is encountered fairly frequently these days. "One conclusion still seems unanimously shared," claims a prominent media researcher; "the impressive variety of the world's cultural systems is waning due to a process of 'cultural synchronization' that is without historical precedent" (Hamelink 1983: 3). Horror tales are told: "The incredibly rich local musical tradition of many Third World countries is rapidly disappearing under the onslaught of dawn-to-dusk American pop music." "For starving children in the Brazilian city of Recife, to have a Barbie doll seems more important than food." The prime mover behind this pan-human replication of uniformity is late western capitalism, equipped with media

technology, forever luring more communities into dependency on the fringes of an expanding world-wide consumer society. The transnational cultural apparatus is an instrument of hegemony.

The alarmist view of the threat of global cultural homogenization cannot be dismissed out of hand. Yet some questions should be raised which may cast some general light on the problem of the efficacy of the transnational cultural apparatus.

One question is whether the transnational influences must really be seen as wholly deleterious. Current conceptions of cultural imperialism exemplify on the largest imaginable scale the curious fact that according to the economics of culture, to receive may be to lose. In that way, they are a useful antidote to old 'white man's burden' notions of the gifts of culture from center to periphery as unadulterated benefaction. But perhaps a closer examination allows us to see more shades in the picture. In the areas of scholarship and intellectual life in general, we hardly take a conflict for granted between the transnational flow of culture and local cultural creativity the way we do with popular culture. Without a certain openness to impulses from the outside world, we would even expect science, art and literature to become impoverished. Obviously, for example, Nigerian literary life could hardly exist were it not for the importation of literacy and a range of literary forms. But there would not have been a Nigerian Nobel Prize winner in literature in 1986 if Wole Soyinka had not creatively drawn on both a cosmopolitan literary expertise and an imagination rooted in a Nigerian mythology, and turned them into something unique.

Nevertheless, the transnational diffusion of popular culture tends to be described, among intellectuals and policymakers at least, rather unremittingly in terms of its destructive and distracting powers. And this is as true in debate in the Third World (or on behalf of the Third World, among interested outsiders) as in a country like Sweden which, if finer distinctions are to be made, would probably be described as part of the semi-periphery (but hardly, on the other hand, of the semi-center) as far as transnational cultural flow is concerned.

Why, then, are we so quick to assume that in this field the relationship between local and imported culture can only be one of competition? Established assumptions about cultural purity and authenticity probably come to the surface here. We imagine that local products are threatened with extinction through the importation of 'cheap foreign junk'. In such references one may detect some hypocrisy, insofar as they imply that all local products are of great intellectual or esthetic merit, never merely cheap local junk. But we also ignore the possibility that the formal symbol systems of popular culture and the media, and the skills in handling the symbol systems, can be transferred between cultures. As long as there is room for local cultural production as well, this may in itself be helped in its development by the availability of a wider range of models. And at least to the extent that the Nigerian example is anything to go by, it seems to be a dubious assumption that there will never be such room for local production, or that it cannot be created. (But I will have a little more to say about the particular Nigerian conditions below.)

It may be objected that such notions of cultural enrichment are not to the point, that even if what is imported is seen as equipment, models and stimuli, it is still destructive insofar as it irreversibly changes local culture. Whatever modifications these imports undergo, however much they are integrated with indigenous culture, they may impose alien formats on it. When literacy comes in, whatever modes of

thought may be linked to pure orality are likely to be corrupted.[6] A Nigerian sitcom is still a sitcom. The very shape of popular culture as a social organizational phenomenon, with its great asymmetry in the relationship between performers and audience, might threaten older and more participatory arrangements of cultural expression.

Again this is a serious argument. But there is perhaps only a thin line between a defense of authenticity and an antiquarianism which often turns out to be vicarious. Nigeria, for example, could hardly in this postcolonial era go back completely to its precolonial cultural heritage, for pure tradition and its collective form of expression would not serve the contemporary structures of the country and could not match the everyday experiences and desires of many Nigerians today. A popular culture, and a media technology, are now as much necessities in large parts of the Third World as they are in the Occident, and the more realistic hope for continued cultural diversity in the world, with some linkage to local heritage, would rather seem to be for a diversity in motion, one of coexistence as well as creative interaction between the transnational and the indigenous.

Another problem with alarmism tends to be the quality of the evidence for it. Quite frequently it is anecdotal – "I switched on the television set in my hotel room in Lagos (or Manila, or Tel Aviv, or Geneva), and found that *Dallas* was on." In a more sophisticated version, it may be pointed out that on one Third World television channel or other, some high percentage of the programming is imported.

To be more completely persuasive, however, arguments about the impact of the transnational cultural flow would have to say something about how the people respond to it. The mere fact that Third World television stations buy a lot of imported programs, for example, often has more to do with the fact that they are cheap than that audiences are necessarily enthralled with them. We may have little idea about how many television sets are on, when they are shown, and much less what is the quality of attention to them.

At least as problematic is the sense that people make of the transnational cultural flow. Even when we refer to it as a 'flow of meaning', we must keep in mind the uncertainties built into the communicative process. If one cannot be too sure of perfect understanding even in a face-to-face interaction in a local context with much cultural redundancy, the difficulties (or the opportunities for innovative interpret-ations, if one wants to see it another way) multiply where there is largely a one-way cultural flow, between people whose perspectives have been shaped in very different contexts, in places very distant from one another. The meaning of the transnational cultural flow is thus in the eye of the beholder; what he sees we generally know little about.[7]

One intricate issue here is the relationship between different symbolic modes and the global diversity of culture. Do some symbolic forms, in some modes, travel better than others? We know well enough where the barriers of incomprehension are between languages. How is the transnational spread of popular culture affected by varying sensibilities with respect to other modes, particularly the musical and gestural? One may rather facilely explain the popularity of Indian and Hong Kong movies over much of the Third World by referring to the fact that they are cheap (which appeals to distributors) and action-packed (which appeals to somewhat unsophisticated audiences). But the latter point may hide as much as it reveals.

What kind, or degree, of precision is there in the audience appreciation of the symbolic forms of another country?[8]

It seems also that the consequences of transnational cultural flow must be understood as they unfold over time. The murderous threat of cultural imperialism is often rhetorically depicted as involving the high-tech culture of the metropolis, with powerful organizational backing, facing a defenseless, small-scale folk culture. Such encounters do perhaps occur. Yet at other times and in other places this is a very ahistorical view. In Nigeria, in the case of popular music but probably with reference to other popular culture forms as well, it seems important that the process by which external borrowings have been absorbed has some time depth. Metropolitan popular music, its genres and its instruments, have filtered into the West African coast societies gradually over the last century, introduced to begin with by modest means. There has been time, then, to absorb such influences, and in turn modify the modifications, and to fit the new popular culture to the evolving national social structure, its audiences and its situations. And this is the local scene which now meets the transnational cultural industries of the late twentieth century.

One can think of two rough scenarios of the long-term effects of transnational cultural flows. I would like to call them the scenarios of saturation and maturation. The former would suggest that as the transnational cultural apparatus unendingly pounds on the sensibilities of the peoples of the periphery, local culture will cumulatively assimilate more and more of the imported meanings and forms, becoming gradually indistinguishable from them. At any one time, what is considered local culture is a little more like transnational imports than what went before it as local culture. This may not sound altogether implausible. The maturation scenario, on the other hand, is based on the possibility that with time, imported cultural items which were at first to some degree in their unaltered, wholly alien forms would with time come to be taken apart, tampered and tinkered with, as people would evolve their own way of using them in a manner more in line with a culture of fundamentally local character.

The two scenarios describe opposing trajectories, but in real life they may well appear interwoven with one another. On the whole, the history of Nigerian popular music seems to have much in common with the maturation scenario. And one can see reasons why this should be so: developed native musical traditions; an early involvement with foreign cultural imports at a time when the pressure of the transnational cultural apparatus was modest, thus allowing time to adapt; a sizeable market for the local product. Yet this is not to say that the Nigerian market cannot continuously make some room for new music from abroad as well.

The nature of the market is the factor of some importance, not least when one can see the transnational cultural flow as a flow of commodities. Often the importation of culture seems to presume a market which is, as it were, middling poor. Again, when for example Nigerian television stations, and other stations more or less on the periphery, buy programming from the center, the reason is that they cannot afford to produce their own. On the other hand, they are not poor enough not to be able to import. But the more or less peripheral places can differ in these respects, and can differ also with regard to different kinds of cultural commodities, and can differ over time. Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, at times quite affluent due to its oil exports, is better equipped than most to engage in cultural import substitution

and build up its own internal cultural apparatus. It is also one of those countries which may find some market for its own cultural commodities in its wider region, and eventually to some extent reach a wider market yet. It has some potential for becoming a center of sorts in its own right. Smaller national markets may be more dependent on the importation of popular cultural goods from either regional or global centers.

On the other hand, if cultural commodities will only flow transnationally to places where markets exist, there may be places too poor to hold much promise in this regard. As the countries of the periphery are often vulnerable to changes in the relationship of local economies to that of the world, moreover, markets may shift dramatically over time. Small town people who bought imported popular fashions in the marketplace yesterday are perhaps no longer able to do so today; they have other reasons for the import substitution. Quite possibly, if the hold of the center on the economies of the peripheries is such as to weaken them, at one time or over time, that very fact may also limit its own cultural power over them.

NOTES

1 Kopytoff (1987: 10) defines the ecumene as a "region of persistent cultural interaction and exchange." Kroeber (1948: 423), recalling that the Greeks in antiquity used this term for "the inhabited world," comments that it "has a modern utility as a convenient designation of the total area reached by traceable diffusion influences from the main higher centers of Eurasia at which most new culture had up to then been produced". Again, a world culture ordered by center–periphery relationships.

2 The core–periphery conceptual pair (at times with semi-periphery thrown in to form a trio) is favored by Wallerstein 1974; the metropolis–satellite contrast may remain most strongly associated with Frank (e.g., 1967); Shils, although writing from a very different perspective, may have done more than anybody else to put the center–periphery pair into circulation (e.g., 1975). For a slightly earlier attempt, see Moore 1966.

3 A comment by Amar Nath Pandeya at a meeting of Asian academics is to the point: "We in India receive information on Japanese society and science via America, and Americans' image of Japan is given to us as if it were what Japan really is. Japan exports cars and machines, but not culture or science; Japanese scholars and academic circles are not responsive to international needs. What we want to know is not the American people's view of Japan, but the Japanese people's view of Japan" (Abdel-Malek and Pandeya 1981: 12).

4 See, for example, contributions to the volume edited by Gibbons and Wittrock (1985).

5 See discussion of such issues in McBryde 1985.

6 See for example Rodgers's (1984) analysis of the impact of literacy on Batak thinking about kinship.

7 A classic instance from anthropology is the Tiv reinterpretation of *Hamlet*, as recounted by Laura Bohannan (1966). A news item on *Dallas*, the television serial, in the *International Herald Tribune* tells a similar story (Friedman 1986). A team of communication researchers at Hebrew University in Jerusalem conducted a study of how Israelis of different national origins decoded American television programs generally, and *Dallas* specifically. The most striking finding was that the groups came up with quite divergent interpretations of the program. Recent Russian immigrants were suspicious of the show and paid attention to the

credit to find out who was the power behind it. One of them said, "they want us to think the rich are unhappy so we average people will feel more content." They also looked in a more deterministic way at the activities of the characters – JR did what he did because he had to, as a businessman. The Moroccan Jews as well as the Israeli Arabs saw the show as some sort of depiction of reality, but a reality they were uncomfortable with. The Arabs did not want to watch *Dallas* in mixed company, and when it had shown Sue Ellen leaving her husband JR to go and live with her lover, this group of viewers apparently unconsciously censored the occurrence and reported that she had returned to her father. The kibbutz Israelis were most like Americans in the response, according to this study. They related to it playfully, as a source of fantasy.

8   Worth (1981: 72) touches upon such problems in his discussion of film anthropology, as he asks how cinematic understandings are distributed. Do "film language" communities have anything to do with language communities; do they relate to the distribution of cognitive styles? Sperber's (1985) "epidemiological" concern with the differential cognitive contagiousness of representations may also be related to transnational cultural flows in different symbolic modes.

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