

The Global Transformations Reader

An Introduction to the Globalization Debate

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David Held and Anthony McGrew

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Encountering Globalization

Kevin Robins

[...]

Globalization is about growing mobility across frontiers – mobility of goods and commodities, mobility of information and communications products and services, and mobility of people. Walk down your local high street and you will be aware of global chains such as McDonald's or Benetton. You may buy the global products of Sony, Procter and Gamble or the Coca-Cola Corporation. In your local supermarkets you will buy more or less exotic fruits and vegetables from almost anywhere in the world, along with ingredients for curries, stir-fries, pizzas, and other 'world foods'. If you go out to eat you can choose from restaurants providing a whole range of 'ethnic' cuisines (Italian, Chinese, Indian, Korean, Thai, etc.). Go to the off-licence and you cannot but be aware of the increasing globalization of the market for wines (not just French or Spanish, but now South African, Chilean, Australian, and even Crimean varieties) and beers (Italian, American, Indian, Brazilian, Japanese, and more). Your coat might be produced in Turkey, your hi-fi in Japan, and your car in Korea. And, of course, we could push this analysis back one stage further, for the various inputs into the production of these commodities (raw materials, labour, components, finance) are also likely to come from a range of geographical sources.

Through the development of satellite and cable services, and on the basis of more liberal media regulation, the television market is moving from national to transnational scale. CNN can bring you 'real-time' access to news stories across the world, as we clearly saw at the time of the Gulf War in 1991. The Disney Channel is targeted at a global audience. It's an MTV World' is the cover story of a recent issue of *Newsweek* magazine (24 April 1995) [...] – itself now a global media enterprise. The main headline: 'Rock around the clock and around the world with the ultimate New Age multinational!'. Through the new telecommunications networks – from voice through to fax and e-mail – we can now enter into global communications 'at the touch of a button' (though paying for them is, of course, another matter). And if you have access to the Internet and the World Wide Web, you may gain access to global databases, and you can choose to become a member of a global user group. Instantaneous and ubiquitous communication is giving substance to the Canadian philosopher Marshall McLuhan's idea, first put forward in the 1960s, that the world is now becoming a 'global village'.

There are gathering flows of people, too, not just of physical and information products and goods. Members of the international business elite now undertake international travel on a routine and regular basis, constituting themselves as a global community of frequent-flier cosmopolitans. Far more numerous are those whose mobility and movement are precipitated by need or by despair, the migrants who take

advantage of a cheap plane or train to seek work in the world's more affluent centres, establishing themselves there as minority communities in exile. Leisure pursuits, too, like the pursuit of employment, are associated with accelerating flows. If where you live is a tourist resort, you will be familiar with visitors from Europe or from the United States, increasingly from Japan and the Far East, and now, too, from Eastern Europe and Russia. And you will doubtless be aware of the relative ease with which you can undertake holiday travel, not just to the South of France, or the Costa Brava, but now to Florida Disneyland, or to Goa or the Caribbean. [...] Mobility has become ordinary in the emerging global order. But it is also possible to see the world without having to move. For now 'the world' is able to come to where we are. As the writer Simon Winchester puts it in his introduction to Martin Parr's collection of photographs, *Small World*:

A whole new industry has been born from the manufacturing of ... foreign-theme entertainment parks, the world brought to your doorstep by, first, the Americans (with both the outer world, and outer space, tucked into the more exotic corners of Disneyland) and then by the Japanese - who went on to develop the idea to a fine art, settling outside Tokyo an English village that is more brimming with thatch and swimming in bitter beer than anywhere in the Cotswolds. Soon the Europeans are to have such a *parc international*, with little great walls of China and petit Taj Mahals constructed in fields convenient for the fun-filled charabancs that converge on Cherbourg. (Parr 1995)

[...] With mobility, comes encounter. In many respects, this may be stimulating and productive. Global encounters and interactions are producing inventive new cultural forms and repertoires. Musical culture provides an excellent example. Salma and Sabine are Pakistani sisters who sing Abba songs in Hindi, Rasta-Cymru is a Welsh-speaking reggae band, El Vez is a Latino Elvis impersonator with attitude; Cartel is a Turkish-German group appropriating US West-coast rap music and style. The anthropologist Jan Nederveen Pieterse reflects on the significance of such musical and other cultural intermixtures:

How do we come to terms with phenomena such as Thai boxing by Moroccan girls in Amsterdam, Asian rap in London, Irish bagels, Chinese tacos and Mardi Gras Indians in the United States, or Mexican schoolgirls dressed in Greek togas dancing in the style of Isadora Duncan? How do we interpret Peter Brook directing the Mahabharata, or Ariane Mnouchkine staging a Shakespeare play in Japanese Kabuki style for a Paris audience in the Théâtre du Soleil? (Nederveen Pieterse 1995: 53)

Nederveen Pieterse describes these phenomena in terms of the origination of 'third cultures', the 'creolization of global culture', the development of an 'intercontinental crossover culture'. Globalization, from this perspective, is conceived in terms of a process of creative and conjuring *hybridization*.

Of course, this is only one aspect of the logic of globalization. The encounter between cultures can produce tension and friction. The globalization process can equally be associated with confrontation and the collision of cultures. At the present time, we can see some of the stresses of global change in the difficult relations between Western and Islamic worlds. It is there in the conflict between French people and Algerian migrants, or in the divisions between Germans and their Turkish 'guest workers'. The building of Europe's largest mosque in Rome, the historical centre of Christendom,

has had some problematical repercussions. In Britain, the 'Rushdie affair' has testified to the difficulty of intercultural understanding. The Iranian government has sought to block American satellite broadcasting to prevent the 'Westoxification' of Iranian society (while many Iranians have been actively seeking to acquire satellite dishes in order to see Western programmes such as *Baywatch* and *Beavis and Butthead*). In August 1995, the socialist mayor of Courcouronnes, south of Paris, put a ban on satellite dishes to prevent the reception of programmes from North Africa. 'Integration', he maintained, 'does not mean transforming France into a nation of the Maghreb' (*Observer*, 17 Sept. 1995).

But there are also cultural confrontations within the Western world itself. It is apparent in the ambivalence and anxiety felt in Europe towards American cultural exports: in 1995, the Uruguay Round of GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) negotiations almost broke down on account of French intransigence about maintaining restrictive quotas on US film and television products. 'Are we all Americans now?' Andrew Billen wondered (*Observer*, 17 Sept. 1995), as the Disney Channel arrived in Britain. There is the clear sense in some quarters that 'Americanization' - from Hollywood to Coke and McDonald's - is a threat to the integrity of European cultural life (see Tomlinson 1997). In these defensive and protective responses to cultural encounter, we are a long way from the celebration of cultural hybridization.

Complexities of Globalization

Having argued that globalization and global encounter constitute a new logic of economic and cultural development, I want now to make two important qualifications to what would otherwise risk being too facile an argument. [...]

The first point of qualification [...] is that globalization does not supersede and displace everything that preceded it. As well as recognizing social innovation, we must have regard to the evident continuities in social and cultural life. Globalization may be seen in terms of an accumulation of cultural phenomena, where new global elements coexist alongside existing and established local or national cultural forms. [...]

[Second] I want to emphasize [globalization's] complexity and diversity (which make it particularly unamenable to ideal-type categorizations). The processes of global change are multifarious, and they are also experienced differentially by all those who confront them. [...]

There are more and less benign encounters with the forces of globalization. The geographer Doreen Massey captures this inequality well in relation to the experience of human mobility and movement. [...] At one end of the spectrum, she argues, there are those 'at the forefront' of what is going on: 'the jet-setters, the ones sending and receiving the faxes and the e-mail, holding the international conference calls, the ones distributing the films, controlling the news, organizing the investments and the international currency transactions'. At the other end are those who are out of control:

The refugees from El Salvador or Guatemala and the undocumented migrant workers from Michoacán in Mexico crowding into Tijuana to make perhaps a fatal dash for it across the border into the USA to grab a chance of a new life. Here the experience of

movement, and indeed of a confusing plurality of cultures, is very different. And, there are those from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Caribbean, who come halfway round the world only to get held up in an interrogation room at Heathrow. (Massey 1993: 61-2)

'Some initiate flows and movement,' Massey observes, 'others don't; some are more on the receiving end of it than others; some are effectively imprisoned by it' (1993: 61). Globalization is an uneven and an unequal process.

[...]

A World of Difference

[...] I want [...] to look at some broader aspects of globalization in relation to culture and identity. For it is surely clear that the global shift – associated with the creation of world markets, with international communication and media flows, and with international travel – has profound implications for the way we make sense of our lives and of the changing world we live in. For some, the proliferation of shared or common cultural references across the world evokes cosmopolitan ideals. There is the sense that cultural encounters across frontiers can create new and productive kinds of cultural fusion and hybridity. But, where some envisage and enjoy cosmopolitan complexities, others perceive, and often oppose, what they see as cultural homogenization and the erosion of cultural specificity. Globalization is, then, transforming our apprehension of the world in sharply contrasting ways. It is provoking new senses of disorientation and of orientation, giving rise to new experiences of both placeless and placed identity.

Old certainties and hierarchies of identity are called into question in a world of dissolving boundaries and disrupted continuities. Thus, in a country that is now a container of African and Asian cultures, can the meaning of what it is to be British ever again have the old confidence and surely it might once have had? And what does it mean now to be European in a continent coloured not only by the cultures of its former colonies, but also by American and Japanese cultures? Is not the very category of identity itself problematical? Is it at all possible, in global times, to sustain a coherent and unified sense of identity? Continuity and historicity of identity are challenged by the immediacy and intensity of global cultural confrontations. Of course, we should not believe that these developments are entirely unprecedented [...]. A great many cultures have historical experience of global intrusion [...]. Nonetheless we should have regard to what is without precedent at the end of the twentieth century: the scale, the extent, the comprehensive nature, of global integration. We should consider [...] the particular complexities of global encounter at this century's end.

One very powerful dimension of global cultural change has been that which has sought to dissolve the frontiers and divisions between different cultures. It has been actively promoted by global corporate interests [...] – it is an ideal that is particularly symptomatic to those members of the class of symbolic analysts working in the creative areas of media, advertising, and so on. We could consider it in terms of the global culture and philosophy associated with 'McDonaldization' or 'Coca-colonization'. But a particularly good example – because it is so explicit and self-aware about its objectives – is that of Benetton advertising. Through its 'United Colors of Benetton'

slogan, the company has actively promoted the idea of the 'global village', associated with global consumer citizenship. What is advocated is the ideal of a new, 'universal' identity that transcends old, particularistic attachments. But transcendence is through incorporation, rather than through dissolution. Michael Shapiro describes it as 'a globalizing, ecumenical impulse'.

Ever since [Oliviero] Toscanini [the artistic creator of the campaigns] produced the slogan, *The United Colors of Benetton*, the Benetton company has made explicit its desire to dominate the mediascape with a symbolism that comprehends nationalities, ethnicities, religions, and even tribal affiliations. The world of geopolitical boundaries – boundaries transversed by Benetton's enterprises – is no impediment to the production of media-carried global symbolism. (Shapiro 1994: 442)

This global corporate philosophy is further refined in Benetton's most recent campaign, concerned with global threats and disasters:

In this case, the interpretative work locates the observer in a global community, trying to make sense of the violent clashes of ethno-nationalists. This global self-identification is precisely the difference-effacing stance that Benetton is trying to achieve. The interpretative contemplation of global threats and catastrophes cuts across ethnicities, nationalities, and tribalisms, allowing Benetton to position its products in a universalizing thematic that transcends cultural inhibitions. (1994: 448)

What the example of Benetton makes clear is the resourcefulness of global advertising, both incorporating and effacing cultural difference in its endeavours to put in place the new global acumen.

A second dimension of cultural globalization that we should consider is that which promotes cultural encounter and interaction. Here, in stark contrast with the first dimension that we have just looked at, we are concerned with the active interpenetration, combination and mixture of cultural elements. These processes are, as Akbar Ahmed makes clear, a consequence of both communication flows and human flows:

The mixing of images, interlocking of cultures, juxtaposition of different peoples, availability of information are partly explained because populations are mobile as never before. The mobility continues in spite of increasingly rigid immigration controls. Filipino maids in Dubai, Pakistani workers in Bradford, the Japanese buying Hollywood studios, Hong Kong Chinese entrepreneurs acquiring prime property in Vancouver testify to this. The swirling and eddying of humanity mingles ideas, cultures and values as never before in history. (Ahmed 1992: 26)

Cultures are transformed by the incorporations they make from other cultures in the world. Salman Rushdie (1991: 394) has famously written of 'the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs'; 'Mélange, hotchpotch,' he declares, 'a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world.' This process of hybridization is particularly apparent now in developments within popular culture. The sociologist Les Back (1994: 14) describes the bhangramuffin music of the singer/songwriter Apache Indian as 'a meeting place where the languages and rhythms of the Caribbean, North America and India mingle, producing a new and vibrant culture'. Artists like Apache Indian are

expressing and defining cultural modes that are simultaneously local and global,' Back observes. 'The music manifests itself in a connective supplementarity – *raga* plus *bangra* plus England plus India plus Kingston plus Birmingham' (p. 15). Places too can be characterized in terms of hybridity: places of encounter, meeting places, crucibles in which cultural elements are turned into new cultural compounds. Doreen Massey (1993: 66) argues for the recognition of 'a sense of place which is extraverred, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local'. A 'global sense of place' involves openness to global dynamics and also an acceptance of cultural diversity and the possibilities of cultural encounter within.

The third dimension of cultural globalization that I want to [emphasize] concerns developments that apparently involve a rejection or turning away from the turbulent changes associated with global integration. These developments express themselves in a turn, or return, to what are seen as traditional and more fundamental loyalties. In the recent period, we have become increasingly aware of the resurgence of national, regional, ethnic and territorial attachments. In Eastern Europe, particularly in the former Yugoslavia, we have witnessed the growth of neo-nationalism in its most militant form, but it has also been a feature of Western Europe, with the assertion of Basque, Breton or Scottish identities. It has now become a journalistic commonplace to describe such regionalist or nationalist reassertion in terms of a reversion or regression to tribal loyalties. These loyalties and attachments seem to go against the grain of globalization; they appear to articulate the desire and need for stability and order, as a refuge from the turbulence and upheaval of global transformation. And, of course, there is a great deal of truth in this theory of resistance through roots. But we might, at the same time, also see this as itself an expression of the globalization process – Anthony Smith (1991: 143) writes of the 'globalization of nationalism'. Resurgent nations are also seeking to position themselves in the new global space.

We may see the same contradictory relation to the globalization process in the case of resurgent religious cultures and identities. While there has been a return to fundamentals within Hinduism, Judaism and Christianity, it is the case of Islamic fundamentalism that has been made to stand out for its opposition to global times. The attempts by some Islamic countries to ban satellite television have seemed to symbolize resistance to global information and communication flows [...]. A *Guardian* headline (5 Aug. 1994) expressed it perfectly: 'As satellite television shrinks the world, traditionalists from Tehran to Bollywood [India] take on the dishes in a war of the heavens.' At one level, of course, this does indeed represent a defensive and protective response to the disruptions of global modernity. As Akbar Ahmed (himself a Muslim) makes clear in his book *Postmodernism and Islam*, we must see such actions in the context of the struggle by traditional cultures, and particularly Islam, to come to terms with Western globalization:

The West, though the dominant global civilization, will continue to expand its boundaries to encompass the world; traditional civilizations will resist in some areas, accommodate to change in others. In the main, only one, Islam, will stand firm in its path. Islam, therefore, appears to be set on a collision course with the West. (Ahmed 1992: 264)

But we must see this as far more than just closure and retreat from global culture. What we must also recognize is the aspiration to create a space within global culture.

For many Muslims, Ahmed argues, the objective is 'to participate in the global civilization without their identity being obliterated' (ibid.). As Peter Beyer (1994) argues, the 'revitalization of religion is a way of asserting a particular (group) identity, which in turn is a prime method of competing for power and influence in the global system' (p. 4); the 'central thrust is to make Islam and Muslims more determinative in the world system, not to reverse globalization. The intent is to shape global reality, not to negate it' (p. 3). The point is to create a global civilization on a different basis from that which is being elaborated by the symbolic analysis of the West.

What I am trying to bring out in all of this is the factor of diversity and difference in the cultural experience of global modernity: new forms of universal culture, new kinds of particularism, new hybrid developments, all of them gaining their significance from their new global context. We should not think of globalization in terms of homogenization, then, in line with what is commonly believed and feared.

But nor should we see it just in terms of diversity and differentiation, which is the opposite temptation that many more critical spirits have succumbed to. What globalization in fact brings into existence is a new basis for thinking about the relation between cultural convergence and cultural difference.

[...]

The globalization process must be seen in terms of the complex interplay of economic and cultural dynamics, involving confrontation, contestation and negotiation. The global future is therefore sure to have surprises in store for us.

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