

What evidence do you find for the existence of a common global culture?

My views on the existence of a common global culture mirror those of Hannerz (1990). Namely, that a world culture does exist, however not in the sense of cultural homogenisation. Instead, world culture is "marked by an organization of diversity rather than by a replication of uniformity" (Hannerz 1990: 237).

Advances in technology, especially transportation and communication technologies, have simplified, and thereby increased what Lingard and Rizvi (1998: 68) call "cultural flows between nations". It is important to note however that technology plays just one role in accommodating these cultural flows and that other factors – economic and political – also have an impact. In any case, it is this increase in the "communicative and interactional connecting of [...] cultures" (Robertson 1995: 31) that most commentators equate with globalization. And it is when this communication and interaction becomes asymmetrical that concern over cultural homogenisation comes to the fore, manifested in terms like McWorld, McDonaldisation, or more directly, Americanization. However, like Lingard and Rizvi (1998: 62), I feel that, especially in terms of culture, "the case for homogenisation produced by globalisation is overstated."

As Robertson (1995: 38) points out, "the major alleged producers of 'global culture' – such as those in Atlanta (CNN) and Los Angeles (Hollywood) – increasingly tailor their products to a differentiated

global market." Even McDonald's has had to customise its products to suit the market of the locales in which it does business. From an Australian perspective, this customisation is evident through the introduction of the Outback Burger (and the accompanying marketing campaign which used broad Australian accent voice-overs). Internationally, there is no better exemplar of the need for McDonald's to alter its products to meet the standards of the local market than in India, where the cow is revered as a sacred animal, and certainly not something to be used as fast fodder. McDonald's has even had to vary its product line *within* a specific locale. In Canada, the McDonald's menu varies from one coast to the other to account for local tastes within what is essentially just one market, namely the nation of Canada.

A second, and more recent example of the influence of local markets on the forces of globalisation, comes from another large and powerful American corporation, Microsoft. Microsoft's market penetration is arguably higher than that of McDonald's (an economic consideration yes, but not without cultural implications), and yet Microsoft has also had to tailor its products (and even its business strategy) to meet the needs of local markets. This fact is evident in the increasing amount of languages in which Microsoft software is available, as well as in the recent introduction of a new product; Microsoft Windows XP Starter Edition was specifically built "tailored to local markets, in local languages" and features "localized and tailored support and localized customization." (Microsoft 2004)

Globalisation is undeniably a powerful force in the world today. Its

effects span the globe and reach all aspects of society including culture. However, globalisation has not produced a homogenised global culture. Instead, as suggested by the two examples above, local, regional, and national distinctiveness has affected globalisation. Put simply, globalisation is predicated on a relationship *between* global and local forces; it does not involve the *dominance* of the global over the local (Robertson 1995).

References

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