

JEDER MENSCH BRAUCHT  
FREIHEIT, UM SEINE  
ANLAGEN UND FÄHIGKEITEN  
ENTFALTEN UND  
VERWÄRTLICHEN ZU KÖNNEN.  
WENN ER NICHT  
VERFÄLLEN KULTUR UND  
WISSENSCHAFTEN, STAGNIERT  
DIE WIRTSCHAFT.  
GEISTIGES LEBEN BRAUCHT  
FREIHEIT GENAUSO, WIE DER  
KÖRPER DIE LUFT ZUM ATMEN.

## Liberales Institut

Tom G. Palmer

# Globalization and Culture: Homogeneity, Diversity, Identity, Liberty



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# Globalization and Culture: Homogeneity, Diversity, Identity, Liberty

Tom G. Palmer

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Free trade is under attack. Advocates of free trade are accustomed to refuting the doctrine of the balance of trade and various fallacies about nations „competing“ economically with each other.<sup>1</sup> They are less accustomed to responding to the „cultural“ critiques of trade. Advocates of barriers to trade insist that free trade and globalization are destructive of culture. But does globalization produce cultural homogeneity and loss of diversity? Is cultural „authenticity“ threatened by globalization? Is the planet in danger of being drowned in a vast soup of sameness? And should we fear a loss of personal identity as members of different cultures exchange ideas, products, and services? The cultural arguments against free trade, as we shall see, are hardly new. They are as fallacious as the economic arguments against free trade.

## I. Definitions

It's usually helpful to start any discussion of globalization with a definition of the term. Like any term, we can stipulate whatever we want about the meaning of globalization, but not all stipulations are as good as all others. Most are merely attempts to win the debate before it starts. I offer a stipulation that I believe captures the core of what is being debated, rather than being a bit of propaganda one way or the other.

It's common for critics of globalization – who sometimes insist that they aren't enemies of globalization, but supporters of an „alternative globalization“ – to use the term simply to mean human wickedness or greediness or the allegedly undesirable effects of increasing global trade; the undesirability is included as a part of the definition. Let's instead start with an operational definition and then ask whether the effects of globalization thus defined are desirable or undesirable. I use the term to refer to the diminution or elimination of state-enforced restrictions on voluntary exchange across borders and the increasingly integrated and complex global system of exchange and production that has emerged as a result of that diminution or elimination of state-enforced restrictions on voluntary trade across borders.

The core policy issue is whether borders should be used to stop transactions between people on different sides of them. Should American wheat farmers be allowed to buy cell phones from people in Finland? Should Ghanaian weavers be

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1 For helpful discussions of various fallacies concerning international trade, see Paul Krugman, *Pop Internationalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996) and the various essays on trade by Frederic Bastiat.

allowed to sell the shirts and pants they make to German auto workers? Should Taiwanese investors be allowed to purchase assets from Kenyans? Should Mexican mechanics be allowed repair cars in Ottawa or Chicago? Obviously, lists of that sort could go on indefinitely, but I think that it's clear enough what I'm getting at. If an exchange would be allowed if both parties were on one side of a border, should they be stopped if instead one party were on one side of that border, and the other party were on the other side?

Now let's turn to culture. The term is used in a multitude of ways, often in the course of the same essay or consideration. They include: the cultivation of certain human capabilities; art (typically the term is reserved for „high“ art; reaction against that reservation of the term has fueled much academic study of „popular culture“); and the concrete forms of life that people lead in common. In general the critics of globalization refer to the second and third uses of „culture“ when making their critiques. My primary focus will be on the third use of the term, on what Peter Berger calls „its conventional social scientific sense: as the beliefs, values, and lifestyles of ordinary people in their everyday existence.“<sup>2</sup>

Should we welcome and embrace, or fear and reject, the interaction and mixture of cultures, peoples, races, communities, and worldviews that global trade, commerce, and interconnectedness bring in their wake? In particular, is it true that globalization is leading to a homogenized global culture, one in which life in Brazil approaches being indistinguishable from life in Bavaria, or – more to the point – is it leading to a world in which every country looks like southern California?

## II. Contrasting Approaches to Globalization

Globalization is hardly a new phenomenon. It's nearly as old as recorded history itself and its advocacy is among the first coherently articulated political philosophies of the western world (at least). About the year 420 BCE the philosopher Democritus of Abdera wrote, „To a wise man, the whole earth is open; for the native land of a good soul is the whole earth.“<sup>3</sup>

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2 Peter Berger, „Introduction: The Cultural Dynamics of Globalization,“ in *Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World*, ed. By Peter L. Berger and Samuel P. Huntington (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 2. We could also distinguish between discrete forms of globalization, including the emergence of global business, professional, and academic cultures, the diffusion of pop culture, and the effects of globalization on the ways in which the majority of people live their lives.

3 In Kathleen Freeman, ed., *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), fragment 247, p. 113.

International trade has long been identified with civilization itself. In Book IX of the *Odyssey* Homer depicts the Cyclopean race as savages precisely because they do not trade or have contact with others:

*For the Cyclops have no ships with crimson prows,  
no shipwrights there to build them good trim craft  
that could sail them out to foreign ports of call  
as most men risk the seas to trade with other men.*<sup>4</sup>

Of course, such attitudes were not limited to the Greeks. The Song Emperor Gao Zong (1127–1162) explained in a defense of commerce that „Profits from maritime commerce are very great. If properly managed, they can amount to millions [of strings of coins]. Is this not better than taxing the people?“<sup>5</sup> The people of the Song capital, Hanzhou, had a famous saying: „vegetables from the east, water from the west, wood from the south, and rice from the north.“<sup>6</sup>

To get a sense that the current debate over globalization and culture is hardly new, let's contrast several descriptions of globalization through commerce that were written, not in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The English playwright and literary figure Joseph Addison published an account of his experiences with globalization in *The Spectator* in the year 1711. He described his frequent visits to the Royal Exchange in London:

Factors [trading agents] in the Trading World are what Ambassadors are in the Politick World; they negotiate Affairs, conclude Treaties, and maintain a good Correspondence between those wealthy Societies of Men that are divided from one another by Seas and Oceans, or live in the different Extremities of a Continent. I have often been pleased to hear Disputes adjusted between an Inhabitant of Japan and an Alderman of London, or to see a Subject of the Great Mogul entering into a League with one of the Czar of Muscovy. I am infinitely delighted in mixing with these several Ministers of Commerce, as they are distinguished by their different Walks and different Languages: Sometimes I am jostled among a Body of Armenians: Sometimes I am lost in a Crowd of Jews; and sometimes in a Groupe of Dutch-men. I am a Dane, Swede, or Frenchman at different times, or

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4 Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. by Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1997), p. 215.

5 Quoted in Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne, 1405-1433* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 41.

6 Quoted in Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas: The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne, 1405-1433*, p. 42.

rather fancy myself like the old Philosopher, who upon being asked what Countryman he was, replied, That he was a Citizen of the World.<sup>7</sup>

The second was written by a French literary figure and political campaigner named François-Marie Arouet, known to most of us as Voltaire, in his Philosophical Letters. In addition to popularizing and promoting the innovation of inoculation against smallpox (which is a pretty disgusting process when you think about it, but which saved many millions of lives), he described to his French audience the exciting, cosmopolitan, and comparatively tolerant and liberal world of England. Again, it was the stock exchange that caught his attention, as he related in his Sixth Letter:

Go into the Exchange in London, that place more venerable than many a court, and you will see representatives of all the nations assembled there for the profit of mankind. There the Jew, the Mahometan, and the Christian deal with one another as if they were of the same religion, and reserve the name of infidel for those who go bankrupt. There the Presbyterian trusts the Anabaptist, and the Church of England man accepts the promise of the Quaker. On leaving these peaceable and free assemblies, some go to the synagogue, others in search of a drink; this man is on the way to be baptized in a great tub in the name of the Father, by the Son, to the Holy Ghost; that man is having the foreskin of his son cut off, and a Hebraic formula mumbled over the child that he himself can make nothing of; these others are going to their church to await the inspiration of God with their hats on; and all are satisfied.<sup>8</sup>

In his Tenth Letter, Voltaire remarked on the astonishing legal and social equality enjoyed by the English – something we would judge quite imperfect by the standards of our day, but which many at the time considered truly scandalous – and contrasted the commercial, open, dynamic English society he had observed with the greater deference to authority of his native France:

In France anybody who wants to can be a marquis; and whoever arrives in Paris from the remotest part of some province with money to spend and an ac or an ille at the end of his name, may indulge in such phrases as „a man of my sort,“ „a man of my rank and quality,“ and with sovereign eye look down upon a whole-

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7 Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, Saturday, May 19, 1711, reprinted in Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, *Selected Essays from „The Tatler,“ „The Spectator,“ and „The Guardian,“* ed. by Daniel McDonald (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1973), p. 238.

8 Voltaire, „Letter Six, On the Presbyterians,“ in Voltaire, *Candide and Philosophical Letters*, ed. and trans. by Ernest Dilworth (New York: The Modern Library, 1992), p. 141.



saler. The merchant himself so often hears his profession spoken of disdainfully that he is fool enough to blush. Yet I don't know which is the more useful to a state, a well-powdered lord who knows precisely what time the king gets up in the morning and what time he goes to bed, and who gives himself airs of grandeur while playing the role of slave in a minister's antechamber, or a great merchant who enriches his country, sends orders from his office to Surat and to Cairo, and contributes to the well-being of the world.<sup>9</sup>

Addison and Voltaire celebrated the openness, the dynamism, the freedom, and the progress that they associated with globalization. More importantly, they celebrated what came to be known as the rights of man, or what we would today call human rights. They looked forward to the universal spread of the principles of liberty, toleration, and equal rights.

Not everyone appreciated the effects of commerce in the same way. Many were appalled by such social mobility, such chaos, such immoral mixing of classes, races, religions, and – horrors! – even the sexes. One especially influential critic of commercial globalization was the writer and man of affairs Justus Möser, a leading political and intellectual figure in the independent city of Osnabrück, which is situated not far from the Netherlands. Möser was not merely one of the most influential critics of globalization in the 18th century; his ideas were to influence all of the great enemies of globalization in years to come and are very much with us still. Unlike Addison and Voltaire, Möser condemned commerce, merchants, peddlers, and Jews. He campaigned against people who took goods to the countryside and corrupted the simple and „good morals“ of the peasants by enticing them with new goods and previously unknown pleasures, in the process exposing them to new ideas and thereby undermining their culture, their accustomed way of life. As he wrote,

Our ancestors did not tolerate these rural shopkeepers; they were spare in dispensing market freedoms; they banned the Jews from our diocese; why this severity? Certainly in order that the rural inhabitants not be daily stimulated,

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9 Voltaire, „Letter Ten, On Commerce,“ in Voltaire, *Candide and Philosophical Letters*, op. cit., pp. 154-55. Of course, Voltaire is being quite clever here. It's not true that he doesn't „know which is more useful to a state,“ for he makes it quite clear which of the two is more useful and more deserving of praise: not the aristocrat clinging to the threads of a dying order, but the merchant, the trader, the entrepreneur, the agent of wealth production and progress. What is perhaps most remarkable is that he closes the letter with an invocation, not of the well-being of the merchant, but of how he „contributes to the well-being of the world.“

tempted, led astray and deceived. They stuck to the practical rule: that which one does not see will not lead one astray.<sup>10</sup>

Commerce, he believed, undermines traditional morals, which he identified with good morals.

Möser was not, however, only concerned with morality within a political order, but with the effects of the spread of universal principles on the variety of political orders across the planet. In 1772 he bemoaned the spread of the idea of universal human rights, writing that ideas of universal and equal rights depart from the true plan of nature, which reveals its wealth through its multiplicity, and would clear the path to despotism, which seeks to coerce all according to a few rules and so loses the richness that comes with variety.<sup>11</sup>

When Möser wrote of variety, he was writing not of the variety of goods in the market, or even of the variety of experiences that people might have in open and commercial societies, but instead of the variety of political regimes and systems, most of which would of necessity be highly illiberal and based on political and legal inequality. After all, equality is unique, whereas there is an infinite range of possible forms and systems of inequality.

Möser and his modern followers suggest (or even insist) that freedom of trade and travel will cause the whole world to become homogeneous, bereft of variety, and thereby impoverished. As societies become more connected, the argument goes, they become more alike, and as they become more alike, the human experience of variety diminishes, and with it there is a net loss of something of value. Möser's criticism of trade and commerce has been revived and has become a significant form of attack for the anti-globalization movement. The only major difference is that the anti-globalizers now typically focus on rather large nation states (France, Germany, Brazil, Japan, Mexico) as the locus of what Möser called „multiplicity," rather than small regions or towns such as Osnabrück, which Möser sought to protect from being influenced by trade with such exotic places as Hamburg, Amsterdam, and Cöln.

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10 Justus Möser, „Klage wider die Packenträger," in Justus Möser, *Justus Möser's Sämtliche Werke* (Oldenburg/Berlin: Gerhard Stalling Verlag, 1943-1990), vol. 4, p. 188, cited in Jerry Z. Muller, *The Mind and the Market: Capitalism in Modern European Thought* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), p. 97. See also the treatment in Jonathan B. Knudsen, *Justus Möser and the German Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 114-121.

11 Justus Möser, „Der jetzige Hang zu allgemeinen Gesetzen und Verordnungen ist der gemeinen Freiheit gefährlich," in Justus Möser, *Justus Möser's Sämtliche Werke* (Oldenburg/Berlin: Gerhard Stalling Verlag, 1943-1990), vol. 5, p. 22, cited in Jerry Z. Muller, *The Mind and the Market: Capitalism in Modern European Thought*, p. 86.

### III. Social Connectedness and Diversity

The authors of the report on „Alternatives to Economic Globalization“ begin the chapter on „Diversity“ with the following remarkable complaint.

A few decades ago, it was still possible to leave home and go someplace where the architecture was different, the landscape was different, and the language, lifestyle, dress, and values were different.<sup>12</sup>

Echoing Justus Möser, they proclaim that Diversity is key to the vitality, resilience, and innovative capacity of any living system. So too for human societies. The rich variety of the human experience and potential is reflected in cultural diversity, which provides a sort of gene pool to spur innovation toward ever higher levels of social, intellectual, and spiritual accomplishment and creates a sense of identity, community, and meaning.<sup>13</sup>

Is it true that global trade and commerce leads to a net loss of the human experience of variety? The answer is: almost certainly not. Once again, the debate is hardly new, but has been with us for many years. The issue was addressed quite clearly by the sociologist Georg Simmel, who studied processes of group formation and differentiation. Simmel observed that as groups expand in size and extent they tend to become ever more differentiated internally. The greater the number of interacting persons, the greater the number of available social roles or niches and the greater the opportunities for individuation and diversity among persons. As groups become increasingly differentiated internally, i.e., as the human experience of diversity within groups grows, the diversity among groups will diminish.<sup>14</sup> Thus, individualization and increasing diversity within

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12 Alternatives to Economic Globalization [A Better World is Possible], A Report of the International Forum on Globalization, drafting committee co-chaired by John Cavanagh and Jerry Mander (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2002), p. 64.

13 Alternatives to Economic Globalization [A Better World is Possible], A Report of the International Forum on Globalization, p. 65.

14 Georg Simmel, „Group Expansion and Development of Individuality,“ in Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. By Donald N. Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 252: „Different as its points of origin in M and N may have been, this process will inevitably produce a gradually increasing likeness between the two groups. After all, the number of fundamental human formations upon which a group can build is relatively limited, and it can only slowly be increased. The more of these formations that are present in a group - that is, the greater the dissimilarity of constituent elements in M and N respectively - the greater is the likelihood that an ever increasing number of structures will develop in one group that have equivalents in the other.“

the group is likely to correspond to diminishing individualization and diversity among groups.<sup>15</sup>

The economist Tyler Cowen recently described the relationship between forms of variety in his *Creative Destruction: How Globalization is Changing the World's Cultures*:

When one society trades a new artwork to another society, diversity within society goes up (consumers have greater choice), but diversity across the two societies goes down (the two societies become more alike). The question is not about more or less diversity per se, but rather what kind of diversity globalization will bring. Cross-cultural exchange tends to favor diversity within society, but to disfavor diversity across societies.<sup>16</sup>

If the existence of diversity is by itself valuable, then it would be difficult to know whether we should favor or oppose the extension of interconnectedness. There is a reason, however, for those concerned about human variety to favor greater interconnectedness. Mere diversity that is not experienced by anyone is by itself of no value to human life. The existence of diversity among isolated groups of humans with no experience of each others' diversity would be of no benefit to any of the members of those groups. For such diversity to be of value, someone or some group would have to experience the diversity. It may be true that „A few decades ago, it was still possible to leave home and go someplace where the architecture was different, the landscape was different, and the language, lifestyle, dress, and values were different,“<sup>17</sup> but that was generally only true of small numbers of mobile elites who represented a tiny percentage of world population. The vast majority of people, who lived within comparatively insular communities, did not enjoy any benefits from such diversity, because they did not experience it. Those living today, who experience the modern globalized world, experience more human variety and creativity than any previous generation of humanity.

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15 „The narrower the circle to which we commit ourselves, the less freedom of individuality we possess: however, this narrower circle is itself something individual, and it cuts itself off sharply from all other circles precisely because it is small.“ Georg Simmel, „Group Expansion and Development of Individuality,“ in Georg Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, p. 255.

16 Tyler Cowen, *Creative Destruction: How Globalization is Changing the World's Cultures* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 15. Cowen also identifies diversity over time as a kind of diversity to which protectors of „authentic“ culture seem hostile. Critics of globalization tend to view cultural change as a pure loss, rather than as the emergence of new forms of human life that increase the store of possible human understandings and experiences.

17 *Alternatives to Economic Globalization [A Better World is Possible]*, A Report of the International Forum on Globalization, p. 64.

If it is the experience of diversity that is valuable, then greater group interconnectedness and expansion of social groups generates more of the diversity that is desirable, since most experience of diversity is experience of diversity within social groups, not across them. Indeed, as more people experience diversity across groups, the less diverse those groups are likely to be among themselves, but the more diverse they will be within themselves, where most people actually have the opportunity to experience diversity. In general, globalization leads to more actually experienced diversity, not less. Tourists, diplomats, and those engaged in international commerce do directly experience diversity across cultures, but it is those very activities that constitute globalization and that lead to increased experience of diversity within societies. For such people to complain of the effects of globalization is a bit like those unreflective tourists who complain bitterly that places „X“ or „Y“ have been ruined by „too many tourists.“

#### **IV. Policies of Cultural Protectionism**

Some people seek to ensure or protect cultural distinctiveness through coercive means, including the imposition of legal limits on imports of foreign films and books, special subsidies for local production of cultural products, restrictions on the use of foreign languages, restrictions on satellite dishes or interconnections, limits on the abilities of property owners to sell to foreigners, and other forms of social control. Indeed, exceptions to general principles of freedom of trade have been a part of international trade agreements since shortly after World War II. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade of 1947 included „Article IV,“ which covered „Special arrangements for cinema films“ and validated screen quotas and domestic regulations on cinema. During the Uruguay Round that created the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), cultural services were singled out for services negotiations. However, under GATS (in contrast to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, GATT), exemptions may be sought from the Most Favored Nation (MFN) principle. The European Union has successfully exempted cultural industries from the GATS, allowing various European governments to impose domestic content restrictions on television broadcasting and film distribution.

Cultural protection via coercion takes many forms. The Canadian government taxes its citizens to subsidize the domestic film industry. The French government not only taxes its citizens to subsidize film making, but mandates that at least 40% of all films shown in France must be in the French language. The Iranian government restricts satellite dishes. The governments of Singapore, China, and Saudi Arabia restrict access to the Internet in the name of protecting their local cultures (not to mention their rulers' holds on power).

In defense of such restrictions and special exemptions from general free trade principles, François Mitterand argued that, „What is at stake is the cultural identity of all our nations. It is the right of all peoples to their own culture. It is the freedom to create and choose our own images. A society which abandons to others the way of showing itself, that is to say the way of representing itself, is a society enslaved.”<sup>18</sup>

Pascal Lamy, European Commissioner for Trade, insists that normal principles of free trade should not apply to cultural goods, for „Cultural products are special, in that, on the one hand, they can be bought, sold, imported and exported and, on the other, despite everything which points to their categorization as goods and services in merchandising, they still cannot be reduced to simple goods and services because of their values and creative content.”<sup>19</sup> He explained that „According to the humanist theory of trade, this type of exchange must promote diversity, not limit it.”<sup>20</sup>

To the extent that taxpayers in Country X are taxed to subsidize local film production, advocates of freedom of trade have no special complaint. (Taxpayers in those countries, of course, may have their own grounds of complaint.) But

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18 François Mitterand, Speech given at Gdansk, Poland, September 21, 1993, cited in J. P. Singh, „Globalization, Cultural Identities, and Negotiations: The Evolution of European Preferences on Cultural Industry Negotiations,” paper submitted to the special issue of *The Information Society on „Social Determinants of Public Policy in the Information Age.”*

19 Pascal Lamy, „The state of the GATS negotiations,” Speech before the 4th EBU Conference, Brussels, March 27, 2001, [http://www.ebu.ch/news/press\\_archive/press\\_news\\_1301.html](http://www.ebu.ch/news/press_archive/press_news_1301.html).

20 It's notable that so much attention has been directed toward the role of cinema and so little to the role of the written word and to music. Hollywood – itself substantially a creation of central European artists who fled from or were expelled by collectivist regimes that sought to insulate themselves from dangerous cultural influences – is presented as a homogenizing force. (The Indian film industry – „Bollywood” – and the Brazilian film industry, despite being tremendously popular around the world, are routinely ignored, mainly because most anti-globalization activists are profoundly Euro-centric.) Benjamin Barber insists that „Films are central to market ideology” and contrasts the sameness of „multiplex movie boxes” with the variety of „a Protestant church in a Swiss village, a mosque in Damascus, the cathedral at Rheims, a Buddhist temple in Bangkok.” Barber finds the former less distinctive than the latter. (Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism Are Shaping the World* [New York: Ballantine Books, 1996], pp. 98-99.) Perhaps that has something to do with the difference between entertainment and worship; one suspects that worldwide variety among dental offices is also declining. (For a treatment of the case of the film industry, see chapter four of Tyler Cowen's *Creative Destruction: How Globalization is Changing the World's Cultures*.) Although most of the ire of the anti-globalization movement has been directed to the rise of films produced in the U.S., almost no attention is paid by anti-globalization writers to the rise to international prominence of such authors as Naguib Mahfouz, Mario Vargas Llosa, V. S. Naipaul, or Yukio Mishima.

restrictions on the rights of consumers to purchase, view, read, or otherwise experience cultural products produced elsewhere are a different matter. They represent assertions of power by some over others, notably by well connected elites over those who would willingly purchase or view films, surf internet pages, or read books that the elites consider harmful to the fragile cultural identities of those who would be doing the purchasing, surfing, or reading. In no way should such assertions of power be represented as cases of „culture defending itself,“ for they are instead assertions by some persons of the right and power to determine for others what those others will see, hear, read, and think. The issue is not whether some should be able to make choices for others and impose them by force. To think that such restrictions foster a greater sense of cultural freedom is an act of self-deception. As a Romanian student remarked to me recently at a conference at the University of Aix-en-Provence, „How does it make me freer or more secure in my culture to require that boring old movies be shown over and over and over on Romanian television, simply in order to meet a domestic production quota?“

François Mitterand was wrong when he stated that restrictions on trade in cultural goods represent „the freedom to create and choose our own images.“ They represent the power of political elites to use violence against others to override their freedom to create and choose their own images.

## V. Identity and Cultural Authenticity

A common complaint against globalization is that it erodes cultural authenticity, or even that it dilutes the purity of a given culture. For example, the authors of the report on „Alternatives to Economic Globalization“ claim that „Corporate logos replace authentic local cultures as the primary source of personal identity.“<sup>21</sup>

Manfred Steger decries „McDonaldization“ and asserts that „In the long run, the McDonaldization of the world amounts to the imposition of uniform standards that eclipse human creativity and dehumanize social relations.“<sup>22</sup>

Maude Barlow of the „Council of Canadians“ claims that, „Governments and

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21 Alternatives to Economic Globalization [A Better World is Possible], A Report of the International Forum on Globalization, p. 71. See also „Culture Wars,“ *The Economist*, September 12, 1998, reprinted in *Globalization and the Challenges of a New Century*, ed. by Patrick O'Meara, Howard D. Mehlinger, and Matthew Krain (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), pp. 454-460.

22 Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 71.

people around the world are increasingly concerned about a global cultural homogenization dominated by the American and Western values and lifestyles carried through the massive U.S. entertainment-industrial complex.<sup>23</sup> Barlow argues in favor of an international „Convention on Cultural Diversity“ that would „recognize the importance to all nations and peoples of maintaining cultural diversity.“ Notably, it would require, not lawyers for its interpretation, but „cultural experts“ (although just who those people might be is never made clear):

Challenges and disputes under the new charter would need to be judged by cultural experts, not trade bureaucrats. The instrument would have to be self-defining: what constitutes a matter of cultural significance to one nation may not be to another. These definitions must be allowed to change over time, because we cannot know today what form cultural expression will take in the future.<sup>24</sup>

Such claims rest on confusion about the nature of culture (the claims of purity and authenticity), on confusion about the nature of personal identity, and on a political theory that is both parasitic on liberal cosmopolitan theories of rights and justice (insistence on „free and informed consent“ is frequent) and at the same time highly authoritarian and elitist („cultural experts“ get to decide what others will be allowed or required to produce or consume).

## A. Cultural Purity/Authenticity

Let's begin with claims of cultural purity or authenticity. They rest on myth and fantasy. One would be hard pressed to find any culture anyplace on the globe that one could assert to be „pure,“ for each culture has been influenced by others. At a Cato Institute forum on Tyler Cowen's book *Creative Destruction*, Benjamin Barber, author of the anti-globalization book *Jihad vs. McWorld*, defended authenticity and gave as an example threats to „authentic Indian tea culture,“ which he sought to protect from the ravages of Coca-Colonization.<sup>25</sup> Of course, tea was not „native“ to India, but had been introduced there from China by British merchants and cultivated for export. The search for „authenticity“ is a pipe dream. There is no

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23 Maude Barlow, „Cultural Diversity: The Right of Nations to Resist Cultural Homogenization,“ in *Alternatives to Economic Globalization [A Better World is Possible]*, A Report of the International Forum on Globalization, p. 69.

24 Maude Barlow, „Cultural Diversity: The Right of Nations to Resist Cultural Homogenization,“ in *Alternatives to Economic Globalization [A Better World is Possible]*, A Report of the International Forum on Globalization, p. 71.

25 Available for viewing at <http://www.cato.org/events/030304bf.html>



longer any culture that could be identified as „pure,“ i.e., that is not a *mélange* of bits and pieces contributed by or drawn from other cultures.<sup>26</sup>

Those who defend cultural authenticity typically find the borders of authentic culture to correspond to the territorial borders of nation states, which are hardly „authentic“ expressions of culture. It is not simply the nation (i.e., the expression of a cultural nation) that built the state, after all, but rather more often the state that built the nation. As Charles Tilley notes,

As direct rule expanded throughout Europe, the welfare, culture, and daily routines of ordinary Europeans came to depend as never before on which state they happened to reside in. Internally, states undertook to impose national languages, national educational systems, national military service, and much more. Externally, they began to control movement across frontiers, to use tariffs and customs as instruments of economic policy, and to treat foreigners as distinctive kinds of people deserving limited rights and close surveillance.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore, it is hardly clear that the boundaries of nations states, which is where protectionist restrictions are normally enforced, are coincident with important common features of groups. As Robert Musil noted, „The German peasant stands closer to the French peasant than to the German city dweller, when it comes down to what really moves their souls.“<sup>28</sup> Which is the more „authentic“ identity: German, French, peasant, or city dweller?

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26 As Jeremy Waldron asks, „What if there has been nothing but *mélange* all the way down? What if cultures have always been implicated with one another, through trade, war, curiosity, and other forms of inter-communal relation? What if the mingling of cultures is as immemorial as cultural roots themselves? What if purity and homogeneity have always been myths?“ Jeremy Waldron, „Multiculturalism and *mélange*,“ in Robert Fullinwider, ed., *Public Education in a Multicultural Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 107

27 Charles Tilley, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, 990 - 1992* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 115-116.

28 „Nation' as Ideal and as Reality,“ in Robert Musil, *Precision and Soul: Essays and Addresses*, ed. and trans. by Burton Pike and David S. Luft (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 111. Musil continued, „We - each nation for itself alone - understand one another very little, and fight or betray one another when we can. We can, to be sure, all be brought together under one hat when we plan to squash it on the head of another nation; then we are enraptured and have a shared mystical experience, but one may assume that the mystical in this experience resides in its bring so rarely a reality for us. Once again: this is just as true for the others as it is for us Germans. But in our crises we Germans have the inestimable advantage that we can recognize the real connections more clearly than they, and we should construct our feeling for the fatherland on this truth, and not on the conceit that we are the people of Goethe and Schiller, or of Voltaire and Napoleon.“

Those who claim to protect authentic cultures from contact with or contamination by others are almost always acting on a set of ideas that emerged in Europe, even when they claim to be representing allegedly authentic African, native American, Islamic, or other non-European cultures. The influence of European anti-liberal thinking (both red and brown) on Islamic radicalism, for example, makes a mockery of the idea that Osama bin Laden and others are merely acting to protect authentic Islamic purity from corrupting outside influences.<sup>29</sup> The very language of „authenticity“ is, for most cultures, profoundly „inauthentic.“ The influence of the anti-liberal German philosopher Martin Heidegger’s theory of authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) can be found throughout much of the literature on cultural authenticity.<sup>30</sup> Like Marxism and Fascism, which are often presented as „indigenous“ expressions of local political culture, the fetish for authenticity is an import from Europe.

An example of the arrogance of the authenticity fetishists may be helpful. During a trip a few years ago to Guatemala, a Mayan-Guatemalan friend who teaches anthropology in Guatemala City took me on a very enlightening tour of the Mayan highlands. He related to me how academic visitors from abroad whom he takes on such trips bitterly complain that the Mayan women are increasingly less likely to wear their traditional - and I should add, both very beautiful and very

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29 That issue is discussed in chapter three of Paul Berman’s *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2003). The radical anti-globalization writers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri assert in their book *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000) that radical Islamic „fundamentalism“ (a misnomer, in any case) „might be better understood not as a premodern but as a postmodern project. The postmodernity of fundamentalism has to be recognized primarily in its refusal of modernity as a weapon of Euro-American hegemony - and in this regard Islamic fundamentalism is indeed the paradigmatic case.“ (p. 149) *Empire* offers, among other things, a defense of terrorist attacks on commercial institutions, of wholesale murder, and of totalitarian censorship; those themes are only thinly veiled by a style that is almost completely opaque and virtually unreadable. See, for examples, pp. 36 - 38 („moral intervention,“ i.e., verbal criticism of murderous totalitarian regimes, is condemned, and the term „terrorist“ dismissed as „a crude conceptual and terminological reduction that is rooted in a police mentality“), pp. 65-66 („Don’t we already possess ‚arms‘ and ‚money‘? The kind of money that Machiavelli insists is necessary may in fact reside in the productivity of the multitude, the immediate actor of biopolitical production and reproduction. The kind of arms in question may be contained in the potential of the multitude to sabotage and destroy with its own productive force the parasitical order of postmodern command.“), and pp.154-156 („Truth will not make us free, but taking control of the production of truth will. Mobility and hybridity are not liberatory, but taking control of the production of mobility and stasis, purities and mixtures is. The real truth commissions of *Empire* will be constituent assemblies of the multitude, social factories for the production of truth.“).

30 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. by John Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York, 1996), e.g., pp. 39-47.

laboriously hand-made –clothing than was the case in the past. Increasingly, they wear such clothes for special occasions, such as christenings, weddings, church, and the like. The reaction of the visitor is almost uniformly one of horror. The Mayan women, they say, are being robbed of their culture. They are the frontline victims of globalization.

My friend noted that he had never heard a visitor who made such a complaint actually bother to ask any Mayan women why they did not dress like their mothers or grandmothers. My friend, since he speaks various Mayan dialects and is, in addition, an authentic social scientist, does ask, and he says that the answers are invariably some version of the observation that traditional clothing is becoming „too expensive.“ Now what, we might ask, does it mean to say that a hand-made garment (almost invariably made by women) has become too expensive? It means that the labor of a Mayan woman is becoming more valuable. It means that she can spend many hard hours on a hand loom (often attached to a tree; I tried it, and it is astonishingly hard work) to make a skirt and wear it, or she could make such a skirt and sell it to a wealthy lady in Paris, New York, or Rome, and with the money she earns buy several outfits, as well as eyeglasses, or a radio, or medicine to combat dengue fever, or books for her children. She is not being robbed; she is becoming wealthier. And from her perspective, that doesn't seem to be such a bad thing, no matter how much far wealthier foreign visitors may complain about it.

Furthermore, we know that, as prosperity grows, traditional indigenous garments are often revived as a locus of creative design and innovation. The sari that some Indian women abandoned for western clothing is now back in demand among Indians, and with prosperity, it has become the height of fashion; the best designers work to call forth from the traditional sari ever more beautiful forms of itself.

## **B. Culture and Personal Identity**

Cultural authenticity is closely tied to issues of personal identity, for if the identity of a person could only be constituted within a pure or authentic cultural context, and inauthentic, impure, or cross-cutting cultural loyalties threaten to dissolve such identity, each person might have an interest in protecting the purity or authenticity of that culture. Personal identity is understood as encased within a wider and inescapable collective identity. Thus, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz (rather presumptuously) claims, on behalf of „some three hundred million indigenous people on the earth,“ that Ours is a collective identity with collective ownership of fo-

rests, waters, and lands. These are antithetical to individualism, private property, modernization, and global capitalism.<sup>31</sup>

Harvard professor Michael Sandel argues that cultural membership, and hence the primacy of the community, is a requirement for self-understanding and personal identity and that individualist approaches generally fail to deal adequately with the problem of personal identity, for „to be capable of a more thoroughgoing reflection, we cannot be wholly unencumbered subjects of possession, individuated in advance and given prior to our ends, but must be subjects constituted in part by our central aspirations and attachments, always open, indeed vulnerable, to growth and transformation in the light of revised self-understandings. And in so far as our constitutive self-understandings comprehend a wider subject than the individual alone, whether a family or tribe or city or class or nation or people, to this extent they define a community in a constitutive sense.“<sup>32</sup> Thus, each of us has certain „constitutive self-understandings“ without which we would simply have no fixed identity, and those self-understandings are so connected with the „family or tribe or city or class or nation or people“ that what is really identified is not a numerically and materially individuated human person, but a collective person.

According to Sandel, an epistemological principle can be transformed into an ontological principle: „this notion of community [the constitutive conception] describes a framework of self-understandings that is distinguishable from and in some sense prior to the sentiments and dispositions of individuals within the framework.“<sup>33</sup> Because shared understandings are necessary for our self-understanding, i.e., because they are asserted to be an epistemic criterion for self knowledge, it is asserted that those shared understandings are constitutive of our identity, and that therefore „the bounds of the self are no longer fixed, individuated in advance and given prior to experience.“<sup>34</sup>

That move is unjustified, for „even if this were granted it would not follow from it that subjects of these relationships are anything other than distinct per-

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31 Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, „Cultural Diversity: The Right of Indigenous Peoples to Remain Different and Diverse,“ in *Alternatives to Economic Globalization [A Better World is Possible]*, A Report of the International Forum on Globalization, p. 65. Tauli-Corpuz and others like her offer no evidence that „indigenous peoples“ are inherently collectivist or antithetical to individualism or property. The claim is pure assertion.

32 Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 172.

33 Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, p. 174.

34 Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, p. 183.

sons. To suppose otherwise is to infer fallaciously that epistemological considerations enter into the constitution of the object known."<sup>35</sup> That individuals share notions of justice, compassion, and self-understanding does not imply that the boundaries of those individuals melt into a vast fondue of communal understandings, for, as John Haldane points out, „Features can only be shared if they attach to bearers which at base are numerically diverse."<sup>36</sup>

Sandel is surely wrong to assert that people who participate in the „same“ culture have, are, or constitute the same self. Indeed, it does not even follow that they share the same self-understandings. Modern societies encompass such a wealth of different self-understandings that it is meaningless to assert that that one’s identity is uniquely determined by a monolithic culture.

A model of social interaction might be helpful. If we were to try to imagine collective identity geometrically, we would have a series of concentric circles, with the circle of „the culture“ forming the outer circle. That outer circle would be rather like a hard shell, guaranteeing the discrete identity of the persons who find themselves within it. But such an image does not begin to describe even relatively small (by modern standards) social orders, which are increasingly sets of intersecting circles that connect via their intersections with circles that would be seen by holders of the „hard shell“ approach as outside the culture entirely.<sup>37</sup> Georg Sim-

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35 John J. Haldane, „Individuals and the Theory of Justice,“ *Ratio* XXVII 2 (December 1985), p. 195. This is an old debate, and its outlines can be traced quite clearly in the debate between the „Latin Averroists,“ notably Siger of Brabant, and St. Thomas Aquinas over whether there is one „intellective soul“ for all of mankind. The Averroists argued that, for two individuals to know the same thing, they have to have the same form impressed by the agent intellect into the same material (or possible) intellect; to know the same form, they must share the same material intellect; it was reported by some in the thirteenth century that that thesis had radical implications for the moral responsibilities of the individual: if Peter was saved, then I will be saved too, as we share the same intellective soul, so I am free to engage in whatever sinful behavior I wish, in the knowledge that I will be saved nonetheless. Thomas Aquinas responded that the impressed intelligible species is not literally the very form of the thing raised to a higher level of intelligibility, but rather that by which we know the thing. See Siger of Brabant, „On the Intellective Soul,“ in John F. Wippel and Allan B. Wolter, O.F.M., eds., *Medieval Philosophy: From St. Augustine to Nicholas of Cusa* (London: Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1969) and Thomas Aquinas, *On the Unity of the Intellect Against the Averroists* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1968).

36 John J. Haldane, „Individuals and the Theory of Justice,“ p. 196.

37 Otto von Guericke was a pioneer in describing the nature of modern association. As he noted, „No modern association of fellows encompasses the totality of a human being, even in economic terms: the aspect of their economic personality which forms part of the association is strictly defined.“ Otto von Guericke, *Community in Historical Perspective*, translated by Mary Fischer, selected and edited by Antony Black (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 208. The book is excerpted from Guericke’s *Das Deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht*.

mel, who was deeply interested in the processes of differentiation and individuation, characterized the relationship between identity and social affiliations as an „intersection of social circles“ („Die Kreuzung sozialer Kreise“):

The groups with which the individual is affiliated constitute a system of coordinates, as it were, such that each new group with which he becomes affiliated circumscribes him more exactly and more unambiguously. To belong to any one of these groups leaves the individual considerable leeway. But the larger number of groups to which an individual belongs, the more improbable it is that other persons will exhibit the same combination of group-affiliations, that these particular groups will „intersect“ once again [in a second individual].<sup>38</sup>

The less a social circle to which a person belongs requires or entails membership in another, the more modern a set of relationships is. Thus,

The modern pattern differs sharply from the concentric pattern of group-affiliations as far as a person's achievements are concerned. Today someone may belong, aside from his occupational position, to a scientific association, he may sit on a board of directors of a corporation and occupy an honorific position in the city government. Such a person will be more clearly determined sociologically, the less his participation in one group by itself enjoins upon him participation in another. He is determined sociologically in the sense that the groups „intersect“ in his person by virtue of his affiliation with them.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, implicit in the conception of culture involved in theories of collective identity is a static understanding of what constitutes a culture. But for a culture to qualify as a living culture, it must be capable of change. To insist that it not be influenced by other cultures, or that it be „protected“ behind barriers to trade and other forms of external influence, is to condemn it to wither and die. It

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38 Georg Simmel, „The Web of Group Affiliations“ (Die Kreuzung sozialer Kreise) in Georg Simmel, „Conflict“ and „The Web of Group Affiliations,“ trans. by Kurt H. Wolff and Reinhard Bendix (respectively) (New York: The Free Press, 1955), p. 140.

39 George Simmel, „The Web of Group Affiliations,“ p. 150. Mario Vargas Llosa amplified that point in his defense of global free trade: „The notion of ‚cultural identity‘ is dangerous. From a social point of view, it represents merely a doubtful, artificial concept, but from a political perspective it threatens humanity's most precious achievement: freedom. I do not deny that people who speak the same language, face the same problems, and practice the same religions and customs have common characteristics. But that collective denomination can never fully define each one of them, and it only abolishes or relegates to a disdainful secondary plane the sum of unique attributes and traits that differentiates one member of the group from the others.“

Mario Vargas Llosa, „The Culture of Liberty,“ *Foreign Policy*, January/February, 2001.

is also to impose on people an „identity," a vision of themselves, that they themselves do not share, as evidenced by the fact that their choices must be overridden by coercion in order to „protect" that vision. As Mario Vargas Llosa puts it, „Seeking to impose a cultural identity on a people is equivalent to locking them in a prison and denying them the most precious of liberties - that of choosing what, how, and who they want to be."<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, the assumption that introduction of cultural novelties into an existing culture implies imposition of systems of meanings on the members of those cultures rests on an assumption that the members of those cultures are simply inert and incapable of creating new forms of meaning. As Joana Breidenbach and Ina Zukrigl ask, „What about the meaning that local people attach to globally distributed goods and ideas?"<sup>41</sup> As they point out, even the hated McDonalds restaurant has different meanings in different cultures.<sup>42</sup> Tyler Cowen shows in his book how materials from one cultural context have been appropriated for aesthetic or artistic purposes in others, from Trinidadian musicians appropriating steel barrels and creating their famous steel band music to trade blankets that were painstakingly unwoven by Navajo artists to be re-dyed and rewoven into works of great beauty.<sup>43</sup> By appropriating materials, ideas, and approaches from outside, carriers of cultural practices keep cultures alive. The alternative preferred by enemies of globalization is to „preserve" cultures through use of coercion, much as one „preserves" insects by pinning them to boards in exhibition cases.

### C. Empowering Elites

The language of collective identity is frequently asserted in conjunction with appeals to „informed consent," a standard normally associated with liberal individualism. But the difference between „informed consent" under collectivism and liberalism is that the entity that is to be „informed" and to give „consent" is neither an individual human being, nor a voluntarily formed association of human

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40 Mario Vargas Llosa, „The Culture of Liberty."

41 Joana Breidenbach and Ina Zukrigl, „The Dynamics of Cultural Globalization: The Myths of Cultural Globalization," <http://www.inst.at/studies/collab/breidenb.htm>.

42 One example that they give is the use of McDonalds in Beijing as a non-competitive alternative to giving lavish banquets, since the „menu is limited and the food standardized...For people without a lot of money McDonalds has become the best alternative to host a meal." Tomas Larsson takes up the many ways in which objects are appropriated and appreciated by different cultures involved in peaceful trade in his book *The Race to the Top: The Real Story of Globalization* (Washington, D.C.: Cato Institute, 2001), pp. 83-89.

43 Tyler Cowen, *Creative Destruction: How Globalization is Changing the World's Cultures*, pp. 25-26, 43-46.

beings, but a collective entity. Such approaches reveal a profound misunderstanding of how individuals and groups are related; they fall into the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. The error is in moving from the existence of a group to treating that group as if it were another individual person, just like the individuals that make up the group. Liberal individualism does not entail that there is no such „thing“ as society or that we cannot speak meaningfully of groups. The fact that there are trees does not mean that we cannot speak of forests, after all. Just as a building is not a pile of bricks but the bricks and the relationships among them, society is not a person, with her own rights, but many individuals and the complex set of relationships among them. Society is neither merely a collection of individuals, nor some „bigger or better“ thing separate from them. The group is not another person who can give informed consent to the introduction or adoption of new ideas in the same way that an individual can give informed consent to the administration of a new medical procedure.

The historian Parker T. Moon put the matter quite clearly in his study *Imperialism and World Politics*:

Language often obscures truth. More than is ordinarily realized, our eyes are blinded to the facts of international relations by tricks of the tongue. When one uses the simple monosyllable „France“ one thinks of France as a unit, an entity. When to avoid awkward repetition we use a personal pronoun in referring to a country—when for example we say „France sent her troops to conquer Tunis”—we impute not only unity but personality to the country. The very words conceal the facts and make international relations a glamorous drama in which personalized nations are the actors, and all too easily we forget the flesh-and-blood men and women who are the true actors. How different it would be if we had no such word as „France,“ and had to say instead—thirty-eight million men, women and children of very diversified interests and beliefs, inhabiting 218,000 square miles of territory! Then we should more accurately describe the Tunis expedition in some such way as this: „A few of these thirty-eight million persons sent thirty thousand others to conquer Tunis.“ This way of putting the fact immediately suggests a question, or rather a series of questions. Who are the „few“? Why did they send the thirty thousand to Tunis? And why did these obey?

Empire-building is done not by „nations“ but by men. The problem before us is to discover the men, the active, interested minorities in each nation, who are directly interested in imperialism, and then to analyze the reasons why the majorities pay the expenses and fight the wars necessitated by imperialist expansion.<sup>44</sup>

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44 Parker T. Moon, *Imperialism and World Politics* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1926), p. 58.



Treating the collective as a person who can give „informed consent“ to the adoption of new technologies, ideas, or practices obscures, rather than illuminates, important political questions. Those questions, mostly centering around explanation and moral responsibility, simply cannot be asked within the confines of the group personification thesis. To propose group personification is to drape a cloak of mysticism around the actions of the real policy makers, who are flesh-and-blood individuals, not ghostly collectives.

The insistence on collective – rather than individual – consent means that it is invariably the case that some (whether a minority in power, a plurality in power, or a majority in power) will give consent for others. If cultural identity is a collective concept and if „the culture“ has to maintain its authenticity if it is to provide the collective identity necessary for personal identity, then it follows that some person or persons has to determine what it is that's authentic about a culture, and what is not. Sometimes the group that insists on being empowered to decide what will be considered authentic is not even drawn from members of the culture in question. It is made up of outsiders, who seek to protect the culture from being spoiled by contact with the outside. Such are the anti-globalization activists from wealthy countries. They fail to appreciate the humanity of the poor. They see them, not as sources of cultural creativity, but as exotic pets. Their goal is to convert the poor nations of the world to zoos, in which „native peoples“ can be displayed in their „authentic habitat.“ They do not see them as humans.

For such restrictions to be enforced, someone must be empowered to decide what is and what is not a part of the culture. In principle, it seems that virtually anything could be included in a „culture,“ understood as „the beliefs, values, and lifestyles of ordinary people in their everyday existence.“<sup>45</sup> That includes everything from rice production (witness Japanese protection of the powerful and protected rice farmers, who enjoy disproportional representation in the Diet [both political and culinary] and who force Japanese consumers to pay high prices for domestically produced rice), to ownership of radio and television stations (witness U.S. restrictions on foreign ownership of broadcasting licenses), to coal mining (witness the impassioned pleas on behalf of „traditional“ ways of life associated with coal mines that are no longer profitable to operate), and now even to information technology and computer programming (witness various complaints from formerly highly paid computer programs over outsourcing of coding to programmers in India). Who will be empowered to make such determinations, and how?

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45 Peter Berger, „Introduction: The Cultural Dynamics of Globalization,“ in *Many Globalizations: Cultural Diversity in the Contemporary World*, p. 2.

One solution is to rely on „cultural experts," but that assumes that we already know who is the proper, or authentic, interpreter of a culture. Another is to rely on local political power holders, who are frequently patriarchal, authoritarian, and quite intent on retaining the power they hold over other members of their culture. Of course, yet another approach is to rely on wealthy self-appointed activists from outside to serve as „cultural experts" and allow them to decide what the poor may or may not import, trade, adopt, or adapt.

The whole enterprise is more than faintly reminiscent of the time in Germany when „cultural experts" on authentic German culture were empowered to deny to Germans the enjoyment of „degenerate art." The cultural experts got to define Germanness, but millions of Germans who enjoyed (or would enjoy, had they had the chance) jazz and swing music, abstract art, and the like were denied the enjoyment of such experiences by those empowered to determine what was truly German and what was not, and to protect German culture from pollution.<sup>46</sup>

## VI. Trade, Change, and Freedom

None of the above defense of cultural freedom implies that nothing is lost when cultures change. The most extreme example of true loss is the loss of linguistic diversity, for as languages „die," i.e., when the last speakers of those languages stop speaking them, songs, poems, stories, and other forms of complex meaning are lost. Loss is not always, however, equivalent to net loss. The speakers of those languages may have abandoned them for a reason, viz. the net gain realized in switching from a language with a tiny number of speakers to a language with a large or growing number of speakers, such as Spanish, Kiswahili, Arabic, or Mandarin. (Contrary to popular imagination, English is not rapidly growing as a primary language; its main advantage is that it is a common second language, such that when people from Norway, Mexico, Iran, and Thailand meet, they are likely to speak English, rather than Norwegian, Yucatec Mayan, Farsi, or Thai.) For every chosen benefit, there is a cost, namely, what is given up in the act of choice, and that cost may sometimes be felt more acutely by those who don't reap the benefit, such as speakers of more widely spoken languages who might have benefited from the continued existence of small language groups as sources of cultural inspiration, without having themselves to bear the costs of being linguistically isolated. In any case, even loss of language, as great a loss as that is, need not

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46 For an inspiring treatment of the resistance of the resistance to such imposed authenticity, see Michael H. Kater, *Different Drummers: Jazz in the Culture of Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

entail complete extinction of a culture, as theological, artistic, familial, and many other elements of that culture may continue to be expressed and developed in other languages.

The extreme case of linguistic extinction is hardly the only – or even the dominant – experience of globalization. (And even in such extreme cases, it is more an experience of „regionalization“ than of globalization, as there seems little likelihood of a global primary language emerging any time soon.) Even in the cases of relatively small language groups, however, globalization can often increase the cultural vitality of those groups, by increasing communication among otherwise isolated population clusters. As Tsering Gyaltzen, owner of an internet service that is connecting 13 remote mountain villages in Nepal, told a BBC reporter,

We bring the web to distant places so they can project themselves, benefit from the exposure and maybe young people will stay at home and be proud of being Sherpas, rather than running to Kathmandu or America.<sup>47</sup>

Barun Mitra of India's Liberty Institute told me during a conference in Berlin that he was struck by seeing German-language editions of the Harry Potter books in German bookstores. The wealth of Germany (in his words, „a pretty small country“) made possible a thriving German-language literary culture, whereas the relative poverty of India could not support editions of such books in indigenous Indian languages. Wealth makes it easier to support a culture. A remarkably striking example is the capacity of cosmopolitan and highly „globalized“ Iceland, with a very small population, to support a flourishing cultural offering of Icelandic poetry (Reykjavik is the only city where I have ever, in the course of an evening, been introduced to three people with the comment „He's a poet“), novels, plays, cinema, music, and journalism.

Globalization has also led to the creation of communities of persons who are actively seeking to document, defend, and even revive dwindling cultures. As Kani Xulam states in a promotion for the group Cultural Survival, „We have made friends through the Internet in places that we could not have reached otherwise. I am talking about South Korea, New Zealand, South Africa, Costa Rica and many other places. We have an address, a face, and a message for the world.“<sup>48</sup>

There is nothing implicit in the concept of culture that requires investing eli-

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47 Daniel Lak, „High Ambition for Himalayan Internet,“ BBC News, October 31, 2003, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south\\_asia/3230069.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/3230069.stm).

48 Posted on [www.culturalsurvival.org](http://www.culturalsurvival.org)

tes with the power to manage or protect „authentic culture“ by using force to override the choices of the members of those cultures. Culture can exist and flourish without cultural dictatorship.

## VII. Conclusion

Living cultures change. It is the very process of change that makes them themselves. Their sameness is not merely a matter of their difference from other cultures, but of their difference from themselves over time, just as a person who grows from childhood to adulthood remains the same person only by changing.<sup>49</sup> What too many observers from wealthy societies seem to identify as the essential cultural element of poorer societies is their poverty. I have observed the disappointment of visitors from wealthy cultures when colorful poor people dressed in brilliant clothes stop, pat themselves down, and take out cell phones in response to insistent ringing sounds. It's not authentic! It ruins the whole trip! Those people are being robbed of their culture.! They're victims of global capitalism! The arrogance of those who want to keep the poor in their native environments, like lizards in a terrarium, is startling.


Although seeing a Dalit („untouchable“) or a Mayan highlander talking on a cell phone may ruin the visit of a wealthy poverty tourist, being able to use telephony to talk to their friends, family members, or business associates is often highly valued by the people who bought the cell phones, and should not be seen as a threat to their identity. Globalization is making possible a culture of wealth and freedom for Dalits and Mayans, who can enjoy wealth and freedom without ceasing to be the people they are. Just as culture should not be identified with isolation or stasis, it should not be identified with poverty.

The right to trade is a fundamental human right. The „cultural“ arguments on behalf of limiting trade to the boundaries of nation states are untenable. Trade protectionism perpetuates poverty, not culture. It should be resisted, not primarily in the name of economic efficiency, but in the name of culture, for living cultures flourish in freedom and prosperity.

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49 I am not suggesting a similar pattern of maturation among cultures.





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