Center-Periphery Relations and Creolisation in Contemporary Culture

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How are we to understand the nature of culture in today's world? In the following few pages I will sketch, mostly in quite abstract terms, what I think of as a macroanthropological perspective toward contemporary cultural organisation.[1] To begin with, let me say that I think of culture as having essentially three dimensions. It consists of (1) ideas and modes of thought as entities and processes of the mind - that entire array of concepts, propositions, values and other notions which people within some social unit carry together, as well as their various ways of handling such ideas in characteristic modes of mental operations; (2) forms of externalisation, the various ways in which meaning is made accessible to the senses, and thus made public; and (3) social distribution, the ways in which (1) and (2) together are spread over individuals and social relationships. These three dimensions, of course, interrelate in a great many ways. Here I will give some emphasis to the third, distributional, dimension, as I think this is where we have seen some of the most dramatic changes during this century - changes that we have been somewhat slow to conceptualise effectively.

The idea of the cultural mosaic

In the century preceding ours, Europeans especially developed a view of culture which entailed some particular assumptions about its characteristic distribution. This was an era of triumphant nationalism, and the ideologically colored understanding of culture which went hand in hand with it was one which made the nation state the major vessel of culture. Within the boundaries of the for-

[1] This paper draws on work done within the "World System of Culture" project and now continued within the "National and Transnational Cultural Processes" project, both based at the Department of Social Anthropology, Stockholm University, and supported by the Swedish Council for Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSFR). Earlier publications which elaborate or exemplify various aspects of the theoretical perspective include Hannerz 1987, 1988, 1989 a and b, 1990, and 1991; the most complete statement, however, is in Hannerz 1992. The paper was first presented at the Conference on Culture and Management at "Sveriges Invandrarinstitut", Botkyrka, June 11-14, 1991, and its original publication will be in a volume resulting from that conference.

mer was a population held together by a shared cultural heritage; and the boundaries between such populations were ideally quite sharply defined. If reality did not always conform with this ideal, moreover, the state tended to make it its task to try and close the gap, by homogenising its citizenry by various means.

Recent events for example in southeastern Europe show persuasively enough that nationalism is not a spent force in the organisation of culture. Yet for various reasons it is becoming forever more difficult to remain committed, as a matter of analysis rather than ideology, to the idea of a world culture as a mosaic composed of clearly bounded pieces. Now more than ever before, there is a constant, large-scale and highly differentiated flow of meanings and meaningful forms across as well as within national boundaries. The distributional dimension which I identified above, then, for one thing now entails a globalisation of culture. It comes about because people in the twentieth century move quickly, in large numbers - as labor migrants, refugees, businessmen, tourists or whatever - over great distances, and carry some of their culture along. But culture also increasingly moves even when people do not, with material goods and especially with those technologies of cultural distribution which we term media.

Toward global homogenisation?

This globalisation, however, is a process of which different views can be held. One of them involves a scenario of global homogenisation, of which the term globalisation itself is quite frequently taken to be a mere synonym. We are all familiar with this scenario. It suggests that especially through the mechanisms of the market, a version of contemporary western culture will eventually spread to every corner of the world. The main source of this culture would obviously be the United States. *Dallas,* MacDonalds and Coca Cola are its main symbols, to the extent that Cocacolonisation has become an alternative label for the process as a whole.

Perhaps the scenario of global homogenisation is now no longer quite as widely held as it was some years ago. Postmodernist fashions in intellectual life would seem to have something to do with this; the emphasis in these, despite an acknowledgement of global interconnectedness, is yet on fragmentation, diversity and the local games of language and living. The global homogenisation scenario would seem to be one of those overarching "master narratives" of history toward which postmodernism is generally skeptical.

Nevertheless, extreme as that scenario may be, we cannot easily disregard the fact - stated in more qualified terms - that culture does move across borders, and that it tends to do so more in some directions than in others. To put it in another way, transnational cultural flows are in rather large part asymmetrical, they arrange themselves into some kind of center-periphery pattern. The global homogenisation scenario emphasises that the center-periphery relations of cultural diffusion are closely aligned with those of political and economic power, with the center in North America and western Europe, and with the rest of the world to varying degrees peripheral or at least semiperipheral. The point is in large part valid, even if we may want to observe that the center-periphery relations of culture are not at any point in time a mere reflection of current political economy, and that one could only map them accurately by including centers at different levels, and with different specialisations.

Four frameworks of cultural flow

I shall not attempt to go into such detail here, however; instead, I want to try and sketch in a general way the main principles by which culture flows in the relationships between people today, and suggest how these principles relate to contemporary global cultural interconnectedness generally and to the asymmetry of center-periphery relationships a little more specifically.

Four organisational frameworks, I believe, together comprise a very large part, if not quite all, of cultural process in the present-day world. They do not exist in isolation from one another, but it is rather in their interplay, with varying respective strengths, that they shape both what we rather arbitrarily demarcate as particular cultures, and that complicated all-encompassing entity which we may think of as a global ecumene. For these four frameworks I use the terms form of life, state, market, and movement.[2]

"Form of life" is probably the least self-evident of these, but is really the most important, most fundamental, frame of cultural flow in every human group, so let me discuss it first. The point here is that

[2] It must be emphasised that I am referring here only to that aspect of state and market wich entails a management of the flow of meaning and meaningful form. The state and the market may also operate to set conditions for people's lives in physical and material terms; through these they influence cultural process somewhat more indirectly, in shaping the environment to which cultural flow within the form of life framework must adapt.

people acquire a large part of their ideas and modes of expression simply by going about their everyday lives. They observe what others around them do, and talk to each other about more or less common experiences and interests, and in so doing they produce and reproduce knowledge and values. This occurs freely, in large part spontaneously and without much reflection, anywhere in the world, in households and neighborhoods, in gangs or among work mates. Very often this flow of meaning is a matter of routines. We draw on ideas and overt forms which are practical in the situation at hand and stick to them for as long as they indeed remain practical. In the prototype small-scale, relatively isolated locale of classical anthropology, this type of cultural process may encompass just about all there is to culture, involving a rather high degree of overall symmetries in the cultural aspects of social relationships - over time at least, everybody gives about as much as he or she gets. In contemporary complex societies, on the other hand, the cultures based on forms of life are more likely what we describe as subcultures. These cultures are rather inward-turning, toward the groups of people carrying them; they are mostly not missionising, although as observers of what goes on around us, we may yet form some understandings of at least some other subcultures as well.

Conventionally we are likely to think of the state as a political form, defined perhaps by its monopoly on certain forms of power within a territory. In recent times, however, the tools of power have increasingly become cultural. The state desires loyal citizens, and works on constructing them through its own cultural apparatus of schools, media, museums, national holidays, monuments or whatever.[3]

Obviously the nineteenth century European view of cultural diversity organised by national boundaries, as referred to above, fits in here. The nation state draws its legitimacy in large part from its claim to be the guardian of culture voluntarily shared and historically rooted, primarily within the form of life framework. Consequently, diversity within its borders, or cultural linkages which cut across these, may be problematic to the state, and it may be a significant part of its cultural policy to try and deal with such problems. Often it is in the interest of the state that the conceptual difference between the state and nation is blurred. This is not least obvious in the case of those many states in the Third World which have to live with the arbitrary boundaries of colonialism, but where dominant strata and the state cultural apparatus are inclined to use

[3] See for instance several chapters in Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983).

the term nation-state, whether as a pious wish or as a rhetorical device.

Beyond the shaping of citizens, however, states can have greater cultural ambitions. They may aim at promoting some sort of "cultural welfare", in the sense of providing citizens with good ideas, experiences and capacities for expression, for their own sake. Clearly, some states are better equipped than others to implement such goals.

In the market, culture is produced and disseminated for at profit. As in the state framework, culture in the market flows in large part through a cultural apparatus, where fairly few produce, for material compensation, while many pay in order to consume. The market and the state thus both tend toward a degree of centralisation in cultural production, whereas cultural production in the forms of life is quite diffused; in other words, with state and market go more asymmetries in cultural process. It is also characteristic of the market-oriented cultural process that it expansively tries to commoditise a perhaps ever-increasing proportion of culture as a whole, and that there is a strain toward innovation, and the celebration of innovation, in the shaping of cultural commodities. Here the market contrasts with the state, which at least in its pursuit of legitimacy as a nation is more likely to emphasise historical roots, and perhaps conceal what is actually the invention of tradition.

As the fourth distinctive framework for the contemporary social organisation of meaning, then, I want to identify movements. Occurring more intermittently than the others, they may grow and then wither away, but for certain periods at least their part in the production and dissemination of culture can be considerable - western culture in the last couple of decades would have been very different without the women's movement, the environmentalist movement, or the peace movement. Like cultures based on forms of life, movements lack the power base of the state, and are not out to make a profit; but they turn strongly outward, even if there is likely to be an inner life, among those already committed, and an inner management of meaning, as well.

Tendencies and entanglements

Within the form of life framework, then, the flow of culture passes simply between fellow human beings, in their awareness of one another; in the state framework primarily between the state appa-

ratus and citizens; in the market framework between buyer and seller; and in the movement framework between those converted and those not, at least not yet, converted. And in each case, the frameworks entail their own tendencies, or at least their characteristic internal dilemmas, which contribute to shaping those meanings and meaningful forms which are handled within them. State, market and movement tend to organise a more deliberately planned flow of meaning than the form of life does, at least much of the time. The state and the market, which have specialists engaged in the production and spread of culture, must finance their activities, and thus integrate cultural flow more directly into the material economy than does the form of life frame, and often the movement frame as well. The frameworks may have their special ways of regulating cultural flow; through censorship within the state framework, for example, or through copyright laws in the market.

Not least do the frameworks tend to relate differently to time. Movements may engage a great many people in an intense cultural process, "consciousness raising" as the term has it, but it is in their nature to be rather unstable phenomena. A movement which is not engaged in change is no longer really a movement. The market, likewise, tends toward change, insofar as it strives toward expansion and innovation even when the commodities are ideas or meaningful forms. To repeat, in the form of life framework, stability tends to be normal, as everyday routines do not change much unless circumstances change - which of course happens occasionally. And again, at least when the state identifies itself as a nation, its preoccupation with historical continuity also entails an emphasis on stability.

Such differences in cultural process between the frameworks combine into an overall picture of great diversity, one which permits few generalisations about the characteristics of contemporary culture as a whole. As I have said, however, the four principles also interact, and thereby engage in varied transformations. In contemporary life, state, market, and movements can be deemed successful in their cultural management to the extent that they can make the cultures tied to forms of life absorb the ideas and manifest forms which they promote; but such success cannot be taken for granted. States sometimes have to compete in markets, with other states, or with other organisations engaged in the management of culture. Movements may be assimilated into states; national movements may turn into states. Movements may also merge out of forms of life where an awareness of some problem has been increasing. Cultural phenomena within the form of life framework may be tur-

ned into commodities as "life style news" - the latest in folk music, or ethnic food recipes, or family relationships. And so forth. It is in these entanglements between the frameworks that we find much of what is dynamic in culture today. Through them the flow of culture may shift speed and direction, and meanings and the forms which carry them may be repackaged into new units and combinations.

The frameworks and globalisation

What is particularly important to our concern with global interconnectedness and center-periphery relationships is the way the frameworks relate to space. Here we can see some of the important changes of the past century. No doubt a very large part of the cultural flow within the form of life framework remains local; it occurs in face-to-face relationships in which just about all of us are almost continuously involved, with those with whom we are closely linked as well as with more distant acquaintances and with mere strangers present in the same territory. Yet the form of life cultural process is now less tied to a limited space than it has been. Increasing physical mobility makes it possible for people to engage even in face-to-face relationships with people in different locations, whether they do so only through one or two moves over a life time or through a rapid shuttling between many places. Furthermore, decentralised media, such as writing and telephones can also support long-distance relationships within the form of life framework. Through some combination or other of such mobility and such media, a considerable variety of large or small social networks can maintain a cultural flow across national borders, and across oceans and continents: dispersed families, ethnic diasporas, corporations, occupational communities.

The situation is similar with respect to movements. Many of them remain local, or at least confined within national boundaries. Some movements, however, are now transnational, if not global, in character: again, the women's movement, the environmental movement, the peace movement. Generally, movements develop where there is some threat to a form of life, or (more rarely, perhaps) if it is felt that for the entire population engaged in carrying it or for some part of it, it leaves something to be desired. In this century we have seen that some threats have themselves been transnational, and have been understood to be so; and with more effective means of communication, those facing the same undesirable situations have been better able to band together.

As far as the market is concerned, we have already seen that this is the framework which has above all been identified with the scenario of global homogenisation. This is hardly surprising, given its expansiveness, the built-in tendency of sellers to try and reach the largest possible number of consumers with the same product. It may seem natural for the market to disregard or subvert boundaries, rather than to respect them or even celebrate them, unless obstacles are placed in its way. Yet the market framework contains opposed tendencies, and in order to evaluate the global homogenisation scenario, we will have to return to these.

The state framework, finally, would seem to have the least flexible relationship to space; the state itself remains territorially defined, and all but a very minor part of the cultural flow organised by states is confined within their respective territories. We have seen also that in identifying as a nation, the state has some interest in maintaining cultural distinctiveness, thus constraining transnational cultural flow. Even so its part in managing contemporary culture has not been, and cannot be, as simple as it may seem.

For one thing, the very idea of the nation is transnational, spreading over the world from nineteenth century Europe, with limited modifications. There is a recurrent form, filled with contrasting cultural content.[4] Distinctiveness tends to be demonstrated in some, prescribed, ways but not in others. Furthermore, as not only markets but also movements and forms of life cross national borders, the notion of the nation state guarding the characteristic ideas and modes of expression of its inhabitants becomes more problematic. In the past, the state faced difficulties in this area mostly when it contained too much local and regional diversity within its territorial space. Such difficulties have not disappeared, but now competing loyalties connected to shared culture are more likely than before to transcend boundaries, and are not necessarily territorially anchored at all.

It is also a fact that the contemporary state, while it may labor to maintain the material well-being of the society within its borders, and to do this it must often acquire new ideas - knowledge, competence, expertise - from sources abroad. Obviously this is one way in which state apparatuses have been major agents of the global center-periphery flow of culture in this century. And in doing so, the states also help create some of those networks and subcultures

[4] See Orvar Löfgren's (1989) discussion of this.

whose transnational allegiances may compete with those to the respective nations.

An additional although perhaps minor complication with regard to state maintenance of cultural boundaries has to do with possible ambitions in the field of cultural welfare. If the state is committed to offering its citizens the best of human thought and symbolic expression, will not this often have to be imported from abroad? Frequently, of course, the state, when it has an active cultural policy, contrasts the national culture it promotes to "imported cultural junk", identified with the market. Yet everything foreign is not bad, and all domestic cultural products are not necessarily of high quality. A generally favorable review by a group of foreign experts of Swedish cultural policy - carried out under the auspices of Unesco - has indeed recently suggested that one possible improvement of that policy might entail greater support for the presentation to the Swedish public of superior artistic expressions from other countries.

The general conclusion of this very brief overview of how the major organisational frameworks for cultural flow relate to national boundaries is that in the present period, they all engage in border-crossing in different and sometimes complicated ways. Globalisation is a very differentiated phenomenon which can by no means be identified only with the market framework, and the mass transfer of popular culture within it. To what extent, then, do the transnational channels in these frameworks contribute to asymmetry, to the organisation of world culture in center-periphery terms? As we have seen, a greater degree of asymmetry in the direction of cultural flow is built into the state and market frameworks. This can operate directly at the transnational level in the case of the market; the state, on the other hand, inserts its own centering capacity within national boundaries as it mediates imports, whether these are received through more symmetrical or more asymmetrical linkages (often surely the latter). The form of life and movement frameworks, for their part, in themselves show less of a centering tendency. Whether in fact the flow of culture within them will become organised into a center-periphery pattern may depend on various particular circumstances; whether more people, or people with greater resources, are engaged in them in some parts of the world than in others, or whether their interrelations with state and market frameworks are differently constituted in different places, for example. There is considerable scope for more symmetrical, less centered arrangements here, but also for some variety of specialised centerings.

Creolisation: the creativity of center-periphery relations

A last big question: do transnational cultural flows, and especially in center-periphery structures, necessarily entail cultural homogenisation? In my opinion, we need at least one alternative scenario to that of global homogenisation, one which I think of as the scenario of creolisation. "Creole" is a term which has historically been used, especially in the Americas but elsewhere as well, to designate certain peoples and cultures which have in one way or other been products of globalisation; from there the term has been appropriated by linguistics, where it has been further developed, conceptually and theoretically. And from linguistics, in turn, I and some number of other anthropologists have recently borrowed it, to be used (with some caution perhaps) as a guiding metaphor for our concerns in cultural studies.[5] Understandings of creolisation as derived from linguistics have a number of components which seem useful in thinking about culture in the context of global center-periphery relationships. They suggest, to begin with, that cultures can be intrinsically of mixed origin, rather than historically pure and homogeneous. Creolist thought thus clashes with those received assumptions about culture coming out of nineteenth century European nationalism. A culture - in the sense of that complex of meanings and meaningful external forms carried by the population of some territory - reflects in its organised diversity the external relationships in which people have been engaging, in the past or in the present. Not least do center-periphery relationships leave their mark, in the asymmetries of cultural flow and in the fact that what is in one way or other closer to the center often carries more prestige and power. There is, in creole language and in creole culture, a more or less open continuum of forms, differentially distributed within society, representing different mixtures of center and periphery.

But for all its recognition of the facts of openness and asymmetry in cultural distribution, creolist thought in linguistics and in anthropology does not see the influence of center on periphery as a matter of homogenisation. It emphasises, rather, that new culture is generated in the encounter between cultural currents of different origins, through new combinations and new syntheses. To creolise is to create. In the case of creole languages there is the understanding that characteristics of different derivations may dominate at different levels - lexicon, phonology, grammar; in studying creole cultures, one may be open to the possibility of similar differential inter-

[5] For recent overviews in linguistics see Mühlhäusler (1986) and Romaine (1988), and for anthropological applications for example the South American studies by Drummond (1980) and Jackson (1989).

penetrations between cultures at levels of meaning, form, and the social organisation of culture.

In such terms, we now see creolisation at work perhaps more dramatically than anywhere else in some of the current artistic expressions of the Third World. In literature, experimentation with local mythologies and imported genres leads to new writing which runs off with major prizes even at the centers of global culture. In popular music, the ways in which words, rhythms and instruments from different cultural sources are put together result in tunes never heard before, and quite capable of competing with imported hits.

Much of this creolising creativity is naturally most in evidence at the periphery. Often, it seems, it grows precisely in those entanglements between the organisational frames of culture which I have referred to above. As far as the market framework is concerned, for example, it is true that it has one built-in tendency to try and reach as many consumers as possible with the same single product; but there is also an opposed tendency toward a segmentation of markets, toward finding niches where commodities specially adapted to the needs and desires of particular categories of consumers have a competitive advantage. Such segmentation often depends on the diversity found within the form of life framework, with its particular strength in shaping people through everyday experiences. It may well be that the daily life of some groups of people in the periphery is not all that different from the corresponding groups at the center; they may indeed be in close touch through travel and in other ways. Here, then, the cultural commodities of the center may be acceptable and attractive as they are, whether films or fast food. But those groups, or those masses, who are still more rooted in the traditions of the periphery may hold promises of market segments for the creolising entrepreneurs.[6]

Yet there is another implication of creolisation, which makes it more visible at the center as well. As the interconnectedness between center and periphery is intensified, and the periphery creates its mixed cultural forms, the latter also tend to become more accessible and attractive to the center than the original, more alien forms most likely were. And so cultural flow may become a little less asymmetrically one-way, as for example certain of the creole commodities become marketable in New York, Paris, or Stockholm.

[6] Things get more complicated as we also take into account those anti-center reactions, often on the part of people under a strong cultural influence from the center, which result in a deliberate, often rather romantic fostering of the local tradition of the periphery. Such traditionalism, however, may well be understood as another kind of creolisation.

This, clearly, is what we have recently seen in literature, and in popular music.

Perhaps, then, the story of cultural interconnectedness in the world today and tomorrow is not necessarily one of continued global homogenisation, of disappearing differences. The diversity we witness in the present may not be the same as that of the past, or that of the future. But because of the varying reach of different currents of cultural flow, and because of the different and partly contradictory tendencies of the frameworks in which they are organised, the cultures of center and periphery may never become the same.

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