GLOBALISATION: IMPACTS ON POPULAR CULTURE

by Lindsay Frost

GLOBALISATION started as early as the 1950s, blossomed in the 1970s, and accelerated from the 1980s with **consumer technology** from Japan (e.g. Sony Walkman) and the USA in the 1990s. The modern world is interlinked, causing the 'shrinking world' effect, where people on one part of the Earth know about distant places very well and very quickly. Globalisation involves:

- movements of people (migration, including knowledge and culture)

- trade (including products and money, mostly through transnational corporations)

- communications and transport (e.g. telecommunications, jet aircraft)

- environmental issues (e.g. global warming)

- politics (continental or global organisations, e.g. the EU and UN).

Popular culture is a term usually associated with teenagers and started in the 1950s and 1960s when young people had more money to spend, for example on music (e.g. Elvis Presley, The Beatles). Today popular culture involves fashion clothing (e.g. *Rocawear*), pulp literature (*OK!* magazine), sports (Barcelona football club), food (Pizza Hut), drinks (Coca-Cola), and entertainment (Warner Brothers films, and iPods). Today it is not a culture that everybody grows out of, as popular culture has a broad, long-lasting appeal across age groups and across countries (e.g. McDonald's has 31,000 outlets in 121 nations). McDonald's is often considered the symbol of US popular culture; the corporation was founded
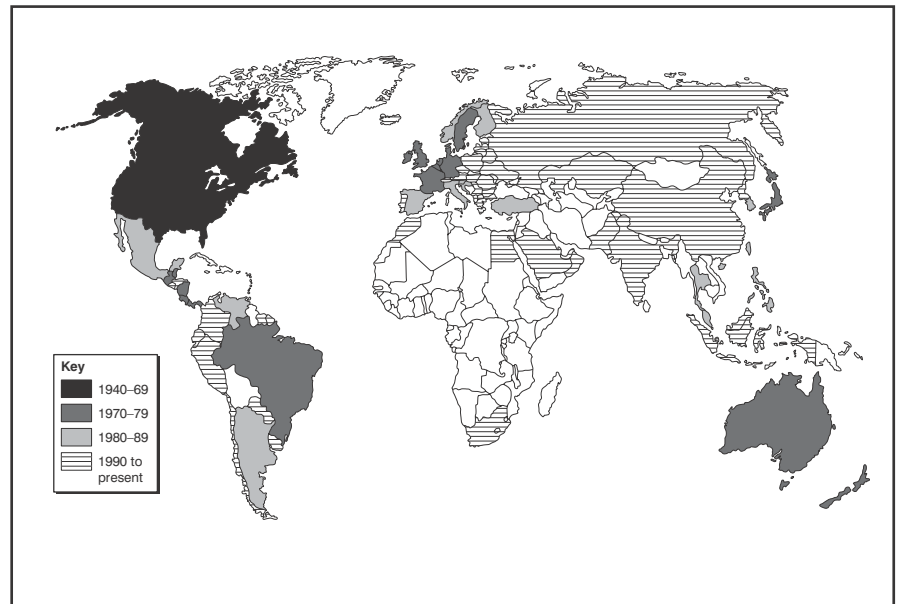

Figure 1: **The spread of McDonald's**

World region	% of countries *without* McDonald's	Examples of countries without McDonald's
Asia	53.3	Afghanistan, Burma, North Korea, Vietnam
Europe	8.3	Albania, Bosnia
Latin America and Caribbean	40.0	Cuba, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica
Middle East and North Africa	36.8	Algeria, Iran, Libya, Tunisia
Oceania (Australasia)	71.4	Kiribati, Micronesia, Papua New Guinea, Tonga
Sub-Saharan Africa	95.8	Angola, Chad, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe

Figure 2: **Countries *without* McDonald's, by world region**

in 1955 at the beginning of the spread of popular culture. It is now located in so many countries around the world that it is easier to consider the countries that it is *not* found in (Figures 1 and 2)! World popular culture has evolved from US culture, which was itself formed by the original European settlers searching for new opportunities. The belief that a person from any cultural background can make a better life for themselves through hard work, courage, freedom and self-determination is strong in US culture. This belief appeals to many people around the world and has led to an acceptance of 'Americanisation', especially by young people.

ICT or **Information and communications technology**

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Page 1 of 4

has enabled all aspects of popular culture to spread; it is transmitted easily and cheaply from wealthier cultures (especially the USA, Europe, Japan and more recently India) to other cultures. Fast long-distance air travel and satellite technology have allowed people, news and media to get from one side of the world to the other very quickly, so making places seem much closer. Even in the world's poorest continent, Africa, there has been a huge increase in mobile phone use; between 1995 and 2005 the number of users grew from 72,000 to over 60 million, so helping parts of Africa to develop. **Mass media** encourages people around the world to buy products (consumerisation), especially promoting brands through advertising (Figure 3). This creates powerful images that affect other popular cultures around the world, e.g. former communist states. Some brands have become instantly recognisable and are associated

Figure 3: **A McDonald's billboard**

with popular culture, e.g. Nike, Microsoft, Coca-Cola, Starbucks, Apple, Levi Strauss.

A 2008 **Index of Globalisation** included data on 'personal contact' (e.g. foreign population), 'information flow' (e.g. internet users, trade in newspapers, and radios), and 'cultural proximity' (e.g. number of McDonald's

restaurants, number of IKEA stores, and trade in books). **Cultural globalisation** is rated slightly more important than economic globalisation, and the most important variables were McDonald's and IKEA, followed by Radios, International tourism and International letters. Figure 4 shows that European countries are very globalised culturally, followed by countries that have been closely linked with the USA historically (e.g. Canada, Israel, Kuwait) or the UK (e.g. Singapore, New Zealand). Those countries with central locations also feature (e.g. Switzerland, Malaysia).

There are several **disadvantages** arising from the globalisation of popular culture:

- Loss of traditional and local cultures, e.g. wearing blue jeans instead of traditional clothing, Valentine's Day in India, or wearing trendy T-shirts in Bhutan; BBC Worldwide offer TV series via Apple iTunes so spreading UK media; BBC News reported (2004) that young French were excited that Starbucks was opening in Paris because it was like the café on the US TV series *Friends*.

- Loss of social cohesion and traditions in local cultures, e.g. watching CNN on television in Guyana, which introduces a bias of how events are perceived; or young adults migrating from Africa to Europe.

- The introduction of English language terms into other languages, for example in France 'Le Big Mac' or 'Menu Best of'; in China words such as 'cool' and 3Q (for thank you) used by the young; or Hinglish in India.

- Some cultures may see 'westernised' popular culture as a threat, e.g. setting fire to a McDonald's in Grenoble, France (2002); ransacking of McDonald's and the US embassy in Belgrade, Serbia (2008).

- The rich/poor divide is exaggerated in societies as only some people are able to afford the latest popular culture products or have access to

Cultural Globalisation		Country	World region
Rank (/122)	Index		
1	95.38	Switzerland	Europe
2	92.49	Austria	Europe
3	92.26	Singapore	South-east Asia
4	90.82	Belgium	Europe
5	89.41	Netherlands	Europe
6	88.64	Denmark	Europe
7	87.87	UK	Europe
8	87.43	Sweden	Europe
9	86.85	Canada	North America
10	84.91	Czech Republic	Europe
21	77.17	Israel	Middle East
23	76.92	Kuwait	Middle East
24	76.52	USA	North America
27	75.52	United Arab Emirates	Middle East
30	72.37	New Zealand	Australasia
38	66.05	Malaysia	South-east Asia
39	64.40	Russia	CIS
43	59.65	Mauritius	South Asia
44	58.24	Turkey	Asia
45	57.68	Ukraine	CIS

Figure 4: **KOF Index of Globalisation 2008, selected countries**

information technology (internet) (Figure 5), e.g. India has the 4th highest number of billionaires in the world (311) but 35% of the population live on less than US$1 a day; in China 18,000 websites are blocked.

- Transnational corporations (TNCs) linked to popular culture (e.g. news media such as CNN dominate the world) have a lot of power in poorer countries, e.g. McDonald's sponsoring the 2008 Olympic Games in China.

- Small-scale local businesses linked with culture or fair trade lose out to big 'brands' or TNCs such as Nestlé and McDonald's, e.g. local film companies; in 2007 *Spiderman* was the most popular movie ahead of Bollywood films in India (and *Harry Potter* was 7th).

- Lack of concern for environmental issues as personal comforts associated with popular culture dominate, e.g. products are transported around the world and bought and used without thought of social and environmental costs (exploited workers, fossil fuel use).

- Health concerns, e.g. length of time on indoor computer games, or a fast food and fizzy drink diet; e.g. in the UK in 2001 £8.6 billion was spent on soft drinks, 9% of boys and 13.5% of girls were overweight, and there were 10 food commercials on TV per hour!

However, there are **benefits** from globalisation of popular culture:

- Information and knowledge are spread around the world at low cost and high accessibility, e.g. internet use helps people to improve their lives and their countries – over 100 telecentres in rural Uganda are helping teachers, business people, farmers, women and communities; or using Orkut (social networking) in Brazil and India.

- Knowledge and information about a range of cultures is spread throughout the world, e.g. concern for the Jururei tribe in Amazonia (2005), and multicultural societies resulting from migration (USA, UK).

- Spread of common values from popular culture reduces divisions between different cultures, bringing peace and security, e.g.

Country	HDI (2004)	Trade balance ($ billion)	Current account balance ($ billion)	Big Mac Index (price in $)	Internet hosts per 1,000 people	Mobile phone subscribers per 100 people
Brazil	79.2	44.8	14.2	3.01	39.8	46.3
China	76.8	134.2	160.8	1.41	1.5	29.9
France	94.2	−32.1	−33.3	3.82	170.8	79.5
India	61.1	−51.8	−9.2	1.40	1.5	8.2
Indonesia	71.1	22.3	0.9	1.75	1.2	21.1
Iran	74.6	19.0	14.0	n/a	0.08	10.4
Russia	79.7	118.3	83.3	1.85	16.4	83.6
UAE	83.9	44.3	27.2	2.72	74.6	100.9
UK	94.0	−125.1	−53.4	3.90	111.4	109.8
USA	94.8	−778.9	−791.5	3.22	822.7	71.4

Figure 5: **Globalisation statistics for selected countries**

reunification of Germany; relations between Japan and USA; Olympic Games and World Cups.

- English provides a common language for communication between contrasting societies, leading to a better understanding.

- The reaction against Euro-American popular culture can strengthen traditional minority cultures, allowing them to survive in a modern world.

- International migration helps to spread varieties of popular culture, blending them together, e.g. Chinese or Indian food.

- Small-scale popular culture movements have access to worldwide audiences, e.g. World Music Network promoting Hanggai, a Mongolian folk group (2008).

- Globalisation of information, knowledge and discussion amongst young people spreads environmental and social responsibility, e.g. 'blogs' for exchange of views; improving the lives of women in low income countries; Chinese learning how to react at a Whitney Houston concert (2004); big businesses forced to become more environmentally and socially aware.

- The presence of branded international outlets can stimulate similar local businesses, e.g. Starbucks

in Brazil encouraged local coffee shops to open.

- Growth of economies that have adopted 'westernised' values, e.g. India as a growing economic power since 1991; Junior Achievement (international non-profit organisation) helps young people develop business interests; tourism.

Conclusion

'Cultural proximity' (Figure 6) is still increasing in Europe and Asia, both of which have had rapid increases since 1970. However, there have been sharp declines in North and South America, a slight decline in Oceania, and hardly any change in Africa. On a world scale cultural globalisation has stagnated recently, so perhaps the world will not have a single popular culture by the end of the century!
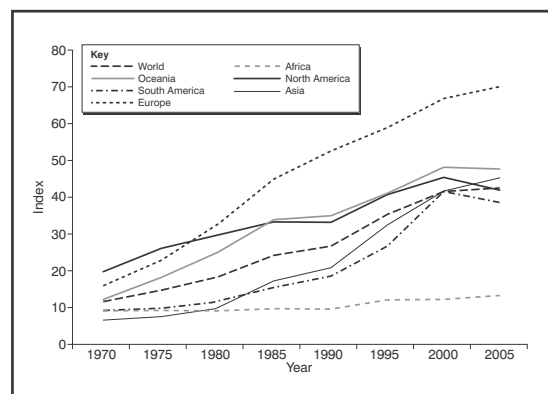

Figure 6: **Cultural proximity, 1970–2005**

Activities

1 Write definitions for the following terms: globalisation, popular culture, consumerisation, telecommunications, and mass media.

2 (a) Name an item that you own or use that is linked to popular culture in each of the following categories: music, clothing, literature, food, drink, sport, entertainment, and communications.
(b) Compare your examples with those of a friend. How similar or different are they?
(c) Compare with the whole class – which are the most common items?
(d) Compare your examples with an adult's examples (e.g. parent). Is there any evidence to suggest that popular culture exists beyond teenagers? What is this evidence?

3 (a) Study Figure 2. Draw a pie graph to show which world areas have the fewest McDonald's restaurants.
(b) Study the examples of countries without McDonald's. Suggest the common reasons that explain why these countries do not have McDonald's restaurants.
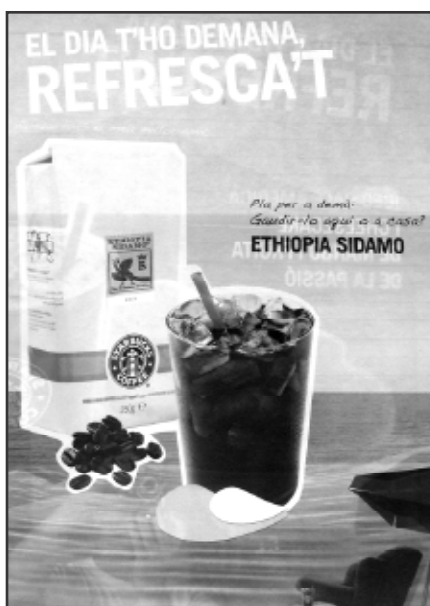

Figure 7: **An ad for Starbucks coffee**

Figure 8: **KOF Index of Globalisation, 2008**

4 (a) Make copies of five logos for brand names that you know, or find them in magazines or on the internet.
(b) How easy do you think people in other places around the world would find it to identify these brands?

5 Study Figure 1.
(a) Why were Europe and Australasia the second step?
(b) Why was Eastern Europe not involved until the 1990s?
(c) Describe and explain the overall pattern shown by the map.

6 Study Figure 7. In small groups, discuss the evidence shown by this photograph for the globalisation of popular culture.

7 Study Figure 5. Consider the data for the ten countries and then place them in order from 'most globalised' to 'least globalised'. Discuss and compare your order with that of another pupil.

8 Study Figure 8. Describe and explain the pattern shown on the map.

9 Considering all the information in this unit, do you believe that the globalisation of popular culture is a 'good' or 'bad' thing? Remember to balance your arguments, giving the main reasons for and against, before stating a final answer.

Extension activities
10 How does each of the following, used in the KOF Index of Globalisation, provide evidence of cultural globalisation?

• McDonald's restaurants
• IKEA stores
• Radio ownership
• International tourism
• International letters

11 Investigate FLAG (Fibre-optic Link Around the Globe), which is a submarine fibre-optic link.
(a) Which world regions are connected by this?
(b) Suggest how this could help spread popular culture around the world.