

and former chief economist of the World Bank. 'small open economies are like rowing boats on an open sea. Although one cannot predict when it might happen, the chances of their being broadsided by a wave are significant no matter how well they are steered. Bad steering, though, increases the chances of disaster and a leaky boat makes it inevitable.'¹² As Paul Volcker has pointed out, the entire banking systems of Indonesia or Thailand or Malaysia are comparable to one decent-sized regional bank in the US.

Since developing countries cannot rely on rich countries to make the reforms needed to protect them, they have to take matters into their own hands. They should welcome stable, long-term foreign direct investment. Companies that set up factories in developing countries provide good jobs and valuable foreign know-how. But governments should impose taxes or controls on volatile short-term capital inflows, as Chile did with some success. If countries can prevent too much hot money from flowing into the country, they can stave off many a crisis before it starts. They should also stop domestic banks and companies borrowing recklessly in foreign currencies. Both these measures will reduce - but not eliminate - crises. So countries should also keep (or reimpose) some controls on money flowing out of the economy to give them a breathing space to work out their problems in difficult times. Financial mayhem is not going to go away - it is intrinsic to the system - but we can still mitigate the harm it does by creating financial firewalls.

TWELVE

Culture Clash

Individual freedom, not Coke, rules OK

I believe you can reduce the world's economies today to basically five different gas stations . . . What is going on today, in the very broadest sense, is that through the process of globalisation everyone is being forced toward America's gas station. If you are not an American and don't know how to pump your own gas, I suggest you learn. With the end of the Cold War, globalisation is globalising Anglo-American-style capitalism and the Golden Straitjacket. It is globalising American culture and American cultural icons. It is globalising the best of America and the worst of America. It is globalising the American Revolution and it is globalising the American gas station.

THOMAS FRIEDMAN, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*

Today the buzzword in global marketing isn't selling America to the world, but bringing a kind of market masala to everyone in the world . . . Nationality, language, ethnicity, religion and politics are all reduced to their most colourful,

exotic accessories . . . Despite the embrace of polyethnic imagery, market-driven globalisation doesn't want diversity; quite the opposite. Its enemies are national habits, local brands and distinctive regional tastes.

NAOMI KLEIN, *No Logo*

There is no contrast of opposites in a world where the cultural hegemony of Walt Disney, Rupert Murdoch and Coca-Cola is only matched by its vapidness.

LARRY ELLIOTT and DAN ATKINSON, *The Age of Insecurity*

It is not pages from Shakespeare or scores of Mozart that litter steppe and savannah but some marketing man's logo from last year's useless, meretricious product, or a snatch of that maddening theme tune from *Titanic* . . . Globalisation is by and large the spread of American culture, ideas, products, entertainments and politics. If you view America primarily as a place of vulgarity and avarice, coarsened sensibility and rampant global ambition, you will shudder for the fate of the world . . . Western cultural imperialism reaches right into the hearts and souls, the sexual behaviour, the spirit, the religion, politics and the nationhood of the entire world. It happens haphazardly with no master-plan or empire-building blueprint, but with a vague and casual insouciance that drives its detractors to despair.

POLLY TOYNE, 'Who's Afraid of Global Culture?'

It is five, maybe six in the morning. The sun is streaming through the glass roof of Amnesia, one of the huge nightclubs on the Mediterranean party island of Ibiza. Down below, clubbers from around the world, most of them high on ecstasy or other drugs, are moving in time to the repetitive beats of house music. They grin, they cheer, they wave in unison. It is a scene repeated in less glamorous clubs every weekend in cities around the globe.

One world united under a groove? Or a drugged global conformity?

Fears that globalisation is imposing a deadening cultural uniformity are as ubiquitous as Coca-Cola, McDonald's, Mickey Mouse – and house music. Europeans and Latin Americans, left and right, rich and poor – all of them dread that local cultures and national identities are dissolving into a crass all-American consumerism. This cultural imperialism is said to impose American values as well as products, promote the commercial at the expense of the authentic, substitute shallow gratification for deeper satisfaction.


Yet the true picture is rather different. Certainly, the commercial clutter of American capitalism seems to corrode even the most ironclad of barriers. One by one, the countries that once resisted it are succumbing. When I visited Moscow in October 1991, in the aftermath of the failed August putsch that briefly ousted Mikhail Gorbachev and accelerated Boris Yeltsin's rise to power, the queue for the recently opened McDonald's stretched as far as my eyes could see. Ten years later, in still officially communist China, the wait for Big Macs in Shanghai was rather shorter, although the punters were just as keen. But the push of the corporate giants that peddle these icons of Americana is more than matched by the pull of consumer demand. Coca-Cola aims to be 'within an arm's reach of desire', but it has yet to fit drips to everybody at birth. People still have to desire to reach for a can of Coke. Clearly, they often prefer it to the local alternative.

Revolutionary refreshment

Havana is still in its midday heat. I glance at the Memorial Gramma, which displays in a glass case the boat with which Fidel Castro landed in Cuba in 1956 to launch the revolution, surrounded by examples of the planes, tanks and weapons used to overthrow President Batista and defend the revolution against the

American incursion at the Bay of Pigs. Then I struggle around the Museo de la Revolución, the former presidential palace where the revolutionary government announced its first new laws in 1959 and which now exhaustively chronicles plucky Cuba's increasingly solitary stand against the toxic waste of Yanqui capitalism. Not quite solitary: the US government assists Castro in his defiance of all things American by banning US companies from doing business with Cuba. Parched and tired after so many rooms of revolutionary propaganda, I make my way to the gift shop for some refreshment. And there, amid T-shirts of Che Guevara and books by Fidel Castro, they are: those oh-so-familiar red cans of Coca-Cola. Is nothing sacred? At least ordinary Cubans are safe from this American rot-gut: it is prohibitively priced out of their reach. They have to make do with 'tuKola', a local rip-off of Atlanta's most famous brew. 'It's cheaper,' explains the saleslady, 'but not as good.'

American cultural imperialism seems pretty benign: it means having the choice to drink Coke. Shock, horror – Coke is actually popular all over the world. This provokes apoplexy among critics of globalisation and pangs of angst among even many of its steadfast supporters. If globalisation allows people to enjoy the best the world has to offer, how come such 'trash' is so popular? Yet there is no accounting for taste. Nobody is forced to drink Coke. Nobody should be prevented from drinking it either.

If the fear is that national cultures are under threat, individual choices, not 'Coca-colonisation', are to blame. If the worry is that countries are becoming more alike, this is because people's tastes have converged, not because American companies are stamping out local competition. Yet here's a heretical thought: perhaps the world is not becoming uniformly Americanised, even by choice. Start with a simple observation: although Coke's global spread creates greater uniformity across countries, it adds diversity within them. Cuban  swigged rum or water; now they can also choose to gulp down Coke and tuKola. Next, note that, by and large, American exports do not rule supreme: pizza is more

popular than burgers. Then ask yourself: by consuming American products, are Cubans and others really losing their national identities – or even their souls? I don't think so. People are not what they buy. Presumably, left-wingers ought to agree.

If critics of globalisation were less obsessed with 'Coca-colonisation', they might notice a rich feast of cultural mixing that belies fears about Americanised uniformity. Algerians in Paris practise Thai boxing; Asian rappers in London snack on Turkish pizza; Indians in New York learn salsa; Mexicans taste Pacific fusion dishes cooked by British chefs. As J. N. Pieterse remarks, the emphasis on cultural uniformity

overlooks the countercurrents – the impact non-Western cultures have been making on the West. It downplays the ambivalence of the globalising momentum and ignores the role of local reception of Western culture – for example, the indigenisation of Western elements. It fails to see the influence that non-Western cultures have been exercising on one another. It has no room for crossover culture – as in the development of 'third cultures' such as world music. It overrates the homogeneity of Western culture and overlooks the fact that many of the standards exported by the West and its cultural industries themselves turn out to be of culturally mixed character if we examine their cultural lineages.²

The really profound cultural changes have nothing to do with Coca-Cola. Western ideas about liberalism and science are taking root in the most unlikely places. Immigration, mainly from developing countries, is creating multicultural societies in Europe and North America. Technology is reshaping culture: just think of the Internet. Individual choice is fragmenting the imposed uniformity of national cultures. New hybrid cultures are emerging, and regional ones re-emerging. National identity is not disappearing, but the bonds of nationality are loosening.

Not as American as all that

Rewind to house music. It was born in America, but in the black urban ghettos, not a marketing man's office. To this day, it remains very much a minority taste in the States. It spread to Europe in the 1980s and, combined with the appeal of ecstasy-induced empathy and euphoria, proved irresistible, especially in England. House music evolved in Britain, went off in new directions, split into many different subforms. It has gone from underground to mainstream: tunes can now move from club to BBC TV jingles in weeks. It has been repackaged and re-exported, to continental Europe, to the rest of the world, and even back to America. The world's top record-spinner³ is a British DJ, Paul Oakenfold. The world's biggest club brand is Britain's Ministry of Sound. Many of the top house acts – Leftfield, Prodigy, Chemical Brothers, Underworld, Basement Jaxx, to name but a few – are British too. Yet in each country where house music arrives, boys (and girls) in their bedrooms bash the beats on their computers and come up with something new – Latin, Norwegian, even Japanese house – which is then sent back out around the world. So yes, house music is a global groove, and yes it originated in the US, but its spread owes little to corporate America and it has a peculiarly British flavour, as well as a huge variety of local forms.

House music

local programming, promotes Thai and Chinese pop stars along with Western ones, and plays rock music sung in Mandarin. CNN en Español offers a Latin American take on world news. McDonald's sells beer in France, lamb in India and chilli in Mexico.

Nor is American culture by any means the only influence on the world. In some basic ways, America is an outlier, not a global leader. Most of the world has adopted the metric system born of the French Revolution; the US persists with antiquated measurements inherited from its British colonial past. Americans measure in inches, miles, pounds, gallons and Fahrenheit rather than centimetres, kilometres, kilograms, litres and Celsius. Most developed countries have become intensely secular, but many Americans burn with fundamentalist fervour – like Muslims in the Middle East. Where else in the developed world could there be a serious debate about teaching kids Bible-inspired 'creationism' instead of Darwinist evolution? According to Gallup polls, only 10 per cent of Americans say they hold a secular evolutionist view of the world, while 44 per cent believe in strict biblical creationism.⁵

America's tastes in sports are often idiosyncratic too. Its home-grown ones, like baseball and American football, have not travelled well, although basketball has fared rather better. Many of the world's most popular sports, notably football, originated in Britain.

Germany and 760 in France. Worldwide, McDonald's now has more than 29,000 outlets in 121 countries. Coca-Cola is drunk in nearly 200 countries; over 70 per cent of the company's revenues come from outside the US. Even so, McDonald's and Coca-Cola are small fry in global terms. Despite Coke's ambition of displacing water as the world's drink of choice, it accounts for less than 2 of the 64 fluid ounces that the typical person drinks a day. Upstarts like Red Bull, an energy drink peddled by a Thai-Austrian joint venture, are eroding its market share. Britain's favourite take-away is a curry, not a burger. There are over 7,500 Indian restaurants – six for every McDonald's – in the UK, up from just six in 1950. For all José Bové's concern about American fast food trashing France's culinary traditions, the French remain iffy about foreign food. France imported a mere \$620 million of food from the US in 2000 – and exported three times more to America. Nor is plonk from America's Gallo displacing Europe's finest: Italy and France together account for three-fifths of global wine exports; the US, which still imports much more than it exports, has only a 5 per cent market share.⁶ Italy is home to a mere 200 McDonald's outlets (and some 2,000 more non-Italian restaurants), but 23,000 pizzerias.⁷ Worldwide, pizzas are more popular than burgers, Chinese restaurants seem to sprout up everywhere and sushi is spreading fast. By far the biggest purveyor of alcoholic drinks is Britain's Diageo, which sells the world's best-selling whisky (Johnnie Walker), gin (Gordon's), vodka (Smirnoff) and liqueur (Baileys), as well as Guinness. The next biggest spirits makers are France's Pernod-Ricard and Britain's Allied Domecq.

In fashion, the *ne plus ultra* is Italian or French. Trendy Americans wear Gucci, Armani, Versace, Chanel and Hermès. The US exports Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren – and Gucci's top designer is an American, Tom Ford – but fashion is hardly an industry that America dominates. On the high street and in the mall, America's Gap is not the only international clothing chain: Sweden's Hennes & Mauritz (H&M) and Spain's Zara dress the

global masses too. Nike shoes are given a run for their money by Germany's Adidas, Britain's Reebok and Italy's Fila.

In pop music, American crooners share the spoils with those from Britain, Ireland and a whole host of countries whose local music is now listened to worldwide. American stars like Mariah Carey and Madonna are global chart-toppers, but so are Britain's Elton John and Ireland's U2. The three artists who featured most widely in national top ten album charts in 2000 were America's Britney Spears, closely followed by Mexico's Carlos Santana, and the British Beatles.⁸ Two Spaniards, Enrique Iglesias (son of Julio) and Alejandro Sanz, are taking the world by storm. Even tiny Iceland has produced a global star: Bjork. Popular opera's biggest singers are Italy's Luciano Pavarotti, Spain's José Carreras and Spanish-Mexican Plácido Domingo. Latin American salsa, Brazilian lambada and African music have all carved out global niches for themselves. Moreover, in most countries, local artists still top the charts. Seven of the top ten albums on Amazon.fr were French when I wrote this paragraph. Same story in Britain on Amazon.co.uk. Six of the top ten on fnac.es were Spanish. But on Amazon.de, only one of the top ten was German. Statistics from the IFPI, the record-industry bible, confirm this impression. Between 1991 and 2000, local acts and artists signed to local music companies steadily increased their share of music sales, from a worldwide average of 58 per cent in 1991 to 68 per cent in 2000, with increases in each year in between. The trend is common to all regions except eastern Europe, the Middle East and Africa.⁹ In Asia, three-quarters of the music market is locally produced.

America does not dominate global book sales either. Airport novelists like John Grisham and Tom Clancy sell well abroad, but perhaps the most famous living author is a Colombian, Gabriel García Márquez, author of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Paulo Coelho, another writer who has notched up tens of millions of global sales with *The Alchemist* and other books, is Brazilian. When I wrote this paragraph, two British writers, J. K. Rowling, the

creator of Harry Potter and the late J. R. R. Tolkien.



the global movie market, it swamps local products in most countries. Even in Japan, American fare accounts for over half the market. US films accounted for 63 per cent of box-office receipts in the EU in 1996, with a 53 per cent share in France and an 81 per cent share in Britain. But that was actually a sharp fall from a 72 per cent market share in 1991 – European cinema may be fighting back.

Hollywood movies rule supreme, but their hegemony is not as worrying as people think. Note first that Hollywood is less American than it seems. Ever since Charlie Chaplin crossed over from Britain, foreigners have flocked to California to try to become global stars. Penelope Cruz, Catherine Zeta-Jones, Ewan McGregor and Arnold Schwarzenegger are only a few of the many foreign actors who have made it big in Hollywood. Top directors are also often from outside America: think of Ridley Scott or the late Stanley Kubrick. Some of the studios are foreign-owned: Japan's Sony owns Columbia Pictures, France's Vivendi owns Universal. Even American-owned productions sometimes have a foreign feel. Two of AOL Time Warner's biggest recent hits, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* and *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, are both based on British books, have largely British casts, and in the case of *The Lord of the Rings*, a Kiwi director. To some extent, then, Hollywood is a global industry that just happens to be in America. Rather than exporting Americana, it serves up lowest-common-denominator pap – sex and violence, special effects, action-packed plots rather than elaborate character development – to appeal to a global audience.

Still, monopolies are generally a bad thing. Hollywood's dominance is in part due to economics: movies cost a lot to make and so need a big audience to be profitable; Hollywood has used America's huge and relatively uniform domestic market as a platform to expand overseas. According to *Screen Digest*, a British trade magazine, a major film release in the United States is typically shown on 1,300 screens, compared with 450 in Germany and even fewer in

other rich countries.¹¹ There could be a case for stuffing subsidies

into a rival European film industry, just as Airbus was created to challenge Boeing's near-monopoly, but France has long pumped money into its domestic industry to try to level the playing field without convincing foreign audiences to flock to its films. So perhaps Hollywood's success is in large part due to its popular appeal, not its market power. Like Coke or McDonald's, Disney is a choice, not an imposition.

To be fair, there is another American export that is conquering the globe: English. Around 380 million people speak it as their first language, and a further 250 million or so as their second. A billion are learning it, about a third of the world's population are exposed to it and by 2050, it is reckoned, half the world will be more or less proficient in it. A common global language would certainly be a big plus: for businessmen, for scientists and for tourists. As Claude Allègre, then France's minister of education, declared in 1998: 'English should no longer be considered a foreign language . . . In future it will be as basic [in France] as reading, writing and arithmetic.'¹² But a single world language would be far less desirable. Language is often at the heart of national culture: the French would scarcely be French if they spoke English (although the Belgian Walloons are not French even though they share a language). Losing national languages would be especially sad if people had not freely chosen to abandon them. English may usurp other languages not because it is what people prefer to speak, but because, like Microsoft software, there are compelling advantages to using it if everyone else does.

Fear not. Although many languages are becoming extinct, this is rarely due to the spread of English. In general, the globalisation of languages is like the spread of Coke: there may be greater uniformity across countries but there is greater diversity within them. The US now has two main languages, not one. Thirty million Americans speak Spanish; both presidential candidates in the

2000 election campaigned in it. People are learning English as well as – not instead of – their native tongue, and often many

more languages besides. Many Norwegians, for instance, speak several Scandinavian languages, plus English and German. Indeed, some languages with few speakers, such as Icelandic, are thriving, despite Bjork's choosing to sing in English. Where local languages are dying, it is typically national rivals that are stamping them out. French has all but eliminated Provençal, and German, Swabian. Although within Britain English has killed off Cornish and in the US it is replacing Native American tongues, it is not doing away with Swahili or Norwegian. Moreover, even as English becomes a global language, it takes on new words and new forms in different places. Estonians speak Baltic English, Indians Hindi English, West Indians pidgin English. New terms – spin doctor, ballpark figure, texting, house music – are forever appearing. Ironically, the biggest 'victims' of this may be the English themselves, since Americans and the world have appropriated their language.

As dusk falls, I take a boat trip up the Huangpu River. On the west bank, Puxi, lies the European elegance of the Bund, the waterfront street developed by the British and French when they ran Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s. River traffic had to pay tolls at the imperious British Customs House. All manner of European architectural styles jostle for attention: Gothic, baroque, Roman, Renaissance, neo-classical and art deco. Amid this eclectic colonial heritage, huge neon signs advertise Coca-Cola, Sprite, Canon, Nikon, TDK, L'Oréal. China's red-star flag is scarcely on display. Further along, vast cranes and even vaster ships line the river banks: the source of Shanghai's new prosperity.

On the other bank lies the millenarian madness of Pudong. Fifteen years ago, it was a village surrounded by marshland. Now, towering, idiosyncratic skyscrapers, designed by the cream of the world's architects, pierce the smoggy skyline. It feels almost Blade

Globalisation is far from the wholesale ransacking of people's souls by American cultural commodities that it is often portrayed as. The flotsam and jetsam of American consumer culture turn up everywhere, but they are not reshaping the world in America's image. You can choose to drink Coke, eat McDonald's and watch Disney but still not be American in any meaningful sense. One newspaper photo of Taliban fighters in Afghanistan showed them toting Kalashnikovs – as well as a sports bag with Nike's trademark swoosh. People's culture – in the sense of their shared ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge; inherited traditions; and art – may scarcely be eroded by mere commercial artefacts that, despite all the furious branding, embody at best shallow and flimsy values.

Natural cultures are much stronger than people seem to think. They can embrace some foreign influences and resist others. Amartya Sen, a brilliant economist, thinker and Nobel prize-winner, is quite right when he remarks: 'the culturally fearful often take a very fragile view of each culture and tend to underestimate our ability to learn from elsewhere without being overwhelmed by that experience'.¹³

Mr Sen's native India is a good example. The sprawling city of Bangalore is a bewildering mix of old and new. St Patrick's church offers diplomas in computing. Starbucks-style Barista espresso bars jostle with traditional stalls. Indian girls in British-style uniforms emerge from Baldwin Girls high school on Richmond Road. Shacks everywhere offer phone access; billboard ads tout mobile phones: 'Break All Barriers. Speed. Pre-paid Mobile Card.' Others tempt passers-by with 0 per cent finance on white goods. 'Interest rates on consumer loans have hit rock bottom. Buy your dream house, the posh car. And soon after you marry your dream girl, go ahead and buy everything money can buy – in dirt-cheap, easy instalments. Welcome to the consumer boom in the time of gloom,' crows the *Economic Times*. But the local newspaper talks of attacks on Muslims by Hindus in the wake of September 11th. One ad promises three lucky families at the Disney Summer Fun Festival the prize of a trip to Disneyland, USA; yet the poster is

hand-painted and Mickey Mouse is misshapen and off-colour. Snehaquest.com offers 'online matchmaking for the global Indian community'. The city even has a TGI Friday's diner, complete with waiters in buffoonish red-and-white shirts with badge-embazoned bracers, which is stuffed with local militaries in uniform. ESPN is showing English football: Arsenal's 4-2 home defeat to Charlton (I saw the wretched game three times in different places). Traffic signs recall Britain's influence: 'Give Way to Right'. Yet Indian drivers press forward nonetheless, dodging oncoming cars rather than giving way. Amid all the consumer pizzazz, people live in tents by the road and work barefoot and with bare hands in open sewers. Kids trawl through rubbish. A man rides by on a horse and cart. Is Bangalore still Indian? Of course it is.

The French epitomise the paranoia about American culture. France's cuisine, wine, art, literature, thinking, you name it, are almost universally admired. Yet the French seem convinced that centuries of cultural tradition, deeply ingrained in every French person, will go up in smoke if people are allowed to watch a few more American films or use English words. It's ridiculous. Frenchness is remarkably resilient. My father, for one, has lived in perfidious Albion for thirty years and, despite a constant bombardment of Anglo-Saxon culture, remains to the core a Frenchman in his attitudes, his values, his beliefs – and his accent.

Appearances can be deceptive. Hong Kong was a British colony for 150 years, until 1997. The street names are quintessentially British: Queensway, Connaught Road, Gloucester Road. Schoolboys wear grey wool trousers, white shirts, boring ties, blue or grey cardigans, just as they would in Britain. Their parents drive on the left, with British-style licence plates. Yet taxi drivers and shopkeepers scarcely speak English. In a McDonald's I ordered a quarter-pounder with cheese in English, but the young man behind the counter didn't understand me: he asked me to point at a menu card with pictures.

Even when countries consciously try to adopt foreign ways, they often fail. Singapore is trying desperately hard to be southern

California. People line up obediently to see the latest Hollywood blockbusters, dutifully munch their popcorn, display their Nikes with pride. Life centres around shopping. The city prides itself on its inane service culture. It is part emulation, part necessity, part government diktat. A speck on the map like Singapore cannot help being globalised: almost everything is imported. But its overweening government sticks its oar in too. It wants Singapore to be an international city. So everything is exclusively in English: the street signs, the menus, the place names. Singapore has even rebranded itself as 'Singapore - New Asia'. Peter Mandelson would be proud. But my Chinese taxi driver spent his time swearing in broken English about 'fucking Muslims and Malaysians'. Perhaps not so New Asia after all. Despite all the government's efforts, the locals have not become citizens of the world - or even fluent in English. Singapore is a cardboard America: where are the voices of discord? Even this most globalised of places, where the govern-

Noreena Hertz¹⁴ describes the supposed spiritual Eden that was the isolated Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan being defiled by such awful imports as basketball and Spice Girls T-shirts. She observes that Bhutan is desperately poor but approvingly quotes its king who says that 'Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product.' Quite. I bet the king pursues happiness in the lap of luxury. Indeed, he is responsible for the terrible basketball craze, since he had tapes of NBA games sent to him from New York. Anthony Giddens, the director of the London School of Economics, has told¹⁵ of how an anthropologist who visited a remote part of Cambodia was shocked and disappointed to find that her first night's entertainment was not traditional local pastimes but watching *Basic Instinct* on video.

But is that such a bad thing? It is odd, to put it mildly, that many on the left

forever casting off old customs when we feel they are no longer relevant. Nobody argues that the English should ban nightclubs to force people back to morris dancing. People in poor countries have a right to change too.

Thriving cultures are not set in stone. They are forever changing from within and without. Each generation challenges the previous one; science and technology alter the way we see ourselves and the world; fashions come and go; experience and events influence our beliefs; outsiders affect us for good and ill. Cultures that close themselves off from the rest of the world stagnate. Many of the best things come from cultures mixing: Salman Rushdie's Anglo-Indian writing, Paul Gauguin painting in Polynesia, or the African rhythms in rock and roll. Behold the great British curry (which, as Mr Sen interestingly points out, comes from India but is made with chilli originally introduced to the subcontinent by the Portuguese: ancient Indian cuisine used pepper instead). Admire the many-coloured faces of France's World-Cup-winning football team, the ferment of ideas that came from eastern Europe's Jewish diaspora, and the cosmopolitan cities of London and New York. Western numbers are Arabic; zero comes most recently from India; Icelandic, French and Sanskrit come from a common root. As John Stuart Mill so rightly observed:

The economical benefits of commerce are surpassed in importance by those of its effects which are intellectual and moral. It is hardly possible to overrate the value, for the improvement of human beings, of things which bring them into contact with persons dissimilar to themselves, and with modes of thought and action unlike those with which they are familiar . . . it is indispensable to be perpetually comparing [one's] own notions and customs with the experience and example of persons in different circumstances . . . there is no nation which does not need to borrow from others.¹⁷

The true picture

Behind the clutter of Coke cans, globalisation is bringing profound – and overwhelmingly positive – cultural change. Technology is opening up new opportunities. The Internet is democratising the spread of information. At the click of a mouse, you can find about almost anything, anywhere, from anyone. A Londoner can chat to a stranger in Bangkok, Baltimore or Brazil. You can read hundreds of different views on globalisation: pro-, anti- and barmy (I recommend philippegrain.com). You can download all sorts of music from audiogalaxy.com and order foreign books from Amazon.com. Satellite and cable television are exploding traditional broadcasters' monopoly. Fed up with Silvio Berlusconi's private and public TV monopoly? Try satellite instead. Don't believe Venezuela's official TV news? Watch BBC World or CNN en Español. Want Korean-language TV in the States or Indian TV in Britain? No problem. Cheap foreign travel is making far-off places accessible to a wider audience. You don't have to be Marco Polo to go to Mongolia these days. Most Westerners can afford to go around the world on a shoestring. Europeans who dare to venture across the Atlantic may even come to like America. George Bush can pay a visit to the Grecians. And once you get home, email and cheap phone calls allow you to stay in touch with your new foreign friends.

The second big change is that immigrants, mainly from developing countries, are turning Western societies into genuinely multicultural ones. Although Europe's former colonial powers have had a huge influence on parts of the Third World – Indians drive on the left, and educated ones speak an antiquated English; West Africans learn about '*nos ancêtres, les Gaulois*' ('our ancestors, the Gauls'); Spanish and Portuguese have almost entirely eliminated native languages in Latin America – the recent flow of migration has been in the opposite direction. There are Algerian suburbs in Paris, but not French ones in Algiers; Pakistani parts of London, but not British ones of Lahore; Turkish quarters in Berlin, but not German ones in Istanbul. Whereas Muslims are a growing

minority in Europe, Christians are a disappearing one in the Middle East.

This new multiculturalism can cause racial tensions. But it is still overwhelmingly a positive thing. People from poor countries get the chance of a new life. The countries they come to are enriched with all they have to offer. Londoners can dine out on Vietnamese food one night, Ecuadorian the next and Afro-Caribbean the following week. Latin Americans put on salsa classes, Indians start bhangra nights, Japanese teach judo. The melding of cultures produces vibrant new forms: Hanif Kureishi's writing; French rappers like MC Solaar; Brazilian artists in New York like Jander Lacerda.

What is happening in America is particularly exciting. Come with me to San Francisco, where my Mexican friend Carlos and I are heading for the Latino barrio for a late lunch. As we drive, the billboard ads switch from English to Spanish: the beaming faces now promise '*con AT&T siempre está cerca*' ('with AT&T you are always close'). With its outsize cars and green street signs, the Mission district is still recognisably American, but with a distinctly Mexican hue. The faces of passers-by are browner: many have a dis-

foreigners themselves arrive in droves – and they are changing America even as they adopt its ways. New York cab drivers come from Ethiopia, Belarus and Laos. A million or so foreigners arrive every year (700,000 legally, 300,000 illegally), most of them Asian or Latino. Since 1990, the number of foreign-born American residents has risen by 6 million to just over 25 million – the biggest immigration wave since the turn of the twentieth century. English may be all-conquering outside America, but in some parts of the US it has become a second language (behind Spanish). Some places in Texas display signs saying 'English spoken here'. Half of the 50 million new inhabitants expected in America in the next twenty-five years will be immigrants or the children of immigrants.¹⁸

In a sense, the many Mexican migrants who are moving north are reclaiming the lands that the US stole from Mexico in the mid-nineteenth century. To put it in a less inflammatory way, Latinos are changing America perhaps more profoundly than any previous immigrants. Why? Because they waded through a river rather than crossing seas to get there. So – notwithstanding the barbed wire, watchtowers and tighter controls since September 11th – America's southern border is blurring. Hispanics now make up half the

along Western lines. Even people who resist liberal ideas, in the name of religion (Islamic and Christian fundamentalists), group identity (communitarians), authoritarianism (advocates of 'Asian values') or tradition (cultural conservatives), now define themselves partly by their opposition to them.

Faith in science and technology is even more widespread. Even those who hate the West make use of its technologies. Osama Bin Laden plots terrorism on a mobile phone and crashes planes into skyscrapers. Anti-globalisation protesters organise by email and over the Internet. José Bové manipulates twenty-first-century media in his bid to return French farming to the Middle Ages. China no longer turns its nose up at Western technology: it tries to beat the West at its own game.

Western ways are not everywhere triumphant. Many people reject Western culture. (Or, more accurately, 'cultures': Europeans and Americans disagree bitterly over the death penalty, for instance; the French and the Americans hardly see eye to eye over the role of the state either.) Samuel Huntington, a professor of international politics at Harvard, even predicts a 'clash of civilisations' that will divide the twenty-first-century world. 'Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of church and state, often have little resonance in Islamic, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Buddhist or Orthodox cultures. Western efforts to propagate such ideas produce instead a reaction against "human-rights imperialism" and a reaffirmation of indigenous values,'¹⁹ he claims.

Mr Huntington's ideas are much in vogue since September 11th. Yet Francis Fukuyama, a professor of international political econ-

Westerners or other non-Muslims. Thank goodness! We should not shy away from extolling the universal virtues of liberal values. They are our proudest export. There is not a shadow of a doubt that life in the American protectorate of Afghanistan is better than life under the Taliban.

A trickier question is what we should do to promote human rights or democracy abroad. Should we stop trading with Burma – or China – for instance? I think it depends on whether sanctions are likely to be effective. If there is a decent chance that sanctions will help bring about changes that most local people want but cannot achieve themselves, they may be a good idea: as in the case of South Africa under apartheid, for example. But if sanctions are unlikely to bring about desirable reforms, applying them only compounds the misery of local people and may close off other avenues for reform. China's regime is loathsome in many ways. But the country is so big that shunning it is unlikely to improve matters. Double standards? Certainly. But surely the point of sanctions is to help people, not ease our consciences? Western governments should still apply some pressure on China when they can. Amnesty International and others are also right to campaign for human rights there. Arguably, denying Beijing the prize of the 2008 Olympics that it so coveted would have been a suitable sanction, but perhaps not: it would doubtless have stirred up nationalistic fervour off which the communists could feed. The 1988 Seoul Olympics sped South Korea's democratic reforms. With luck, Beijing's will too. Globalisation more broadly may also help: although it does not necessarily lead to greater democracy and respect for human rights, it may eventually help to loosen the communists' grip on power. Mainly, though, pressure for change must

are emerging. In 'Amexica' people speak Spanglish: 'Como se llama your dog?' Regional cultures are reviving. Repressed under Franco, Catalans, Basques, Gallegos and others assert their identity in Spain. The Scots and Welsh break with British monoculture. Estonia is reborn from the Soviet Union. Voices that were silent dare to speak again.

Individuals are forming new communities, linked by shared interests and passions, that cut across national borders. Friendships with foreigners met on holiday. Scientists sharing their ideas over the Internet. Environmentalists campaigning together using email. An international Arsenal supporters' group. A world-wide Ricky Martin fan club. House-music lovers swapping tracks online. Greater individualism does not spell the end of community. The new communities are simply chosen, unlike the coerced traditional ones that communitarians hark back to.

The beauty of globalisation is that it can free people from the tyranny of geography. Just because someone was born in France does not mean they can aspire to only speak French, eat French food, read French books, holiday in France, and so on. Does that mean national identity is dead? Hardly. People who speak the same language, were born and live near each other, face the same problems, have a common experience and vote in the same elections still have plenty of things in common. For all our awareness of the world as a single place, we are not citizens of the world but citizens of a state. But if people now wear the bonds of nationality more loosely, is that such a bad thing? People may lament the passing of old ways. Indeed, many of the worries about globalisation echo age-old fears about decline, a lost golden age and so on. But by and large, people choose the new ways because they are more relevant to their current needs and offer new opportunities that the old ones did not.

The truth is that we increasingly define ourselves rather than let others define us. We demand the right to take advantage of the best the world has to offer. We are not betraying our culture by doing so; we are being true to ourselves. People cannot be defined

entirely as British, or French, or black, or gay, or any other type. Being British does not define who you are: it is part of who you are. You can like foreign things and still be British. As Mario Vargas Llosa, a Peruvian author, has written: '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'.²¹