

## The New Face of Imperialism

Ayesha Chaudhry

As I stepped out of the plane and into Karachi's Quaid-e-Azam International Airport, I was expecting to be overwhelmed by the experience of finally being in Pakistan, far away from my home in Canada. Instead, as I walked through the lounge and spacious corridors, I was struck by how similar this environment was to the settings in any western airport. Fully air-conditioned, quiet, efficient, a business-like voice periodically making flight announcements, people hurrying about in Western attire, giant advertisement boards on the walls asking me to buy a Rolex watch, wear Nike shoes, smoke Marlboro cigarettes, and never to leave home without the *American Express* credit card. If somebody had told me that I was in Switzerland and not in Pakistan, I would have readily agreed with her.

At Karachi's Quaid-e-Azam International Airport, I was overwhelmed by feelings of sadness and despair. It seemed that the airport had been stripped of any sign of national identity and of local culture, and that it stood in stark contradiction to all that surrounded it.

### Culture and its Homogenization

What you have read so far does *not* constitute an argument for keeping Pakistan a poor and impoverished nation; instead, it is meant to point out the fact that material and technological progress is eroding local cultures throughout the world, and that Pakistan is no exception. Today, the world is increasingly becoming more and more similar and homogenous. Robert Martin describes: "The world's large cities are sometimes hard to distinguish from each other — they all have too many people, too many cars, too much pollution. The hotels, the restaurants, and the signs of poverty look pretty much the same everywhere you go."<sup>1</sup> He goes on to

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The writer is a student at University of Toronto, Canada.

say that "human beings tend, in whatever part of the world they may live, to watch the same television programs, see the same movies, listen to the same music, and read the same, or indistinguishable, newspapers and magazines."<sup>2</sup> In a similar vein, Patricia Pitchon observes: "The same types of buildings go up in Kuala Lumpur as in California; the same food can be eaten in Mexico and Mongolia; the same violent Hollywood blockbusters can be seen in Scandinavia and South America."<sup>3</sup>

This phenomenon of *homogenization of culture* is rapidly invading every region of the earth, regardless of how remote and primitive, engulfing all cultures, devouring all traditions. No one is immune to its advance. The burgeoning of discos and malls in the post-Gulf War Kuwait,<sup>4</sup> the popularity of Kentucky Fried Chicken and Rap music in Pakistan, the destruction of the nomadic life-style of Saudi Arabian Bedouin tribes,<sup>5</sup> and the powerful trend of Westernization in China<sup>6</sup> are only some manifestations of this phenomenon.

Before moving further, we need to have before us a working definition of the word "culture." The *Webster's New World Dictionary* defines it as "the ideas, customs, skills, arts, etc. of a people or group, that are transferred, communicated, or passed along, as in or to succeeding generations." According to the *American Heritage Dictionary*, culture is "the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought." In this context, we may understand culture as a set of beliefs and behaviors common to a given human society, that is transmitted from one generation to the next through education, training, and imitation. *Beliefs* include a world-view, a set of goals or ideals, and a system of values; all of these are manifested in the *behaviors* of a people

which cover such areas as life-style, social norms, entertainment, eating habits, customs, dress, art, and architecture. Since the beliefs and behaviors that constitute a given culture are not genetically inherited but are learned from the preceding generation, it is obvious that, with the exception of isolated and primitive communities, all cultures are susceptible to gradual change as a result of internal shifts or outside influences. Today, however, the speed of such changes has increased tremendously.

### **The Corporate Age**

The process by which local cultures are being eroded and increasingly replaced by a single global culture is a result, first and foremost, of the globalization of economy and the unprecedented progress in communication technology, without which such homogenization could not have occurred. This has encouraged and facilitated a uniformity and standardization of products, tastes, and techniques throughout the world.<sup>7</sup> By means of the media, people in non-western countries are made complacent to the changes around them, if not manipulated to be desirous of them. In today's world, the globalization of culture and the globalization of economy are two related and parallel processes that support and reinforce each other, being linked together by the modern mass media.

The development of mass communication technologies in recent decades has led to rapid exchange of ideas and information throughout the world, turning the world into a "global village" — a term made popular by Canadian media theorist Marshal McLuhan. Simultaneously, international economy is fast turning into a global capitalism, being supported by the relaxation of regulations established by most countries to control trade, investment, and

financial transactions, as well as by a powerful trend towards privatization.

During the last two decades, transnational corporations and financial institutions have globalized their activities and forced governments to abandon controls on foreign exchange (trading) of their currencies and to relax regulation of banking and financial markets. Consequently, more and more gigantic transnational corporations have come to dominate the world economy. They are now operating in dozens of countries and producing for an increasingly globalized marketplace.

The political domination of the United States, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the development of new techniques for production and new forms of organization have also contributed towards the globalization of economy. The most influential organizations on the international level — the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization — are actively promoting the emergence of a global market. Privatization, deregulation, public-sector downsizing, and “structural adjustment” programs imposed by the money-lending institutions have pried open one country after another. The basic principles of the emerging global economy include “the primacy of economic growth; the need for free trade to stimulate the growth; the unrestricted ‘free market’; the absence of government regulation; and voracious consumerism combined with an aggressive advocacy of a uniform world-wide development model that faithfully reflects the Western corporate vision and serves corporate interests.”<sup>8</sup>

The major beneficiaries in the globalization of economy, as indicated above, are the transnational corporations, ninety percent of which are based in the northern industrialized

nations, and more than half come from just five countries — France, Germany, the Netherlands, Japan, and the United States. These corporations and their affiliated companies account for most of the world's industrial capacity, technological knowledge, and international financial transactions. These corporations enjoy tremendous political and economic influence in their host countries. Today, we find that nation-states are losing their capacity to manage their economies and to regulate social life, while giant transnational corporations are tightening their grip over worldwide finance, production, and trade.<sup>9</sup> Since most of the mass media too is controlled by them, the popular culture of the world is increasingly being shaped by these corporations. And since culture and buying behavior are closely related, it is clear that transnational corporations have high financial stakes in promoting a single life-style throughout the world. According to Jerry Mander, "corporations have a stake in all of us living our lives in a similar manner, achieving our pleasures from things that we buy. ...all corporations share an identical economic, cultural, and social vision, and seek to accelerate society's (and individual) acceptance of that vision."<sup>10</sup> Hence the world-wide drift towards a single global culture.

### **Cultural Imperialism?**

In academic circles, a debate is going on regarding the definition and meaning of cultural erosion. Some define the globalization of culture as "the emergence or the imposition of a dominant culture within an environment..." the fear being that the constant and unilateral flow of images from a dominant culture will, over time, create a homogenized global culture that will impose itself on others.<sup>11</sup> Cees Hamelink has described this in terms of the "core and

periphery theory," according to which global imbalances exist between "core" (i.e., the rich and industrialized) nations of the world and the "periphery" (or the poor and rural) countries, both in the flow of media products and images. Information and its technology are controlled by the core nations, and its flow is uni-directional from the core to the periphery with little opportunity for peripheral nations to participate in the process.<sup>12</sup>

Some have argued that what we are witnessing is not the globalization of culture because the "Western" culture itself has its roots in Africa, Spain and Asia.<sup>13</sup> According to Dr. Ron Robin: "What we are seeing today is not actually a hegemony of American culture, since there is little that can be called inherently 'American.' What's really happening is an 'internationalization' of material culture throughout a world that has truly become a global village. Because the United States is itself a hybrid nation, made up of immigrants from many nationalities, it is acting as a 'crystal ball' for the rest of the world."<sup>14</sup> Others reply that although American culture may originate from countries around the world, it still has to go through the dream factory of America<sup>15</sup> and then packaged and marketed in New York,<sup>16</sup> which results in the other cultures being commodified and de-sacrilized and, in essence, Americanized. The United States may be a nation of immigrants, but the diversity of its population does not reflect in American cultural products; indeed, there are millions of Muslims, Chinese, and native Indians living in the United States, but the culture that is originating from Hollywood does not depict Islamic, Confucian, or native Indian values.

Another term being used to define this process is "cultural imperialism." As James Petras states, cultural imperialism in relation

to the Third World is "the systematic penetration and domination of the cultural life of the popular classes by the ruling class of the West in order to reorder the values, behavior institutions and identity of the oppressed people to conform with the interests of the imperial class."<sup>17</sup> He believes that this imperialism has two main objectives: economic exploitation through the export of cultural and entertainment commodities, and establishment of political hegemony by dissociating people from their cultural roots. He believes that the young are the prime targets of the imperialistic West as they are very vulnerable to media influences. The purpose is to capture the rebelliousness of the young and to convince them that they can relieve their discontent by consuming American products. By instilling this consumerist as well as individualist attitude in them, the attention of the youth is diverted away from potential political aspirations and towards personal ambitions.<sup>18</sup> He contends that under the guise of internationalism, the West has become a dominant exporter of cultural forms which are conducive to de-politicizing and trivializing all else.<sup>19</sup> Hilary Brown is more specific and identifies this process as "cultural dependency," defining it as "a process in which an exogenous system of meanings and symbols (culture) is learned by another society and their indigenous culture simultaneously subordinated and demeaned."<sup>20</sup>

Some have argued that it would be wrong to describe the transformation of values that is taking place on a global level as "cultural imperialism." Their argument is that, for the most part, people around the globe are adopting the global culture *voluntarily*, without being compelled to do so in any way. Furthermore, the IMF, World Bank, and transnational corporations are being enthusiastically petitioned by non-

Western countries to come and provide financial aid, economic advice, technological know-how, managerial expertise, and so on.<sup>21</sup> In response, one could argue that those who welcome the foreign culture in the Third World belong to its politically powerful elite class, which is always a minority. This particular class has close affinities with the elite in other parts of the world, as it is able to share ideas and views with them through various communication technologies. The people belonging to the elite class, however, are generally alienated from the overwhelming majority of the masses living in their own countries and are, therefore, unaware of their problems, needs, and aspirations.<sup>22</sup> The members of this elite class are described by James Petras as "colonized intermediaries" and "cultural collaborators."<sup>23</sup> Typically, they are "upwardly mobile Third World professionals who imitate the style of their patrons" and are "servile to the West and arrogant to their [own] people."<sup>24</sup> It is obvious that no form of imperialism, whether it is militarily aggressive or culturally seductive, can attack and vanquish other nations without the active and enthusiastic collaboration of at least some of the powerful elite in those nations.

### **Manufacturing Needs and Dreams**

During the 20th century, we have witnessed an enormous extension of private power in the information and entertainment sphere. The production of the mass culture today is in the hands of a few mega-corporations, most of which are located in the United States. These corporations often merge,<sup>25</sup> creating an even smaller circle of power and eliminating any real and fair competition. To illustrate: Ben Bagdikian wrote in his book *The Media Monopoly*, first published in 1982, that fifty corporations are controlling half or more of the media

business, including movie studios, newspapers, magazines, book publishing, and radio and television stations. By December 1986, when he finished a revision for a second edition, the fifty had shrunk to twenty-nine. When the latest edition of his book was published in 1993, the number was down to 20. According to Bagdikian, narrow corporate control of mass communications goes far beyond the uniformity of what comes out of television, as it also involves the maximization of profits by conditioning the world to buy compulsively and unwisely.<sup>26</sup>

Some argue that corporate control over the information and production sector is entirely inadvertent and simply coincidental and that there are no conspirators involved.<sup>27</sup> However, those who believe in cultural imperialism point out that most of these corporations are based in the US, and therefore, in effect, it is the United States that is forcing its media images and cultural products on the rest of the world. They argue that, far from inadvertent, this is an active policy on the part of the United States. Consider this: The US Department of Defense has a network of thirty-eight television and two hundred radio transmitters around the world. Also, the United States Information Agency (USIA), the civilian governmental broadcasting establishment, makes a point to reach foreign audiences. "The Voice of America, the radio arm of USIA, transmits some 845 hours in 38 languages weekly to overseas an audience of unknown size. The Agency also distributes taped programs and scripts to local stations throughout the world and estimates that its materials are broadcast by more than 5000 stations some 15000 hours a week."<sup>28</sup> A USIA official Wilson Dizard expressed clearly that this penetration was intentional and planned when he spoke to Congress about how difficult it was for the Agency to penetrate

China: "You know the Chinese mainland is in effect the toughest nut for us to crack in terms of getting in.... The only way we can get in these days is through the Voice of America. We are beefing up our facilities in the Far East right now for this purpose. Unfortunately we are not permitted to go in and put up our own wall posters."<sup>29</sup> Another example is the case of Indonesia, which once was Asia's largest film producing region. Today it is slowly withering away due to the dramatic influx of foreign films. One of the major reasons for its demise is that, in 1991, Indonesia was blackmailed by the United States to give the US Motion Picture Export Association greater access to its domestic market. In return, Indonesia was to receive a thirty-five percent increase in US quotas for its textile producers.<sup>30</sup>

Giant media corporations destroy local cultures throughout the world primarily by targeting the young. This is not only because the young are the most vulnerable to the influence of mass media, but also because of the fact that, once the younger generation is persuaded to abandon the traditional ways in favor of the new consumer culture, the future generations will inevitably follow in its footsteps. The demise of a culture is certain when the children abandon it, for this creates a discontinuity in the transmission of traditions and values from one generation to the next, and the vacuum is then filled by the media. Moreover, it is also important to realize that the modern and consumerist life-style appeals to the passionate and rebellious elements in the human soul, to which the young are particularly vulnerable. Today's generation of children are now growing up on TV and, for the first time in history, their identity is not being shaped and reinforced by their own culture and heritage but rather by

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“distant conglomerates that have something to sell.”<sup>31</sup>

Today, the primary function of television is to encourage consumerism. The basic message received by the audience is that “happiness comes from commodities” and therefore one should buy, and buy more — regardless of whether one needs to buy in the first place! The promotion of consumerism is the only way for the giant business corporations to maximize their profits.<sup>32</sup> If people consumed only out of necessity then the economy would simply crash,<sup>33</sup> which explains why irrational and compulsive consumption and infantile behavior is encouraged by the mass media, irrespective of the high cost to the individual, to the society, and to the natural environment.<sup>34</sup> The technique is obviously working; Herbert Schiller says that Western commercial products have been successfully spread out all over the earth,<sup>35</sup> raking in a whole lot of money for the corporations which produce them and destroying values and cultures in the process. This shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone, as the so-called “profit imperative” is the first inherent rule of corporate behavior, one that takes precedence over everything else.<sup>36</sup>

The symbiotic relationship between transnational corporations and mass media result in the world-wide promotion of a culture that encourages material consumption.<sup>37</sup> Foremost on the list of values being imparted are selfishness,<sup>38</sup> encouragement of infantile behavior, and the celebration of youth.<sup>39</sup> This creates a tension between the individual and the society, making the individual indifferent to societal needs and public interest.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the attention of the people who should be involved in nation building is diverted to shallow personal goals and ambitions. The reason consumerism is so lethal to the Third World economies is that these countries

cannot afford to consume on a scale comparable to the industrialized West; the latter's wasteful life-style itself is unsustainable in the long run and highly destructive to the natural environment. Once people in the Third World get hooked onto the television, they want to consume — in ever increasing quantities — not local and traditional products but rather American ones, which increases the pressure on importing them.<sup>41</sup> Thus, consumerism increases the dependency relationship between the industrialized nations of North America and Europe on the one hand and the impoverished and exploited nations of Asia and Africa on the other. This explains why many countries see Western TV programs as a threat which forces them back into the same dependency they experienced during colonialism.<sup>42</sup> Of course, the biggest problem is how does one fight the West, when the tools needed for fighting the West must also be obtained from the West itself.<sup>43</sup>

It may be asked as to why the non-Western countries do not produce their own television programs to counter the onslaught of irrelevant and culturally damaging television shows? One reason for this is the so-called "dumping" process seen all over the world. American popular culture has a very large domestic audience; this allows the media corporations to cover the price of their products in the home market and then export it to the rest of the world at greatly reduced prices. Once foreign products are offered at such low prices, the cost of local programs seems prohibitively high, discouraging local production; the broadcasting companies naturally turn to the more cheaper American programs.<sup>44</sup> As a result, local and indigenous films are all but liquidated as there is no funding for them, thanks to Hollywood. In some cases, the programs are also supplied free of charge to mesmerize the audiences of Third World countries.<sup>45</sup> Another

reason for importing foreign programs is "TV's enormous appetite for material,"<sup>46</sup> an appetite that local resources and talents cannot satisfy. Consequently, a large share of the television content in the Third World countries originates in the West. For example, over 80 percent of the television content in the Caribbean during the 1980's was imported from the West.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, of the 4,000 films shown on Brazilian television, 99 percent are from rich countries, mostly Hollywood.<sup>48</sup> The arrival of the satellite dish is further contributing towards cultural erosion, as this technology is predominantly being used "to place imagery of American-style commodity life, American values, American commercials, American-style experience in the heads of everyone, wherever they are. The end result will be world-wide monoculture."<sup>49</sup>

The lack of choice on the part of these viewers is often interpreted to imply that they want to watch American television. On the contrary, many studies show that people in Third World countries would rather watch domestic shows even if they are of a poorer quality because they are more relevant to their lives.<sup>50</sup> As mentioned above, however, such shows are becoming less and less feasible to produce, as the trend towards the globalization of economy is eroding national sovereignty in the realm of media too. Patricia Pitchon writes: "One consequence [of globalization] is that politicians have lost the ability to nurture, protect, and develop local cultural activities in the way they once did. Governments must no longer unduly favor national literature and film, and cannot set quotas for the amount of local content on television. Commercial channels can import endless foreign soap operas, for instance — pushing national programs to the margins."<sup>51</sup> Moreover, the popularity of American culture among the young

also means that local media throughout the world is increasingly being forced to imitate Western media trends just to stay in business. The popular music shows now being produced in Pakistan, for instance, are often indistinguishable from MTV productions.

### **Food for Thought**

Having already seen the agenda being followed by major media networks, let us now look at the transnational corporations that manufacture and sell various products, and let us try to understand how they are directly or indirectly contributing towards the destruction of local cultures. First and foremost, these corporations fully realize that what they are selling to the world are not life necessities, but rather lifestyles.<sup>52</sup> Coca-Cola, for instance, understands this well, for one of its executive admitted: "American culture broadly defined — music, film, fashion and food — has become culture world wide."<sup>53</sup> In order to sell these products which are often totally irrelevant and alien to other cultures, transnational corporations must create artificial "needs" and build loyalty to their brand names. Nike, for example, is able to sell its shoes on a grand scale not because they are more comfortable, but because of the images of popularity and glamour associated with its brand name. Thus, when these shoes are bought for their brand name rather than for utility or comfort, they become "a lifestyle choice arising out of the manipulation of emotions linked to sports and winning, rather than to satisfaction of needs linked to walking and shoes."<sup>54</sup> Of course, the consumers must be made to believe in Nike to the point of religious devotion. Nike openly admits that they are doing more than selling shoes; its CEO Phillip H. Knight asked bluntly in his 1992 Annual Report: "How do we expect to conquer foreign lands?"

and then answered saying, "The same way we did here. We will simply export sports, the world's best economy."<sup>55</sup> Similarly, since Coca-Cola cannot manufacture thirst, it manufactures taste; thirst can be quenched by drinking a glass of cold water or any of the numerous home-made traditional drinks. Still, Coca-Cola is successful on a world-wide basis because its consumption is identified — thanks to aggressive advertisement campaigns — with being fashionable, young, fun-loving, and American! CEO Roberto C. Goizueta states that they are now expanding to the rest of the world's population which offers "worlds of opportunity and are not only heavily populated, but also culturally and climatically ripe for soft drink consumption."<sup>56</sup> In order to bring about a change in Indonesia from the local tradition of drinking tea to soft drinks, Coca-Cola aggressively invested in a cultural campaign;<sup>57</sup> it succeeded in defeating the local culture and in this way opened up a big market for sweet beverage sales.

These, however, are *direct* approaches towards the erosion of local cultures for the promotion of consumer products. There is, at the same time, an *indirect* approach too: getting hooked on American products itself involves lifestyle changes. Benjamin Barber accurately explains the influence of consumer products on lifestyles with regards to McDonald's: "The experience sold is more than just a quick lunch. Fast food fits life in the computer world's fastest lane, the bites and bytes propelling our bodies and minds through the day at break neck speed, not a second to lose. Eat fast and serve the business world's god of efficiency. Serve yourself and reduce the number of jobs available. Stand up and eat or take it with you, and transform eating from a social into a solitary activity. Switch (in eastern countries) from rice

or vegetables to meat increases the fat intake, medical costs and the pressure on agriculture (growing grain to feed cattle that go into the beef we eat is radically inefficient, using up to ten times more grain than is consumed by humans who make grain their diet.) The McDonald's way of eating is a way of life, an ideology... more intrusive (if much more subtle) than any Marx or Mao ever contrived."<sup>58</sup>.

Consider the cultural and psychological aspect of this phenomenon. When a person in a Third World nation consumes a McDonald's burger with a bottle of Coca-Cola, enjoying the stylish environment of a typical outlet, he or she also imbibes the spirit of America. What is being consumed is much more than junk food; it is the symbol of the power, privilege, and affluence of the United States that is being taken in.<sup>59</sup> The captivating images of the mass media — like the deadly enticement of the mythical sirens — produce a world-wide yearning for the "American experience," a vicarious substitute for which is the eating of American food in an Americanized environment. The unconscious hope is that this ritual will liberate one from the shame of belonging to a backward and inferior nation. This mentality was eloquently expressed by Den Fujita, chief of McDonald's Japanese operations, when he said: "If we eat hamburgers for a thousand years, we will become blond. And when we become blond we can conquer the world."<sup>60</sup>

### **Resisting the Tide**

For some, the question still remains: Despite the globalization of economy and promotion of consumerist values through the mass media, is there any concrete evidence that local cultures are really being destroyed? Indeed there is, and it is obvious to many. There is a growing awareness of this trend and some resistance

against it is also developing. Li Delun, Musical Director of the central Philharmonic Orchestra of China says about the invasion of popular culture that: "The floodgates have been opened and we have an unprecedented inundation. Since World War , mass culture from the US — from jazz to disco — has conquered the world. China is the last battleground and we are hardly putting up any resistance."<sup>61</sup> This cultural erosion is causing perplexity and confusion among many different people around the world, as they are unable to reconcile their traditional values with the new culture that is rapidly taking hold. For instance, Ramon Tagler Jr. explains that "the Filipino is not only in search of a national identity, but such an identity is becoming more and more blurred with the coming of satellites, computers, and other modern technologies as well as the products that they bring into his country and the alien ideas they inject into his mind."<sup>62</sup> However, others have been inclined to argue that despite what is said, when a people are bombarded with very powerful mass media images and see their traditional culture and values being threatened, they react more strongly and are strengthened in their struggles. The Maori Natives of New Zealand are a case in point, who are now revitalizing their language and culture.<sup>63</sup> However, the resistance against the onslaught of the global culture requires a great deal of struggle, as the attack is multi-dimensional and the forces behind it are extremely powerful.

The first step towards resisting this onslaught is to comprehend the whole phenomenon at a deeper level. The most fundamental reasons why the global culture is being eagerly embraced is the fact that the vast majority of humanity has lost the ability to accept the sacred and religious view of the universe. It has devoted its attentions and energies to the pursuit of

material success in this-worldly life, leaving aside purely spiritual or other-worldly goals. In this context, the global culture is virtually irresistible because it puts forth a very simple and very attractive proposition: abandon the traditional religious ethos and you will get in this very life all that religion promises you in the life-hereafter. Along with this offer, living proof is offered of those individuals who have rejected traditional religion and embraced the global culture, and have indeed attained palaces, gardens, and beautiful partners in this very life. In light of the offer being made and seeing the living proofs that this is not a hollow offer, it is no surprise that individuals abandon their traditional ways of life and their religion in order to embrace the global culture.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, it can be seen that today's cultural imperialism is conquering the world not by force and coercion but rather by temptation and persuasion — a much more subtle and therefore much more effective methodology. At the same time, the tremendous economic and political pressures of globalization have made the rejection of global culture a much more costly and difficult choice for most nations than its acceptance. As a result, the proposition of the global culture is being presented today as an offer which most of us cannot refuse! It is important to realize, therefore, that no meaningful resistance can be launched against the global culture without the revival of the traditional, religious view of the universe that gives due emphasis to the spirit as compared to the world of matter.

The traditional cultures of the world are losing the battle for survival, but they are not giving in. A number of approaches are being suggested and followed by various nations in order to deal with the problem of cultural

homogenization. Some feel that the solution lies in producing local programs to protect the people from foreign influence.<sup>65</sup> This is supposed to promote local culture and therefore provide a shield against the onslaught of the more dominant one. For instance, Anwar Ibrahim, former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, said in a speech: "We are already on the way to gaining control of the communication technologies to empower ourselves with the means, as it were, to mount a counter offensive. Yet that so-called empowerment would be meaningful only if we ourselves could offer cultural products that could successfully compete for the attention of a discerning universal audience. In other words, not only do we have to fortify ourselves against negative cultural bombardment, we must be able to make positive and lasting contributions to a new world civilization which is just and equitable."<sup>66</sup> Others argue that this approach encourages the use of the same methods as are employed by the missionaries of the global culture; in other words, this entails fighting the enemy in accordance with the rules and terms devised by the enemy itself, and this poses a serious problem. Since the global culture is backed by powerful economic and political forces, and since its proponents are not restricted by any moral or spiritual considerations, it is highly unlikely that traditional cultures can win by playing the game of their enemy. In attempting to use the tools and approaches of the global culture, traditional cultures are more likely to lose their own values rather than succeed in promoting them. Instead of following the West, therefore, more creative and novel approaches need to be developed in order to combat the global culture.

The globalization of culture is closely linked with the globalization of economy and the rapidly rising power of transnational

corporations, and therefore effort must be made to deal with the onslaught of this financial hegemony, which is the root of the problem. Unless we make conscious and full-fledged efforts to stem the tide, the global culture of mindless consumption and materialism is likely to dominate the whole world very soon, causing irreparable damage to morality, religion, national sovereignty, and the natural environment. As the value of clean air and water becomes apparent only when they are polluted and destroyed, so too the value of local and traditional culture is being realized only when it is being carelessly and selfishly being destroyed, simply for economic benefit of a small global elite.

Maybe it was the realization of how much has already been lost that struck me as I walked through Karachi's Quaid-e-Azam International Airport. I didn't feel like I was in Pakistan. Gillette's chairman Alfred M. Zein once said: "I do not find foreign countries foreign."<sup>67</sup> Perhaps even he did not fully realize how much truth his statement held.

### Endnotes

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