

LOCAL CULTURES AND GLOBAL DYNAMICS

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Summary

At the beginning of the new century culture is exposed to a radical change all over the world. Those whose education or wealth allows them to partake fully in the advantages of a globalized culture and economy tend to have a positive attitude towards these developments. On the other hand, there are strong local movements, especially in the Third World, which reject the project of globalization as essentially destructive of all the values they hold dear. They see globalization as an extension of colonization, with its concomitant destruction of local moral values and ways of knowing. Yet many of the “local” traditions are constructs invented by the ethnologists of the colonizers, and retention of these imaginary “traditions” involves a limitation of growth and cultural development. Creative cultural energies are attracted to the centers (Western Europe, the USA, Japan), thus allowing them to generate cultural surplus, while at the same time destroying indigenous cultures worldwide.

1. The impact of colonialism and globalization on local and national cultures

At the beginning of the new century culture is exposed to a radical change all over the world. Artists, art managers and media persons need to define their identity in the current media revolution. They need to ask what role, function or chance local and national cultures have in a globalized and digitized world, which has already fundamentally changed our lives and our everyday experiences.

But it is not the media as such which pose a threat to local cultures and minority cultures all over the world and which destabilize the national cultures of smaller nations. It is the economic power of a few states and their control of these powerful media, which threaten the survival of smaller languages and cultures.

Cultural goods are subject to an economy, too, but the cultural economy follows its own laws and logic. Consumers of culture are produced by culture, just as consumers of consumer goods are produced by the logic of production and distribution. The vast majority of potential readers in the third World are illiterate, semi-literate, functionally illiterate, and above all impoverished to such a degree that a single book bought would wipe out their food budget for a week. The picture of Africa, much of South America and Asia, as we enter the new millennium, is largely that of a bookless society, and one which is seriously underfunded as far as access to other cultural goods is concerned.

Sociology has attempted to reconstruct the conditions, whose product the consumers of culture and their taste are. In every culture at every point in time certain forms of culture are privileged as “art”, and certain ways of appropriating culture are acceptable. To understand culture and the consumption of culture one needs, however, to expand one’s view from the narrow concepts of “education” and “art” which are still dominant in Western cultures and encompass a global ethnological concept of “culture”.

In this field individuals are exposed to quite contradictory desires. On the one hand, many people, especially those who have been or still are prevented from moving out of the often restrictive environment of their own regional or national culture, have hailed the current move towards globalization as a liberating experience. Especially those whose education or wealth allows them to fully partake in the advantages of a globalized culture and economy tend to have a positive attitude towards these developments. There are some aspects of globalization that are considered positive even by those, who because of the destruction of their local economy are the losers of globalization. On the other hand, there are strong local movements, especially in the Third World, which reject the project of globalization as essentially destructive of all the values they hold dear. They are joined by those in the First World who see globalization as destructive of values, economic structures, cultures and the ecology. (see *Imperialism, Resistance and Culture*)

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Biographical Sketch

Peter Horn studied German and English at the University of the Witwatersrand. In 1971 he graduated Ph.D. from the University of the Witwatersrand with a thesis on "Rhythm and structure in the poetry of Paul Celan", and was offered the chair of German at the University of Cape Town in 1974. From 1987 to 1990 he was Dean of the Faculty of Arts, and from 1993-1994 Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University. He was president South African Association of German Studies (1989-1997), president of the Institute for Research into Austrian and International Literary Processes (Vienna) (2001-), on the executive committee of the Elias-Canetti-Gesellschaft, the National Executive of the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) (1991 - 1992), the National Executive of the South African Writers' Association. Besides he was Honorary Vice President of the National Union of South African Students (1977-1981), Trustee of the South African Prisoners' Educational Trust Fund (1980-1985), and a member of the Interim Committee of the Unemployed Workers' Movement (1984/5). In 1974 he received the Pringle Prize of the South African English Academy for an essay to the concrete poetry, in 1992 he received the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa (Honourable Mention for *Poems 1964-1989*), and in 1993 the Alex La Guma/Bessie Head Award and in 2000 the Herman Charles Bosman Prize for the short story collection *My Voice is under Control now*. In 1994 the University of Cape Town granted him a Honorary Fellowship for life. Two of his volumes of poetry and numerous other publications by him were banned for possession during the Apartheid regime. His poems are anthologised in most major

anthologies of South African poetry, and more than 100 have been published in journals. He has published numerous contributions to academic books, learned journals, and reviews and review articles.

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