

One Sure Thing About Globalization –
The American Motion Pictures Industry World Hegemony.

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The word “globalization” is often used as shorthand to suggest that the world as recently shrunk for many purposes (Friedman, 1999). At first blush, this would seem to be good news, facilitating the spread of literacy, the diffusion of useful technologies, and socio-economic progress, in general. However, a large segment of public opinion, in this country and, apparently, a larger segment in Europe and certain other countries (such as India), takes a jaundiced view of this shrinkage. This view is propagated by numerous websites as well as by professional intellectuals such as Noam Chomsky (who is often heard on National Public Radio). It contains a large anti-American component (Menand, 2002). It is widespread – at various levels of sophistication – in American universities. (1) In recent years, it has been dramatically acted out by rioters in Seattle, Quebec and Genoa, among other places. For left-wing opinion, “globalization” seems to imply that there is something radically new under the sun that is also economically nefarious for the poor and for the weak. For the same left-wing opinion, the word often suggests a sinister plot implicating in turn, “big corporations”, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and other organizations little understood by the general public. (For a broad, business-oriented and mildly liberal classification of the many sins the word “globalization” covers, see Eden and Lenway, 2001.) That new something entails a clandestine hegemony, or hegemonies, of some sort, dedicated to the further “exploitation” of the already poor and weak by the already rich and powerful. In this presentation, I develop the idea that there is little that is both radically new and nefarious, and that what is new is likely to have largely beneficial effects. I rest my argumentation on readily available, public evidence.

Note: If you don’t think such a perspective on globalization exists, or you believe it’s inconsequential, you may want to stop reading or turn to page 6 below.

It is very difficult to find anywhere assertions about globalization displaying **at once** the following features:

Well-supported by systematically gathered facts;
Logically argued;
Clearly bearing negative consequences for the welfare of any category of population anywhere. (2)

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Scanning the media and the public statements of scholars and activists for evidence that satisfy these criteria, I find only two noteworthy consequences of globalization. One that is undoubtedly noxious but not all that new: the frequent betrayal of small economic actors by powerful democratic governments. The second and the most striking is the nearly undisputed global hegemony of the American motion pictures industry. It's relatively new and the cultural influence of American movies (and of television) is frequently decried by many different kinds of commentators, almost everywhere in the world. In fact, I am almost sure that given ten perfect strangers, in any part of the globe, I can elicit anti-American cinema sentiments in five minutes flat from at least one of them. I argue at the end of this paper that the social consequences of exposure to American movies must be mostly positive for the poor and the powerless of this world. But first, I will take a detour to show that many seemingly self-evident truths about globalization are simply inventions or gross misreadings of the facts.

Globalization in International Trade and Investment?

“Globalization” means, among other things, an increased, or somehow more consequential presence of large multinational corporations. For critics, this implies undesirable consequences.

It's difficult to evaluate the effect that the presence of given multinational company has on a given segment of population of a given country where it operates. There is some ambiguous isolated evidence that some multinationals engage offshore in behavior that would not be ethically acceptable in their home countries (3). Yet, there exists a broad claim to the effect that multinational companies in general are more noxious than they used to be, and international trade, as well as its companion, foreign direct investment, correspondingly destructive of human happiness. If this broad claim were factual, we would expect trade flows or international capital flows to be somehow different from what they used to be. Or, alternatively, we would observe that the cause and effect relationship between such (unchanged) flows and their consequences has become qualitatively different, in a negative way. If any such new developments were truly calamitous we should be able to detect their effects in aggregate income figures. This second possibility needs to be established explicitly; it cannot just be affirmed to exist. At a minimum, the claim that economic globalization is a bad thing requires that some parts of the world be demonstrably worse off than before - or some segment of some population - in a way systematically related to attributes of these flows. The first idea, that trade and investment flows are different from what they used to be, can be examined directly.

In fact, neither trade nor investment flows have changed much in the past 25 years. They are not even radically different from what they were a hundred years ago. The international trade of today was largely prefigured by the international trade of three hundred years ago and even earlier. There already was a great deal of long-distance trade a thousand years ago.

The strongest evidence I have found about any recent change in international trade flows is that it appears that the proportion of world **commodity** production that is traded has increased 2.2 times between 1959 and 1996 (Sangmoon and Shin, 2002). Yet, the importance of **all** international trade in the aggregate world economy has just recently returned to what it was **before WWI** (Pollock, 2001). Although, on the average, countries had more trade ties with one another in 1996 than in 1959, according to a recent rigorous study, most of the increase took place **before 1975**. (Sangmoon and Shin, 2002). The relative importance of any one single country in global trade ties has decreased, between 1959 and 1996; that is, world trade networks are becoming **decentralized**. (Sangmoon and Shin, 2002).

A spoof issue of the Wall Street Journal (1/11/99, fictitiously dated “**01/01/1000**”) published to celebrate the millenium reminds us of the large size and diversity of international trade between China, the economic superpower of the day on the one hand, and other parts of Asia, and Europe and Africa, on the other, in the year **1000** (The article also describes a second network of far-flung trade in gold within Africa.) This WSJ special issue mentions customs duties comparable to today’s (around 10%).

A 1974 book that received the most prestigious Sociology award (the Sorokin Award), entitled The Modern World System, paints in minute scholarly detail the development of the “European world economy”. The gist of the book’s argument is that there has been no **autonomous** regional (or even less, national) economic change since the early sixteenth century, except in the most backward parts of the world. (The fact that its author, Immanuel Wallerstein, may be judged, on a personal level, as one of the ideological grandfathers of today’s anti-WTO rioters does not change the tenor of his book.) Dependence on other parts of the world for essential goods is not a new fact of life. Indonesian mace and turmeric growers of the year 1500, surely did not count on surviving by consuming their own production; they had to sell it far away, as far as Norway, for example, to buy staples (De Raynal, 1778). Those who, today, view with alarm the displacement of locally produced good by foreign products tend to forget that Marco Polo never tasted spaghetti *a la Bolognesa* because tomatoes had not yet been brought to Europe from the New World. Nor did Marco know the taste of coffee, or of chocolate, nor did he smoke, because the last two common stimulants came from the Western Hemisphere, and the first, though originating in Ethiopia, spread to the world through European plantations in the West Indies. Only about four hundred years after Marco’s death had people in most of the world incorporated these items into their lifestyles, but then, it was for good (Braudel, 1981:249-263). Europeans adopted the potato, and Africans, corn, at about the same time (Braudel, 1981:165-171). Those were major changes for the toiling masses of the time, un-paralleled, it seems to me, by anything taking place recently on a global scale. Production for distant markets, the long distance trade relations it implies, and the transformation of some cultural patterns it carries, are **not new phenomena**.

Capital flows relative to the economic sizes of the countries whence they came were larger before WWI than today (Bordo *et al.*:27). In other word, capitalists then were

more invested abroad than they are now. Bordo *et al.* speculate nevertheless that today's foreign investment in, say, Latin America, may have more negative consequences for the recipient countries than yesterday's British investment in say, Australia. (Yes, reader, you got that right: Some critics of globalization actually believe that bringing money **into** a country harms that country.) They argue that this must be so because whereas British 19th century investment was mostly in infrastructures, contemporary foreign investment is mostly in production. Although it is plausible that investments in different economic sectors have different social and economic consequences, the validity of this idea has to be established with data, not just peremptorily stated. In point of fact, over twenty-five years of reviewing sociology of development submissions for the top Sociology journals (American Journal of Sociology, Social Forces, American Sociological Review), I have seen a fair number of empirically based papers making this kind of claim and I used to contribute to this brand of research myself (Delacroix and Ragin 1981). A few of these papers were methodologically and otherwise good enough to be published in those top journals. Those are only a handful, in spite of my impression that such papers tend to receive abnormally favorable reviews because nearly all capable reviewers belong to the same ideological school as the submitters. (Nevertheless, if I were an intellectually serious militant **against** economic globalization, this is where I would direct my attention.)

Poverty, some International Trends

Now, let's look for objectionable new facts in the worldwide distribution of **income**. (It's too difficult to get international data on wealth.) In the nineteen-fifties, the total of the national incomes of all other countries in the world barely equaled the national income of the US alone (Delacroix, 1974). Today, the US GNP constitutes less than one third of the sum of all countries' GNPs (World Bank, 2002:4.2), although the US has experienced healthy economic growth since the fifties. It's true that a number of countries are mired in deep poverty and that some are even regressing. (See below.) It seems to me those are all countries with exceptionally corrupt or tyrannical governments, such as Haiti on the one hand and North Korea, on the other, or stand-alone plutocratically-run former colonies such as the so-called "Democratic Republic of the Congo" (formerly Zaire), or Sierra Leone (where, incidentally, the bulk of the population was almost certainly better off under European colonialism), or that they have especially poor access to current information (because of high illiteracy and other reasons, including government censorship or even deeply entrenched cultural facts [4]), such as Afghanistan (but no hard data are available). By far the worst economic performers in the past ten years are the European countries that have been trying to recover from their cruel experiment in state socialism ("communism"), **not** the Third World countries.

In spite of loose talk of "globalization" somehow deepening the poverty of the Third World (5), the following countries experienced **higher** average Gross Domestic Product rates of annual growth **than the US** (and higher than any Western European country, except one; see below) between 1990 and 2000:

Bangladesh, Benin, Bolivia, Cambodia, Costa Rica, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Jordan, Papua-New Guinea, Peru, Vietnam, not to mention strongly foreign trade-oriented **Malaysia, Chile and Ireland** (each of these three with about **twice the US rate**), and **China**, with a whopping 10%. Even **Lesotho** did better than the US (4.1% Vs 3.5%).

(This is an eclectic and incomplete list that accounts for 45 % of the world population, *circa* 2000, and for a much higher percentage of the population of Third World countries, traditionally defined.)

Let me deal briefly with the common but erroneous notion that, “Poor countries have nowhere to go but up”, which is an attempt to suggest that economic growth among the poor nations is automatic and therefore, not meaningful. During the long, twenty-year span 1980-2000, Haiti (admittedly a basket case) saw its economy **shrink** by an average .4% per year; Jamaica’s grew by a humble average 1.75% ; Algeria, an oil-rich country with a good infrastructure by Third World standards, experienced growth of 2.3% per year on the average. Venezuela, another oil-endowed country, experienced a modest rate of 1.35%. Zambia grew by less than 1%. The Indian Ocean island republic of Madagascar, grew by only 1.6%.

By contrast, Mauritius, a small tropical island country close to Madagascar, with a higher population density than any country except Bangladesh and Singapore (Smith,1999), devoid of natural resources, and populated mostly by South Indian immigrants who have every right to be confused (because they speak French and follow English law), Mauritius had an average annual growth of **5.2 %** between 1980 and 2000. That’s comparable to a family’s income going, in real terms, from \$10 000 to \$27 500. (A lot better than the American working class is supposed to have done during the past twenty years, according to left-wing opinion.) During that period, Mauritius’ manufacturing sector increased by **8.4%** per year, on the average. During the same period, for purposes of comparison, the manufacturing sector of comparatively healthy Finland went up 4.5% per year, that of Ghana, .03% (That’s **3 per thousand**), while the former Soviet and still largely socialist Republic of Latvia experienced a mean 3.3% **shrinkage** per year.

If you want to guess where the capital for this rapid industrialization of Mauritius came from, you may want to look at the tag on the top back inside your sweater. This is not the place to develop a case study of Mauritius’ success, but I can’t help notice that Ghana has a corporate tax rate of 33 % (close to the US 35%), while Mauritius’ rate is 15%, one of the lowest in the world. Guess which tropical country multinational corporations find most attractive?

(All figures in the preceding six paragraphs are from the World Bank’s World Development Indicators 2002, except as otherwise specified.)

Does this mean that “globalization” is only a slogan for the ill informed, not a reality? Maybe not. It’s plausible that some multinational corporations are big enough relative to national governments to escape the rule of law in some countries. I cannot deal with this

important issue here. At any rate, it would require that one disentangle the effects of corporation size and power from those of corrupt, ineffectual and tyrannical national governments, a basketful of opportunities for ideologically motivated mischief.

Independent from this issue, it seems to me that there is both something new under the sun that harms the poor of this world and that there exists a real world-wide domination of the productions of one country in one economic sector, but that it is both ordinary, in accord with conventional economics, and beneficial, in its social consequences..

Broken Promises

Harm to the poor on a considerable scale occurs when rich countries suddenly violate the principles of free trade they publicly support, on the main. The US government and those of other post-industrial countries will periodically make a show of vaunting the merits of free trade on stages (such as the World Trade Organization) that guarantee worldwide publicity. These actions must encourage at least some of the most enterprising poor in poor countries to produce for distant markets they are not in a position to understand. When the governments of rich and large entities, such as the US, Japan and the European Union, suddenly inhibit the free movement of products, those enterprising poor people in poor countries suffer, and suffer disproportionately. Thus, the recent passing of new American farm subsidies legislation (in 2002) makes it difficult or impossible for small farmers in the Sahel area of Africa to compete on the world 's cotton markets with American growers (Thurow and Kilman, 2002)(6). The steel tariffs erected by the Bush administration - with the full complicity of Congress - must have similar effect on steelworkers in some of the Third World and Eastern European steel-producing countries. Neither of these policies nor the broken promises they imply, can be easily defended on moral or rational grounds. Directly, it can probably be shown that the economic actors of poor countries who embraced free trade end up worse off than they would be if they had toed to a more parochial ("autarkic") line. Indirectly, such breaches of faith by powerful rich countries contribute to the stagnation of the Third World by seeming to prove wrong those who adopted a stance leading most surely to economic development: embracers of production for worldwide markets. (In my experience, well-educated defenders of national economic "self-sufficiency" rarely care to argue against free trade **in principle**; instead, they rely on evidence that there is no real free trade but a poisonous international game where the dice are loaded against the poor in poor countries. Sometimes, they have a point.)

The American Motion Pictures Industry's Hegemony

The second, comparatively new phenomenon (less than 20 year old and growing) that can be seen as a form of globalization is the immense reach of American movies. The strong position of American screen productions in the world is not in itself completely new: In 1946, French motion picture industry workers demonstrated on the Champs-Elysees to protest the ascendancy of American movies in the French market. However, the multiplication of movie theaters everywhere in the world, including in poor countries, the retreat of several other important national film industries, the syndication of old movies

on television (itself with a near global reach), all ensured that publics everywhere would enjoy increasing opportunities to watch movies over the past twenty years. The uncheckable proliferation of video-cassettes and the negligible cost of reproducing them, including through copyright piracy, probably enhance again the availability of movies to everyone, including the most destitute populations. As the opportunity to watch movies in general, increased, the likelihood that those would be **American** movies grew very fast: Between 1970 and 1995, the American share of global motion picture production rose from less than **9% to 45%**, approximately. (UNESCO, 1995:8-1. Those are approximate figures because of irregularities and incompleteness of enumeration in this source but the order of magnitude is sure to be correct.) Correspondingly, out of 65 countries reporting for 1995, or 1994, or 1993, only four imported more movies from any country than they did from the US: Azebaidjan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Iran. Notably, Cuba imported more movies from the US than from any other country. (UNESCO, 1995:8-2). This short essay does not allow me to deal with the whole range of means by which American films reach their audiences, worldwide. Instead, I concentrate on film production and revenue figures which are easy to obtain and compare, remaining cognizant of the fact that these figures probably provide an attenuated vision of reality. For the same reasons, I refrain from discussing the spread of other American media. Roughly, it parallels that of the film industry.

From **600 to 750** movies are produced in the US every year, roughly as many as are produced by 33 European countries together (European Audiovisual Observatory 2001-[EAO]). If we consider motion pictures production on a national scale (there are reasons to do this, see Delacroix 2001), only the Chinese, Japanese and Indian industries are of similar magnitude. Hong-Kong and the rest of China jointly produced about **450** movies per year in the mid-nineties (UNESCO, 1995:8-1). Between **250 and 300** movies are turned out in Japan each year but they are not very successful, worldwide, except in the form of televised cartoons and other animation products. It's difficult to assess exactly the size of the Indian movie industry because, for administrative purposes, it only became officially an "industry" recently. It seems to be more or less comparable in size to the American industry. Production estimates range from a low of **400 to 500** movies per year in the past ten years ("http://www.indofilms" www.indofilms.com) to a high but probably reliable **800 to 900** between 1991 and 1993. (Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema 1994). A little fewer than one third of these films are produced in Hindi, the official indigenous language of India, the rest in a variety of local languages including Tamil, the predominant language of South India (Indofilms and Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema). Although the foreign revenue figures of the Indian movie industry are still modest, of the order of \$M250 per year recently, its products are said to be present in a wide variety of countries, including some beyond the Indian diaspora, such as Japan, Russia, and much of the Middle East (CIO 2002), Indonesia, and even Pakistan (Chatterjee, 2002) as well as in the former Soviet Central Asian republics (UNESCO, 1995:8-1). We all remember that the re-opening of Afghan movie theaters after the rout of the Taliban regime was widely reported by the international press as having been celebrated with Indian movies (7). (Approximately 430 to 450 movies were produced in the Philippines in 1994 and 1995. An incomplete data series prevents me from gauging whether this is a new durable trend or a flash in the pan. It may be that the Philippines should be added to this list.)

Finally, Colombian, Brazilian, and Mexican made-for-television soap operas seem to be shown in many parts of the Third World and in the former Communist countries but hard numbers are difficult to come by. So, I will keep this interesting fact out of my discussion.

These potential rivals notwithstanding, **today**, the American cinema dominates global entertainment. People watch American movies wherever **it's not forbidden**. By contrast, Americans watch very few foreign movies. In 2000, the share of **European** movies shown in the European Union, was estimated at only 22.5 %, the balance made up almost entirely of American movies, with the occasional Asian success. This, although collectively, Europeans produce about as many movies each year as do American studios, the fifteen countries of the European Union, about 2/3 as many (EAO 2001: 78). Most motion pictures made in Europe don't do well in Europe outside of their national markets. Hence, if we did an exact count of the spread of French movies in the UK, or of German movies shown in Italy, for example, the numbers would be minuscule (EAO 2001: 75). Even when a strong, democratic, prosperous country such as France, with a general educational status similar to or higher than that of the US, erects careful devices of economic dissuasion against foreign (read "American") movies, the results are underwhelming: About 60% of all admissions in France are to American movies, fewer than in Germany (about 75% and variable) but about the same as in Sweden, and more than in Luxembourg. (EAO 2002:96-97). **Only the American motion pictures industry has universal appeal.**

Just another National Specialization

The massive asymmetry in films exports between the US and the rest of the world may be the result of any number of factors. The fact that foreign movies occasionally do well in the US market (in recent years, "Life is Beautiful", from Italy, "Amélie", from France. The first, 1999, Pokemon cartoon from Japan grossed US\$85.7 , million, according to WSJ 7/19/02:w11, and, as forecasted by same - "Read my Lips", also from France, will do well) suggests that public preference, and possibly language barriers, are more likely to be issues than American distribution superiority, for example. Yet, language barriers may be less significant than one would guess. Luc Besson's "Jeanne d'Arc" ("The Messenger") released in 1999, purportedly produced in English to make it accessible to the polyglot EU markets and to the US market, registered **3.07** million admissions in the **European Union** in that year, against, **40** million for American-made "Star Wars Episode 1", 23 million for "Tarzan", almost 21 million for "The Matrix", and 7.4 million for "American Pie". Even the obscure, American-made "Patch Adams" did better (EAO 2001: 100). "The Messenger" flopped so badly in the American market that admissions and revenue figures are hard to find. For 1999 also, only one British production and two UK-US co-productions, all in English of course, figure among the top worldwide 50 admission getters. In Belgium where practically the whole population understands French , French-made movies obtain usually less than 10% market share, against an 80% share for American-made movies. (EAO 2001: 96). Finally, the foreign successes of Indian movies, almost all in languages understood hardly anywhere outside India and not everywhere in India, suggest again that language may be a small constraint.

The US consistently provides a more munificent environment for the movie industry than the European Union. (Thanks to its a large monolingual population, some argue, but see above.) The US movie market also grows somewhat faster than the European market: from about 1000 million cinema admissions in the US and about 600 million in the EU in 1987, to about 1400 and 800, respectively, in 2000. (EAO 2001: 87). Thus, the origins of the American dominance of the global motion pictures industry remind us of other national specializations. The Italians and the French, who always produced a lot of wine for their own consumption, also provide much of the wine for the rest of the world. (Some of their best buyers live in other wine-producing countries such as the US, Germany and Switzerland). This is exactly the situation international trade is supposed to generate: The economic actors of whatever country happen to have a knack for turning out or distributing certain goods, for whatever reason, including being ahead of the game by historical accident, will supply others, for the benefit of all. Note that there are not many clamors to protest the fact that Denmark, Brazil and Singapore, for example, seem to be largely excluded from the global system of wine production. (The fact that Canada insists on protecting its pathetic wine industry is the exception that proves [“tests”] the rule.) Note also, that under the current system of relatively free trade, it’s possible for producers from historically excluded areas to challenge the hegemonists: See the current success of Australian wines on the American market.

Do Movies Have any Influence?

The belief that movies are potent agents of change, especially with respect to values, is instinctive, widespread, and probably deeply anchored. Typical of this unexamined belief is the assertion by one Indian journalist that, “United States-based Indians take their kids to the [Indian] movies to reinforce cultural values. Weak on plot, the movies promote respect for seniors and the benefits of arranged marriages.” (CIO article: “Don’t call it Bollywood.”). Yet, there is not much **hard fact** substantiating the idea that movies (or television) do anything to people’s **values** or **attitudes**. Professional students of the cinema tend to be very skeptical of the possibility that they do anything at all.

In 278 pages including footnotes, Tom Stempel (2001), a teacher of cinema at Los Angeles City College, makes 158 people selected haphazardly (rather than at random) tell everything they know, remember and think about movies. The result is a wonderfully live document that shows that the effect a particular movie has on a person depends on a multiplicity of factors including age, sex, personal life experience, length of experience as a movie-goer, and on the largely accidental material and social conditions under which a movie is viewed, and of the company one keeps while viewing it.

Many of Stempel’s respondents reminisce on how a particular movie made no impression on them, or a bad impression the first time, while they enjoyed it the second time around, or vice-versa. Movies often serve as markers of one’s personal life (Stempel, 2001:118), like the Kennedy assassination, or the September 11/2001 attack, without necessarily being granted a meaning of their own. The movies viewers report as having made the longest lasting or the strongest impression on them are often not taken seriously by those who so acclaim them (Stempel,2001:155). These include “Star Wars”, “Raiders of the

Lost Ark”, “Close Encounters of the Third Kind”, among others, and “Jaws”. This speaks to the issue of *encephalokleptophobia* (see Delacroix and McAnany, 1999), the fear that the screen is stealing one’s mind: Viewers don’t give much attention even to those movies to which they say they pay attention. The only two examples in the book of movies altering attitudes (and even behavior, in this case) durably are “Jaws” and “Psycho”. (Several respondents affirm that they ceased enjoying swimming in open waters and even stopped swimming altogether after seeing “Jaws”. A couple state that they were afraid in the shower after seeing “Psycho”.)

Stempel recounts (2001:262) how in the 1920s, a morality league, convinced of the evilness spread by movies, spent \$200,000 – at least \$2 million of today, a princely research grant – to have social scientists study the impact of movies, only to be told that more often than not, movies don’t affect attitudes. He further refers (Stempel, 2001: 262, footnote 268) to Fowles’ review of studies of the effects of television (1992) which shows that for every study demonstrating influence, there is one demonstrating no influence.⁽⁸⁾ Finally, he cites several critics Stempel (2001:192), including Charles Champlin, of the LA Times, to the effect that viewers pick and choose and that movies exist only by the “consent of the entertained”, a posture that constitutes the overall conclusion of his book

There is also striking anecdotal evidence to support the viewpoint that movies are impotent to alter values. One Canadian newspaper commentator (Michael Adams, in The Globe and Mail, 7/4/2001) argues persuasively that twenty years of **increasing exposure** of Canadians to American movies (and television) are associated with a strong **value divergence** between the two neighbors: As Americans became more patriarchal in their outlook, Canadians veered more toward egalitarianism in matters of gender. (Notably, this divergence was observed for Quebec as well as for English-speaking Canada.)

The strongest evidence that the screen affects people comes from studies of television violence. Beginning as a curious skeptic, two years ago, I surveyed the literature both secular and scholarly on the subject and came out believing (in a somewhat tepid way) that there may be a relationship between it and violent behavior. My change of heart was effected by a careful and tentatively exhaustive meta-analysis by Paik and Comstock (1994). These scholars pieced together 217 empirical studies published (85%) or otherwise made publicly available (15%) between 1957 and 1990 and relating television viewing with anti-social behavior. They show robust and statistically significant cumulative evidence in support of the idea that exposure to television violence is associated with a propensity to engage in anti-social behavior. However, their meta-analysis is based on studies that are short on hard field measures of violent behavior that are also conceptually and methodologically independent from the independent variables, according to the authors’ own description (Paik and Comstock, 1994:524-525). This fact raises technical issues of common variance and it poses the question of unintended ideological bias. Moreover, overall, the studies included do not overcome completely the design difficulty implicit in the notion that violence-prone individuals may be more likely than others both to commit anti-social acts **and** to seek violent stimuli, on television and

elsewhere. Thus, the study does not speak directly to the specific issue of influence on attitudes. A 1999 editorial in the usually careful British medical journal *The Lancet* asserts that, contrary to a widespread impression, “It is inaccurate to imply that the published work (more than 1,000 scientific studies) strongly indicates a causal link between virtual and actual violence.” It is not rare for scholarly students of the media to point to the same lack of resolution. Thus, in a review of the National Television Violence Study 3,- covering the years 1994-1997, Chaffee (1999: 196) comments that criminal violence is decreasing at the same time as exposure to television violence is increasing.

The Virtuous Global Effects of American Motion Pictures Hegemony

If one concedes the possibility that screen products generate or encourage violence, one must also accept the possibility that they may affect behavior in socially desirable ways. (One can’t have it both ways: Television and, by extension, the cinema are either impotent or they may exercise a virtuous influence, as well as a pernicious one.) Thus, Curtin (1999) argues that satellite television circulates globally beneficently subversive (i.e. non-traditional), images of femininity, and therefore, alternative ways of being a woman. A moving testimony comes from the Albanian novelist Ismail Kadaré (1999): During the long night of Albanian communism (Albania was the most isolated country on Earth for forty years. Its paranoiac regime ended up cutting off relations with all countries except North Korea), Kadaré comments at length on how frequent exposure to garden-variety Western television courtroom drama ultimately induced among Albanians a distaste for personal blood feuds as old-fashioned or un-modern.

So, I pose the question: What **virtuous influence** may the ubiquitous American movies have on the rest of the world and, in particular, on the poor and on the downtrodden everywhere?

Even if one subscribes to the idea that movies don’t do much directly to alter either the values or the behavior of viewers, they inadvertently carry **factual** information, in their settings, as well as in the mundane aspects of their plots. I don’t see how some of that information cannot cumulatively have a liberating effect on those who live under less fortunate circumstances. American movies are shot mostly in the US (sometimes in Canada). They are directed mostly by American directors (or by Americanized Brits). Although Hollywood is one of the world centers of political correctness and of left-wing piousness, Hollywood films cannot help but convey to global audiences important realities of American life (and generic features of life in Western, secular, democratic, capitalist societies, in general). Among these:

Technological wizardry: From the parting of the Red Sea to *Jurassic Park*’s terrifying dinosaurs, the American cinema showcases evident mastery of the natural world (to whatever immature purposes, enraging French intellectuals). Unlike the situation in post-industrial countries, most people in the Third World and in the former socialist countries are farmers, miners or they work in manufacturing. Living as they do in direct contact

with production, it's no mystery to them that improvements in living conditions are often earned through technical progress.

The possibility of **material abundance** for ordinary people: In America, regular people (the 94+% of the work force who are employed at any one time and their families) generally own cars (or better, trucks). There is more than enough food for all; even the poor (especially the poor) are obese. Even if they look sloppy, Americans wear clothes of good quality (Levi's). The blue-collar class lives mostly in individual housing of impressive size and comfort, by world standards (9) (10);

The realization of **individual freedom**: See above about houses and automobiles, some of the best supports to personal autonomy ever devised. At the movies, American women commit adultery in vast throngs. Their husbands or lovers may murder them, or they may be punished by Fate, but mostly, they get off scot-free. At any rate, they are never beheaded or stoned to death courtesy of the national judicial system. Homosexuals are often mocked in American movies but the mildness of the mockery suggests that there is no national debate on whether the best way to dispose of homosexuals is to throw them from tall buildings or to topple heavy walls upon them (as was the case in Afghanistan under the Taliban, according to Rashid, 2000:115). In crime dramas, poor members of racial minorities who are railroaded by corrupt authorities have a lawyer to defend them in court. (Third World revolutionaries have trouble dealing with this fact.)

In conclusion, it seems to me that the belief that there is a new, evil globalization is a myth (or, at best, a hypothesis), because there is no new globalization or because it's not evil. The one sure thing about globalization is that the worldwide domination of the American cinema, including its most vulgar emanations, carries on a global scale its unintended message of the possibility that human wants may be satisfied and basic human dignity respected.

Footnotes

1 In my resolutely middle-class, but non-elite university (it's not Harvard), this perspective appears under two guises: a) at rallies and in a local newspaper put together by a small number of student activists; b) in assignments turned in by undergraduates in various Liberal Arts classes. Based on my occasional reading of the latter, I suspect this view of globalization is widespread.

2 Except for the undeniable fact that whenever production moves from one area to another, some temporary social and economic dislocation occurs in the area that is left behind. I think this dislocation is not trivial but that it must be measured against: a) The overall low rate of unemployment in developed countries and a consideration of its structural causes other than job flight overseas; b) The generous measures most of these countries have taken to soften the blow to individuals displaced by the removal of production to other countries. The US historical unemployment rate was around 6%, much before there was any job flight on any significant scale. European Union countries,

most of which have chronically higher unemployment, seem to encourage joblessness by extending benefits for months, sometimes years, to alleged job seekers without demanding much by way of proof of an active job search. Japanese companies just don't seem to lay off people no matter how much they move operations abroad. Both the EU countries and Japan also inadvertently promote unemployment by making it administratively difficult to lay off workers. A French restaurant owner told me that hiring in France was much more serious than getting married because the former was "pour la vie". In addition to the export of jobs, it may be possible to find socially deleterious consequences to some unwise lending policies of the International Monetary Fund, an organization that is often the object of left-wing ire. It's not obvious how this is an aspect of "globalization" except if we imagine that the IMF is engaged in a mysterious conspiracy to impoverish whole countries to serve the sinister purposes of multinational corporations. Anything is credible for those who don't care about evidence!

3 On September 26/02, six American clothing companies (including The Gap) and 23 Saipan manufacturers joined 19 predecessors and assented to settle a lawsuit brought about by Chinese contract workers. They agreed to create a \$20 million fund to address alleged past and future wrongs, including \$6.4 million for back pay; this without admitting any fault. Levi Strauss, a multinational known for its progressive social policies, refused to join the settlement, arguing that it had done nothing wrong and already possessed an adequate system to monitor its offshore suppliers. The total cost of the settlement to be shared with 49 others, including such giants as J.C. Penney, Sears Roebuck and Nordstrom would be equivalent to five **per thousand** of Levi Strauss, annual sales. The amount is small enough in relation to the sizes of the companies involved to sustain the possibility that Levi Strauss was standing on principle and that the other manufacturers settled a mere nuisance suit for the sake of convenience. It's not clear that any of these companies did anything wrong, by any standard.

4 The whole Arab world translates annually fifty times **fewer** books *per capita* than Greece (computed from the United Nations Arab Human Development Report 2002 and the World Development Indicators 2002). Of course, this has nothing to do directly with economic conditions. The cost of translating books is insignificant if there is a reading public.

5 Critics of globalization often argue in the same breath that it is responsible both for increasing poverty and for **intra-society inequality**. The latter observation is probably correct. Since the works of Kuznets, in the fifties, it has been shown repeatedly that rises in standards in living are normally associated with greater inequality. This is simply because it is not the case that all become richer at the same rate. Hence this criticism of globalization is, in fact, a roundabout admission of its possibly beneficial effects on all standards of living. It's possible to disapprove of inequality without confusing it with poverty.

6 This fact is not always lost on responsible political leaders in the Third World. The voice of the Minister of Agriculture of Benin managed to be heard above the cacophony of the 2002 Johannesburg United Nations World Summit on Sustainable

Development. “They are killing our farmers”, he said, in reference to agricultural subsidies (Wall Street Journal, 09/03/02:A20). Given that Benin is poorer than Haiti and Bangladesh (according to its Purchasing Power Parity of national income *per capita* – World Bank 2002:18), and given that farmers usually make up the poorest segment of the population in agricultural countries such as Benin, the minister’s statement may be literally true.

7 Westerners familiar with them as well as university-educated Indians often treat Hindi-language (“Bollywood”) movies dismissively. In the context of the present discussion, this might be a mistake. Although they tend to have childish plots and to display exaggerated acting, they also feature music, singing, and energetic dancing on a scale not seen in Hollywood since the forties, often beautiful scenery, and increasingly, satisfying violence. It would not be surprising if this cocktail appealed powerfully to the large segment of the world population that is illiterate or poorly educated, (mostly in the Third World). The American cinema’s hegemony may thus soon be challenged from this quarter. (Even as Indian audiences increasingly appreciate American movies; the two are not mutually exclusive). “Globalization” cuts more than one way.

8 There are more sophisticated approaches to the issue of movie influence, but they are far and few, I think. A study by a native-American sociologist (unfortunately a small study but sophisticated in design), brings a subtle answer to the question of what movies do to people (Shively, 1992). The author tries to capture how matched groups of whites and Sioux Indians perceive a classical Western movie where the bad guys are Comanche Indians. All subjects enjoy the movie; all say they like Westerns; all respondents, whites and Indians alike, state that they identify with the intended good guys, John Wayne and another white actor. Asked **why** they like who they like however, the whites mostly single out the moral integrity of the characters; the Sioux emphasize in the same proportions the bravery of the same characters; the whites appreciated the intelligence of the characters while the Sioux pay tribute to their toughness. While most of the whites think the movie is a good historical document, **none** of the Sioux thinks so.

9 A story in the 08/22/02 WSJ describes the plight of a Massachusetts couple of working class immigrants in their fifties with no dependent children. Their annual income approximates the national median. The couple’s house is paid for. These people have difficulties saving for the retirement they would like to take when the husband (the older of the two) is 62. One of the measures they have adopted to further their retirement objectives is to heat their swimming pool only a couple of months each year instead of all year around! The story also mentions that they like to eat out and that their dining bill “sometimes exceeds \$400 a month”!

10 I note that the unintentional transmission by movies of glimpses of the prosperity of ordinary Americans precedes by much the invention of the word globalization. I saw James Dean’s “Rebel without a Cause” as a French teen-ager, in the late fifties. I remember experiencing difficulty connecting mentally with the movie because I could not figure out where it was taking place. I understood Los Angeles well enough but I had trouble grasping the fact that the proximate setting was a high school because so many of

the boys had cars, a privilege few European adults enjoyed at the time. Once I had grasped the inescapable truth, it nudged my perception of the possible.

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