World Culture

Origins and Consequences

Frank J. Lechner and John Boli

Blackwell
Publishing

World Culture

To Jennifer and Lisbeth

World Culture

Origins and Consequences

Frank J. Lechner and John Boli

Blackwell
Publishing

© 2005 by Frank J. Lechner and John Boli

BLACKWELL PUBLISHING
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA
9600 Garsington Road, Oxford OX4 2DQ, UK
550 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

The right of Frank J. Lechner and John Boli to be identified as the Authors of this Work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs, and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

First published 2005 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

1 2005

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lechner, Frank.
World culture : origins and consequences / Frank J. Lechner and John Boli.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0-631-22676-1 (hardback : alk. paper) – ISBN 0-631-22677-X (pbk. : alk. paper) 1. Culture. I. Boli, John, 1948– II. Title.

HM621.L43 2005
306–dc22

2004023326

ISBN-13: 978-0-631-22676-5 (hardback : alk. paper) – ISBN-13: 0-631-22677-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Set in 10 on 13 pt Sabon
by SNP Best-set Typesetter Ltd, Hong Kong
Printed and bound in the United Kingdom
by TJ International, Padstow, Cornwall

The publisher's policy is to use permanent paper from mills that operate a sustainable forestry policy, and which has been manufactured from pulp processed using acid-free and elementary chlorine-free practices. Furthermore, the publisher ensures that the text paper and cover board used have met acceptable environmental accreditation standards.

For further information on
Blackwell Publishing, visit our website:
www.blackwellpublishing.com

Contents

List of Tables vi
Acknowledgments vii
List of Abbreviations viii

1 Introduction: The Olympic Games and the Meaning of World Culture 1
2 Analyzing World Culture: Alternative Theories 30
3 Tracing World Culture: A Brief History 60
4 Constructing World Culture: UN Meetings as Global Ritual 81
5 Sustaining World Culture: The Infrastructure of Technology and Organizations 109
6 Differentiating World Culture: National Identity and the Pursuit of Diversity 135
7 Transforming World Culture: The Antiglobalization Movement as Cultural Critique 153
8 Expanding World Culture: Pentecostalism as a Global Movement 173
9 Opposing World Culture: Islamism and the Clash of Civilizations 191
10 Instituting World Culture: The International Criminal Court and Global Governance 215
11 Epilogue: Reflections on World Culture 234

References 241
Index 261

Tables

Table 2.1 Summary of theoretical accounts 56
Table 4.1 Two conferences on human rights 105
Table 4.2 Two conferences on the human environment 106
Table 4.3 Two conferences on population 107
Table 4.4 Two conferences on women 108
Table 5.1 Connections reported by international organizations, 2000 127
Table 5.2 Number of INGOs and IGOs, 1909–2000 130
Table 5.3 Sectoral distribution of INGOs founded in three eras (percentages) 131

Acknowledgments

Many colleagues contributed to this book with ideas, comments, and conversations. We especially want to thank Terry Boswell, John Meyer, Roland Robertson, Jan Aart Scholte, and a Blackwell reviewer.

We are also grateful for the excellent assistance of many talented graduate students. Rob Constantine, Michael Elliott, Velina Petrova, and Anna Rubtsova helped to make this a better book. We thank the graduate students in our courses on globalization, social change, and sociological theory for helping us push our thinking forward.

Throughout this project, Ken Provencher at Blackwell Publishing provided his strong support and good judgment. It was a pleasure to work with him.

We dedicate this book to our wives, Jennifer Webster and Lisbeth Boli, with deepest thanks for their love and support.

Abbreviations

ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICGC	International Central Gospel Church
IGO	intergovernmental organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	international nongovernmental organization
IOC	International Olympic Committee
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
ITU	International Telecommunication Union
MNCs	multinational companies
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
SWIFT	Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication
TNCs	transnational corporations
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNCHE	United Nations Conference on the Human Environment
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
WSF	World Social Forum
WTO	World Trade Organization

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Olympic Games and the Meaning of World Culture

The Olympic Games and World Culture

The first modern Olympiad, held in Athens in 1896, hardly lived up to the grand vision of its organizers. Though they seemed an "indescribable spectacle" to some participants, those Games were a decidedly modest affair (MacAloon 1981: Ch. 7). Several dozen athletes from just a few countries competed in events, both classical and newfangled, before a Greek audience whose enthusiasm found no resonance abroad. The American delegation, one of the largest, consisted of college athletes from Princeton and Harvard and arrived barely in time, not knowing that Greece followed the Julian rather than the Gregorian calendar. The opening and closing ceremonies derived some dignity from the participation of King George of Greece, who had supported staging the event for political reasons, but they involved no further pageantry. The winner in discus throwing had not practiced much (he was an English tourist who had signed up for tennis on the spur of the moment) and the famed winner of the marathon was a peasant rather than a trained athlete – amateurs all, in more than one sense. Newspaper coverage was limited – a few articles in major French and English newspapers, a small number of pieces in the *New York Times* – and far less prominent than that for domestic events. Though satisfied that his brainchild had come to life, even Baron Pierre de Coubertin, the moving force behind the "restoration" of the Olympic Games, appears to have felt some disappointment, not least because the Greeks seemed eager to turn his vision of an international sports festival into a Greek event, always to be held on Greek soil (ibid.: 241ff.). When the Games were over, the Olympic movement's future was still in doubt. Subsequent Olympiads at Paris and St. Louis, disorganized appendages to the world expositions held in those cities, did little to solidify its fortunes. And yet, from these inauspicious begin-

nings, the Olympics grew to become a grand spectacle, the largest regularly staged event in the world (Rothenbuhler 1989).

Both the surprising success of the Olympic Games as a quintessential global event and their actual content as ritual performance tell us much about world culture. Claiming the attention of a global audience, the Games have helped to foster a shared awareness of living in one world society. Run according to now-familiar rules, they show how people around the globe increasingly organize their common life on the basis of shared knowledge and principles. As the focus of athletic ambition for individuals and nations alike, they express widely shared values. The experience of both participants and audience shows how the world now has a repertoire of symbolic forms that enable, in fact impel, people to become conscious of the world as a single place and act in accordance with that consciousness. In this sense, the Olympic Games embody world culture. To some, that may sound unduly grandiose. After all, critics have derided the Games as the plaything of right-wing aristocrats, an arena for the mindless pursuit of national glory, and a hypocritical display of crass commercialism. Writing in Atlanta, the city that hosted the 1996 Olympics to distinctly mixed reviews, we sympathize with such interpretations. Yet as an event and institution embodying a certain kind of global consciousness, knowledge, and values, the Olympic Games also illustrate important features of world culture.

Although it is risky to interpret the late nineteenth-century founding of the modern Olympics with the benefit of hindsight, that history does have some bearing on the movement's later success as a global event. When Pierre de Coubertin first conceived of the idea of reviving the Olympic Games, he sought support among his friends in aristocratic circles. Members of an elite that cultivated ties across national boundaries, not beholden to any government, they endorsed his plans and several served as members of the fledgling International Olympic Committee (IOC). Not all senior figures in the early movement were aristocrats, to be sure, but the aristocrats' role left its imprint. From the beginning, the IOC would be run as a secretive, independent organization, professedly above partisanship of any sort, which capitalized on the connections of its elite leadership. While this may now seem the quaint legacy of a world long lost, in some respects the early IOC was very much a modern creation. It was, in fact, only one of many voluntary international organizations devoted to a humanitarian vision founded in the late nineteenth century. Its classic predecessor, of course, is the International Committee of the Red Cross, but several hundred other organizations had become active as well. Coubertin's initiative, modest though its initial accomplishments were, was part of a welter of similar

activities in numerous fields, on both sides of the Atlantic, in which private citizens articulated high-minded ideals – in other words, it contributed to "idealistic internationalism" (Hoberman 1995). The Olympics thus represent movements that, important in their own right, together also set a precedent for their flourishing after the Second World War.

Coubertin envisioned the Games as distinctly international events. They would be staged in different countries every four years; they would bring together athletes from many different nations. In recognizing the importance of national loyalties and requiring that athletes represent nations – another fateful legacy of the early days – Coubertin's thinking obviously reflected the realities of the age. But he was no nationalist. Even before working on the Olympic revival, he had opposed French sports organizations devoted mainly to French glory. Notwithstanding his own experience, he also did not think of himself as a cosmopolitan. What the world needed, he thought, was not the cosmopolitanism of those who have no country, but rather the internationalism of "those who love their country above all, who seek to draw to it the friendship of foreigners by professing for the countries of those foreigners an intelligent and enlightened sympathy" (quoted in MacAloon 1981: 265–6). Accordingly, the Games would promote encounters in which, as Coubertin's biographer summarizes it, "real cultural differences were discovered and celebrated," leading foreigners to "true experiences of common humanity" (ibid.: 267). Apart from their Greek heritage, the Olympics would favor no country or culture but remain neutral, devoted only to their own cause, a secular religion capable of binding humanity as a whole. In this way, the Games would also aid the cause of peace among nations. The Olympics, then, arose as a hopeful expression of "pan-human" unity at a time when the nation-state seemed inexorably on the rise (ibid.: 142). Balancing national sentiment against universal aspiration, the Olympic vision thus displayed a close affinity with the chief Western ideological currents of its day. The essential "contest" in the constitution of the Olympics (Hoberman 1995: 15) still expresses larger cultural forces that swirl around it.

This vision was not just an exercise in political philosophy; it also enshrined sports as moral activity, amateur athleticism as virtue. Coubertin had long been interested in Thomas Arnold's use of sports as part of moral education in his public school at Rugby. In such English schools, Coubertin thought, sports helps to form character and devotion to the public good. Physical activity produces "a happy equilibrium in the moral domain"; in sport, liberty "is complete" and courage exalted; it aids morality by "pacifying the senses and calming the imagination" (MacAloon 1981: 81).

Considering athletics essential to overall intellectual development, he had actively promoted physical education in France. The Olympics were Coubertin's effort to elevate his moral vision of the athlete to a higher level. While this particular vision did not command any great consensus at the time, Coubertin did tap into the rapidly expanding interest in organized sports in Europe and America. The rules of several games were being worked out, contests proliferated, participation across social classes increased, and sports performances were beginning to find an audience. International organizations were established for 16 sports before the First World War, including the International Skating Union in 1892 and football's FIFA in 1904 (Van Bottenburg 2001: 5). Prized in most sports was masculine physical prowess displayed through athletic competition. With his Olympic project, Coubertin thus helped to channel an emerging transnational trend. Over time, it fostered, and in turn benefited from, the continuing diffusion of sports as a rationally organized, systematically pursued activity, which ultimately crystallized into a "global sporting system" (ibid.: 2, Ch. 6).

The Olympics' nineteenth-century movement heritage, their tension-ridden version of internationalism, and their role in the rationalization of one segment of popular culture all connect the Games to the larger story of world culture we tell in this book. World culture as we know it today took organized form in the nineteenth century and nongovernmental organizations contributed much to it. World culture, as we stress throughout this book, is not all of a piece, but rather shot through with tension and contradiction, notably between forms of particularism and universalism. World culture has become ever more rationalized, in part the work of specialists running specialized institutions according to formal rules. The Olympics are nicely illustrative in these respects, but without their enormous expansion in scale and reach they would hardly justify the attention we have given to their origins. That expansion took several forms.

The Games themselves became vastly more elaborate. At the very first Olympiad, events like swimming and tennis were already added to the ancient disciplines it was presumed to revive. Over time, from the early introduction of judo to the later inclusion of beach volleyball and table tennis, more and more sports became part of the Games. Inclusion in the Olympics became the goal of many international sports communities, for it constituted a stamp of global acceptance. To qualify, sports had to satisfy IOC demands, leading to similarity in the way they were organized. At a minimum, every self-respecting sport needed its own international organization. At the same time, the sheer diversity of sports made the Games a

much more varied spectacle. Thus, while sports were being standardized, the Olympics were also allowing different forms to flourish on a global stage.

The Games also expanded dramatically in size. After the Second World War, they attracted representatives from both the communist bloc and newly independent countries, ultimately making the Olympics a globally inclusive event; in parallel, new countries also gained representation on the IOC board (Guttmann 1984: Ch. 14). In principle, all countries were entitled to participate, to compete on an equal basis in the same arena. As the world map was covered by independent nation-states, so were the Olympic playing fields. However, the Games hardly reflected a world in which everyone agreed on the greater common good. The Soviet Union challenged IOC precedent by appointing its own representatives; African governments challenged both South African and Rhodesian participation; Indonesia threatened to organize alternative games; Israel's participation came under fire from Islamic countries. Real-world fissures greatly disturbed the Elysian visions of Lausanne. Nor were participants die-hard believers in Coubertin's internationalist vision. As the games globalized, the desire of countries to demonstrate national greatness increased as well. Medal counts counted. Otherwise modestly endowed countries like East Germany and Cuba made it a point to shine at the Games. While in its rules and ritual the Olympics enshrined the formal equality of nations, they thus also provided a forum for ideological contest and national self-elevation.

The most dramatic transformation of the Olympics occurred in the 1960s when the Games became a television event, a mass spectacle for a growing global audience. From flickering images for a primarily Western public, they grew to become a slickly produced package broadcast around the world. Only a few events, such as the World Cup football finals, could match the simultaneous, shared interest in the same event by billions of people that marked the Olympics as a global festival (Tomlinson 1996). In this regard, the Olympics uniquely demonstrated the kind of integration made possible by new advances in communication and transportation. For a few weeks every four years, the Summer Games produced an undeniable common global awareness. This increased interest was the honey that attracted the corporate bears. Abetted by the IOC, corporations sought to exploit commercial opportunities by serving as sponsors. American commercial television became the prime source of funding. The Games turned into a billboard, one giant kaleidoscope of advertisements. While the Games at least tried to keep their distance from politics, about capitalism they were never neutral.

However, their message is not only commercial. With the advent of television, organizing countries also gained a stage on which they could display themselves. The opening ceremonies, in particular, gradually turned into densely symbolic performances. From the "Spielbergian spell" cast by the Hollywood version of American history in Los Angeles in 1984, to the uplifting narrative of national revival, reconciliation, and global unity in Seoul in 1988, to the linking of Catalan and Spanish themes to a novel interpretation of Greek history in Barcelona in 1992, to the projection of the "New South" in Atlanta in 1996, to the multicultural recognition of aboriginal identity in Sydney in 2000, and the Athens 2004 emphasis on the Greek origins of the Games – these ceremonies each "arrogated" universal Olympic ideals in the context of particular histories and cultures, simultaneously celebrating the local and the global (Tomlinson 1996: 590ff.; the official Athens theme was "Celebrating Humanity"). As ritual, they both express and contain the tensions inherent in the Games themselves, tensions that are also intrinsic features of contemporary world culture.

In this way, the Olympics begin to tell our story of world culture – the culture of world society, comprising norms and knowledge shared across state boundaries, rooted in nineteenth-century Western culture but since globalized, promoted by nongovernmental organizations as well as for-profit corporations, intimately tied to the rationalization of institutions, enacted on particular occasions that generate global awareness, carried by the infrastructure of world society, spurred by market forces, riven by tension and contradiction, and expressed in the multiple ways particular groups relate to universal ideals.

To complement the example of the Olympics this chapter first describes other ways in which world culture is embedded in numerous organizations and activities, including many that are not ostensibly global in scope. We then explain how we think about culture generally and how we distinguish "world" culture from other kinds. Previewing an important theme in this book, we stress that many elements of world culture are contested. We conclude with a summary of the case we want to make and an outline of the chapters to come.

Culture in World Society

Even if the Olympics are a richly symbolic event, one could argue that they are exceptional rather than representative. A now biennial television event

comprising a few weeks of entertaining competition hardly concerns most people most of the time. Does this mean that the world culture it expresses is some rarefied sphere floating above the "real world"? We argue that it is not. Many ordinary activities and institutions are saturated with it. In fact, all the things that make the world one – its infrastructure, economy, state system, law, and global problems – are deeply "cultural."

Infrastructure

For the experienced traveler, flying across oceans has become a mundane routine. That very routine represents a form of common knowledge among the wealthier classes of the world. They know all too well how to order a ticket, stand in line, find their way around airports, and go through customs. They know how to squeeze their bodies into seats and stay put for hours. As international travelers, they share a slice of world culture, a set of shared assumptions and expectations. Mistaking the reality of air transportation for a species of cosmopolitanism, they might even perceive themselves as a cultural vanguard. In the air, the American tourist, Japanese executive, and African official have more in common with each other than with their countrymen. Their cultural experience is not limited to the motions of traveling itself (cf. Tomlinson 1999: 4ff.; Iyer 2000). Crossing borders, they encounter far-flung cultures. As people move, cultures mix. At least for a privileged elite, the culture of the neighborhood may lose its appeal by comparison with the pleasures of other places. Air travel thus intensifies the "deterritorialization" many have ascribed to social life in the era of globalization (Scholte 2000). Floating routinely at 30,000 feet produces a distinct view of the world.

We would not want to deny the cultural effects of air travel or deflate its cosmopolitan potential, but our own take on it is slightly different. The very fabric of the civil aviation system is part of world culture. In less than a century, scientists and engineers have figured out how to build durable long-distance airplanes, how to operate them safely and enable them to communicate. Executives have found ways to run airlines and set schedules more or less reliably. Public officials have devised ways of monitoring safety and controlling traffic. While a portion of the airline industry serves only a domestic market, especially in the United States, much of it concentrates on international travel. The system that makes even domestic travel possible depends on close coordination of policies and procedures across national boundaries. The relevant standards, some set by governmental but

many by private-sector groups, apply universally. A country or airline wishing to become part of the system is required to abide by strict norms. This is not to suggest that aviation is a cozy business: competition is stiff, and many countries deviate from the norm. However, this system does embody a conception of the world as a single place, a conception shared by engineers, pilots, officials, and executives. It is based on a vast foundation of universal, technical knowledge, authoritatively produced by experts. It functions thanks to commonly accepted norms, developed by experts and enforced by state and other authorities. Among the public at large, it commands enormous trust in the rational enterprise of moving millions of people across thousands of miles. With only slight exaggeration, we can therefore say that the infrastructure of civil aviation is an intricate world-cultural system, a highly systematized world-view given material form in a specialized, rule-bound global institution.

Economy

At the end of the twentieth century, the world economy seemed to reach a new level of integration. More than a trillion dollars' worth of currency changed hands in foreign exchange markets every day; stock markets attracted capital from around the globe; commodities were produced in ever-widening networks; newly industrializing countries sought their fortunes in international trade. Workers, companies, and countries became exposed to new competition. Affluent consumers became accustomed to a steady supply of cheap goods from foreign sources. As the web of integration tightened, the liabilities of interdependence increased as well: Western banks absorbed losses from loans to emerging markets; poor people in debtor countries particularly felt the sting of market discipline. After the end of the Cold War, the business of the world was business. Globalization, in the new conventional wisdom, meant making the world safe for capitalist free markets. As observers on the left and the right agreed, capitalism had taken over. The driving force in this system was the relentless pursuit of profit in the market. As the unintended consequence of millions of self-interested decisions by market players, the world was becoming a single economic system.

Yet this economic integration, real enough in its consequences, hardly was an eruption of blind forces. For many years, some academics and politicians in Britain and the USA had argued for the opening up of markets and a reduction in government's role – in other words, for global liberalization

(Yergin and Stanislaw 1998). As the role of international organizations like the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and the World Bank expanded to promote free markets and countries' stable growth, they operated under what came to be called the "Washington Consensus" about what constituted sensible goals and policies. However, this consensus only expressed in the form of explicit policy an increasingly shared commitment to markets as vehicles of progress, to economic competition as essential to realizing individual freedom, to GDP (gross domestic product) growth as a marker of collective value. Complementing such ideological scaffolding of capitalism, labeled "neoliberalism" by skeptical observers (see Chapter 7), was the expansion of the knowledge and categories that make a global economy run. Internationally active enterprises were to be organized in corporate form; their success had to judged by rational accounting methods; transactions depended on common understanding of contractual obligations; for the purpose of rational enterprise, labor had to be treated as a factor of production.

As in the case of global infrastructure, then, the very fabric of the global economy is part and parcel of world culture. Economic integration is more than a material juggernaut. It is, at least in part, the realization of ideas. Free markets themselves, after all, are a set of ideas, as Karl Polanyi showed in discussing an earlier period of globalizing fervor (Polanyi 1985). To seek material advancement through economic activity freed from social constraint, to encourage endless technical progress for the sake of competitive advantage, to pit workers and countries against each other in ceaseless battle, all that is part of a distinctive world-view. By the end of the twentieth century, that view had become second nature to many people around the globe. To many business people, public officials, and academics, the world-view also had become socially real: it governed a single system operating under a single set of rules. What made the system work was the very fact that, at least in their international dealings, the main players could rely on common knowledge about what constituted rational economic activity. The Washington Consensus that shaped the actions of international organizations was only one version of this larger consensus (Stiglitz 2002: 16, 53). The world economy, too, had become a world-cultural system.

Governance

By the end of the twentieth century, the United Nations (UN) had close to two hundred members. Although control over some territories was still in

dispute, with the end of colonialism virtually all the world was fully governed by independent nation-states. According to some optimists, economic integration would now tie states together more intimately. They would have to pursue their interests in peaceful ways: "no two countries with a McDonald's desired to go to war with each other," as one popular version of this argument had it (Friedman 1999: Ch. 12). Others argued that new forms of governance, for example through the UN itself, would bind states together as part of a larger whole. In 1990, Iraq confounded those expectations by invading Kuwait, claiming it as its rightful possession. Concerned about Iraq's control of oil supplies and the power imbalance in the region, an international coalition beat back Saddam Hussein's forces, thus vindicating Kuwait's integrity as a state. Though the coalition acted under UN authority, the Gulf War was an exercise in hard-headed realism on all sides. It showed that states were still the prime repositories of force in the world. According to the most common form of realism, still conventional wisdom among statesmen and most academics, states are rational actors pursuing their security and power interests to the best of their ability in a world without shared norms or central authority (Waltz 1979). Order comes about through coalitions and self-help, through successful deterrence or victory in war. But in world politics nothing is really secure: underneath a veneer of civilized agreement, the war of all against all continues. What matters in that war, hot or cold, is the command of people, tanks, and missiles, as the Gulf War seemed to confirm. The world of the 1990s had yet to shed the legacy of 1648, when the Treaty of Westphalia affirmed the principle of state sovereignty among self-interested war-making states.

Once again, we accept the notion that states have interests, pursue power, and collide on occasion. But what does it mean to say that Kuwait, Namibia, and China are all "states"? Where do their interests come from, and what entitles them to pursue power as they see fit? Why should the world be anarchic in the first place? For all the hardware they have at their command, for all the devastation they can cause, states are the institutional form of an idea, namely that each part of the earth should be ruled exclusively by a single government that acts on behalf of "its" people in exercising sovereignty. However impregnable a state may seem, it exists by the grace of mutual recognition, its authority conferred by the system in which it operates. Like capitalism, enmity and political interdependence are cultural forms (Wendt 1999: 136). What states want is not something they can make up by themselves; rather, what they want depends on the range of interests their shared knowledge defines as appropriate and worth pursu-

ing (ibid.: 372). The state system, therefore, embodies a common understanding across states that they do indeed constitute a single system. Its apparent anarchy reflects underlying common knowledge of what it takes to be a state. This anarchy is not a condition in which “anything goes”; instead, state behavior is constrained by many shared norms, though of course some of these have been observed very imperfectly by the likes of Saddam Hussein, the former dictator of Iraq. As we will show in a later chapter, global governance is by no means limited to the actions of states. Here we only illustrate the point that the legacy of 1648 is also a cultural one, since this dimension of world politics constitutes a world-cultural system in its own right.

Law

In the spring of 2001, a Belgian court convicted four Rwandans, two nuns among them, for their role in the genocide against the Tutsis. UN war crimes tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda had already sentenced many others. People guilty of genocide or crimes against humanity, it seemed, were now being held accountable under international law. Heartening as those convictions might appear, the law obviously reached only a few instances of egregious cruelty. No similar acts in Chechnya, Liberia, or Afghanistan had yet been punished. The enforcement of international law was still a matter of political convenience. If major powers supported legal action, it would happen; if not, international law remained toothless doctrine. Thus realism was vindicated after all.

Or was it? The war crimes prosecutions, however selective, are only the tip of a moving iceberg. International law already encompasses much more than the most dramatic violations of the Yugoslav and Rwandan cases. Business transactions are governed by rules – pertaining to contracts, insurance, and the like – that are understood across the globe. The dealings of states are often based on treaties and conventions that have binding force. Numerous tribunals are engaged in settling disputes. The International Criminal Court, discussed in Chapter 10, is designed to be a permanent body charged with pursuing crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide. Without claiming that international law functions as coherently and effectively as established municipal systems, it is fair to say that at the beginning of the twenty-first century, a new kind of “world law” is growing (Berman 1995). This world law is rooted in the realization of relevant judges, lawyers, and officials that there is one world, the problems of which

require the impartial application of one set of rules. It comprises expanding doctrines of contract, state responsibility, and human rights. It applies to many actors besides states as parties to be held accountable. As a systematic body of rules and principles, implemented by an ever-expanding set of institutions, world law is growing into a single tradition enveloping the globe – a part of world culture.

Global problems

In 2001, the world observed the twentieth anniversary of the discovery of HIV/AIDS as a new disease. Experts described the course of the disease in detail, scientists reviewed progress in research, reporters conveyed the hardships experienced across Africa, and activists advocated new policies on drug pricing and distribution. The UN Secretary-General called for a multibillion-dollar global effort to combat the disease. Since the early 1980s, that effort had already greatly intensified. The expanded scope of HIV/AIDS research and drug production, combined with the political attention and organizational resources it had attracted, made the disease the object of a global campaign. Obviously, much was at stake in that campaign: without a sustained effort, many Third World countries risked losing a substantial portion of their younger generations.

The campaign paralleled similar efforts to deal with other global problems by transnational means. It was remarkable in many ways. In less than 20 years, consensus emerged among experts, officials, and indeed a large part of the public that HIV/AIDS constituted a "pandemic," a plague that involved the whole world and affected the whole world. Both in basic research and in public health studies, experts compiled a substantial body of common knowledge about origins, transmission, and possible treatments. Around HIV/AIDS grew a community of patients and advocates turning the disease into an object of global moral concern. They appealed to the human rights of patients as individual persons entitled to the caring concern of the world community. They defined the obligations of states and companies to people and principles that transcended their own interests. Once it was defined as an object of global concern, HIV/AIDS triggered substantial efforts by all kinds of international organizations, from UNAIDS (the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS) and the World Health Organization to Doctors Without Borders and the International HIV/AIDS Alliance. In the way it dramatizes the oneness of the world, draws on authoritative science, and expands the scope of common

moral concern, the global HIV/AIDS campaign is thus also a world-cultural project.

Enacting World Culture

World culture is embodied in extraordinary events like the Olympic Games and it is at work in travel, commerce, conflict, and research. However, its influence goes deeper than these examples convey. World culture also shapes all kinds of ordinary activities that do not have any ostensible global focus. Analyzing one such activity in some detail further helps to clarify what we mean by world culture.

Consider a local chess club in a small town, anywhere in the world. The players abide by global rules governing the play of the game. These rules are formally overseen by the World Chess Federation (WCF), the authoritative chess body at the global level. The chess enthusiasts study the play of international grand masters who have achieved global recognition through major tournaments and high placement in the world chess rankings, which are generated by the WCF. For the most part, local players are only "enactors" of world (chess) culture: they conform to rules coming from the global arena, they learn from external sources which master players (past and present) are to be admired and which masterful books on strategy and tactics are to be purchased, they follow tournaments in distant places they have never seen, and they read newspaper chess columns by world-famous players whose hands they will never shake. Few and far between are the local players of unusual ability and feel for the game who make even a single contribution to the core of what might be called the world chess subculture – the game as such – but some do, by making brilliant plays and winning striking victories that boost them above the local and national levels into the rarified atmosphere of world chess.

However, the game of chess as such is not the sum total of the subculture of world chess. The subculture also includes principles, norms, and models, often informal, about such matters as how to run a chess club, how to communicate about chess, proper and improper ways to approach master players, and so on. For example, the global model of a chess club points organizers to setting up a voluntary, nonexclusive, democratic organization. Anyone can be a member, all members are expected to help with the club's activities, officers (if any) are chosen by one-member, one-vote elections, and club finances and decision making are open matters. Information is to be freely shared, events are to be announced well in advance and made

known to all of the members, and so on. Thus, the organizational model enacted by chess clubs tends to be fairly standardized globally; a chess player from one locale is likely to find many similarities between his club and others he might visit on, say, a world chess tour. Notable variations may occur; for example, some clubs may exclude women or particular ethnic groups. The standardized model is not wholly determinative in this respect.

Obviously, the non-chess dimensions of the culture defining and shaping chess clubs around the world are not peculiar to chess. World culture supplies formal and informal rules about such dimensions for a plethora of global subcultures, most of them overseen by one – or, in some cases, two or several – peak global organizations, usually international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs). Members of the subculture comply with the rules, for the most part willingly, because they accord with deeper principles of world culture that make these rules appear fair, reasonable, sensible, even natural. That a chess club should be nonexclusive accords with the principle of equal treatment of all, that is, nondiscrimination – and what could be more sensible and fair than that anyone who is interested in chess should be welcome to play? That a bunch of eager amateurs should not swarm about a grand master demanding autographs and advice while he is in the midst of a championship match accords not only with a basic principle of chess – a calm, quiet atmosphere is crucial for the concentrated thought required to make good moves – but also with the principle of respect for the integrity and dignity of the individual, indeed, all individuals. Thus, a complex set of elements of world culture, some of great generality that apply to many social arenas, others that apply to a number of chess-like activities, and still others that are specific to chess as such, constitute the global chess subculture. Many are implicit, understood, or taken for granted, while others are explicitly expressed in the formal rules of the game, in the constitution of the World Chess Federation, in the bylaws of the local chess club, and so on.

The example thus far illustrates the constitutive and directive capacity of world (chess) (sub-)culture. Also important is world culture's generative power, for it helps account for the dynamic aspects of global development. Because the global model of the "chess club" is widely known, it is easy for chess enthusiasts to start a club and begin organizing competitions. In this way, the world chess subculture fosters new organizations tied into global structures. Because the World Chess Federation maintains systematic rankings of world-class players, with corresponding rankings by national chess organizations, strong amateurs gain motivation to improve

their play and, in some cases, eventually become innovative contributors to the game. Indeed, the structure of global chess makes innovation and evolution inevitable, since it is built around competition, intensive study, and the rapid dissemination of information about new openings, surprising defense strategies, twists on classic lines of attack, and so on.

As the chess example illustrates, most world-culture doing is enactment – individuals and organizations adopt and implement the rules, norms, and principles of global chess on a largely wholesale basis. Local variations and departures from standard models occur, in response to local circumstances and conditions, but innovation is limited and often even regretted. In this respect, world culture is like culture at any other level. Culture provides the cognitive framework by which we understand the world and orient ourselves to it. It also provides a huge amount of cognitive detail that is interpreted as meaningful by those who enact it, and it is this cognitive detail that makes it possible to manage everyday reality. We inevitably take this cognitive detail for granted; it is the very definition of reality that is provided for us by culture. If we did not treat it as natural and normal, we would find ourselves at every moment crushed by the immense load of puzzlement and confusion that would confront us in the dense social milieu in which we live.

Of course, enactment is also constructive, i.e., an indicator of "agency," but only in the limited sense that it tautologically reproduces the culture being enacted. It makes sense to reserve the notion of cultural construction for the development or propagation of cultural innovation (or cultural revival, which is rather common), that is, for departures from institutionalized rules, models, and principles. However, this form of construction or agency can occur only when actors are firmly anchored in the solid bedrock of cultural enactment. The full implications of this central feature of culture for the actors who enact, reproduce, and occasionally construct world culture will emerge in later chapters.

Thinking about Culture

In analyzing world culture, we apply a particular way of thinking about culture more generally. Since our main purpose is to show the strength of this way of thinking by example, we refrain from extended conceptual discussion. For the sake of clarity, though without attempting an overly restrictive formal definition, we briefly want to explicate the way we use the concept of "culture." Building on several sociological traditions that were

famously brought together in the social-constructionist analysis of Berger and Luckmann (1966), we think of culture as socially shared symbolic and meaning systems that become embedded in objects, organizations, and people yet also exceed what particular individuals can grasp and accumulate in an increasingly systematic fashion.

Culture is often discussed as if it were essentially a complex set of abstractions. It refers to conceptions of the nature of things, principles of social organization, norms regarding proper behavior, patterned "habits" or "folkways," and similar ideas. All of these are noticeably abstract and general. Culture is thus treated like a kind of disembodied symbolism or world-view that floats freely above the mundane details of everyday life. This tendency to speak of culture as free-floating is especially pronounced when world culture is at issue, not least because the "globality" of world culture is itself considered a high-order abstraction.

A dual misunderstanding is at work here. On the one hand, regardless of the level of reality under discussion, be it "local," "national," or global, culture is always and inevitably abstract. Culture operates in and through language, whether it is guiding interaction in routine, face-to-face encounters (e.g., friends sharing coffee and gossiping about indiscretions by their co-workers) or setting the framework for the grandest global phenomena (e.g., capitalist forces impelling the IMF to impose draconian structural adjustment programs on debt-ridden states). But language is inherently abstract. For example, "friend" is a highly general category of broad applicability that can refer to innumerable past or potential instances, and any moderately competent user of a language can correctly apply this abstract category to concrete instances without having to think about it. "Gossip" is a similarly general category applicable to innumerable instances, as are "international organization" and "transnational social movement" and "global network." These latter instances, in fact, are perhaps less abstract than "friend" or "gossip" because they refer to fewer possible instances and could even be reduced to actual lists.

In this light, world culture is not more abstract than any other level of culture, and its elements may be less abstract than many elements of culture at smaller scales or more immediate settings. However, this conclusion is also misleading to the extent that it still seems to represent culture as free-floating, detached, or at some remove from everyday reality. Culture has the strikingly tautological habit of becoming incorporated into the very "stuff" that it defines, into the things that owe their existence and meaning to the cultural complex that constitutes them. Reversing the common observation that individuals, groups, and organizations are "embedded" in their

surrounding cultural environments, we should also think of culture as embedded in the objects, actors, scenes, and structures whose nature and operations are culturally organized. It is embedded in purposive organizations, technical structures, formalized rules, and constitutional documents. Even the propensities, capacities, and potential pathologies of individuals are embodiments of culture. People growing up in a given cultural complex cannot turn out "any old way"; the enveloping culture sharply restricts the possibilities.

Another less noticed aspect of the "culture work" that builds culture into people, organizations, rules, and documents is the longevity of cultural construction processes, increasingly explicit and deliberate, that lead to the formalized embedding of culture in structure. For example, a set of massive, multifaceted, long-term cultural processes eventually produced (and are therefore embedded in) the limited liability corporation, an artificial entity having both legal "personality" and a range of rights and obligations that are entirely taken for granted – so much so that corporations can now be easily and cheaply created out of thin air in huge numbers by quite ordinary individuals. To understand the culture embedded in the corporation, one needs to understand the cultural processes that produced it and the subsequent processes that have changed its meaning and purpose over several centuries.

This discussion gives the lie to a third misunderstanding about culture – that it is primarily to be found "in people's heads." Socialization, acculturation, learning, and similar theories implicitly make this assumption, and we would hardly dispute the conventional understanding that cultural creation takes place above all in the head. We nonetheless insist on the cultural poverty of people's heads. As containers of culture, they are not especially helpful, in two senses. The first is trivial but still worth emphasizing: any given head is cognizant of a negligible portion of the culture in which it is embedded (i.e., the cultural complex that directly orders the daily life, meaning system, functionality, and life chances of the individual attached to the head). More significant is the extension of this triviality: no matter how many heads we put together, their collective contents will still constitute only a small, and usually negligible, proportion of all of the enveloping culture.

How is it possible that all the culture in all the heads of all the world does not approach the sum of all culture that embeds, shapes, guides, informs, and ultimately constitutes the being and meaning of all those individuals-attached-to-heads? We can leave aside history for the moment – the long legacy and vast accumulated residue of past cultures which have

shaped contemporary cultures in innumerable ways. Even currently active, identifiable culture is far more than the sum of all the contents of all the world's heads. How can this be?

Four factors, at least, are important in accounting for this unlikely situation. First, as far as heads go, cultural redundancy is epidemic: most of the cultural cognizance of any particular head overlaps with that of many other heads. (The French sociologist Emile Durkheim labeled such cognitive and normative redundancy the "*conscience collective*," which means both collective consciousness [awareness] and collective conscience.) For example, most heads have active vocabularies of only 5,000 to 10,000 of the tens or hundreds of thousands of words available in their languages, and most heads share largely the same active vocabulary – so most words are unknown to most heads, and many words are known to very few heads. Some words, in fact, may be known to no heads at all, in any active sense. The same logic applies to virtually all cultural domains: that which is culturally available is largely unknown to almost everyone.

Second, for at least the past several centuries, and for much longer in some arenas like institutional religion, ever more expansive cultural creation has been the order of the day. More people have had more time to produce more kinds of cultural elements, and they are increasingly likely to do so self-consciously, elaborately, and thoroughly. Innumerable occupations and entire industries have emerged that do nothing but churn out new or reworked culture, ranging from the obvious "culture industries" (in the narrow usage of the term) like art, literature, performance, film, and television, to the natural and social sciences, engineering, medicine, design, advertising, administration, accounting, etc. These sectors produce knowledge, information, propaganda, mathematical equations, techniques, diagrams, organizational charts, auditing systems, and on and on, all in such abundance that it has become commonplace to worry about "information overload." As a corollary, we have an expanding range of media through which to produce culture, adding to classic verbal and visual media the many new technologies that have emerged since the mid-nineteenth century.

Third, cultural accumulation is increasingly deliberate and systematized. In most social arenas, structures and organizations ensure that cultural development is recorded and preserved, accumulating on dusty shelves, in crammed filing cabinets, or in dense electronic circuitry. Not all of this stockpiled culture is constantly active, and accidental or deliberate forgetting may be common (Douglas 1986), but vast amounts of stockpiled culture are available to be activated on a need-to-know basis. The ubiquity and reliability of such stockpiling is reflected in evolving theories of the purposes of education, which has shifted from memorization and rote recita-