Perceptions of Americanization in Puerto Limon, Costa Rica

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PERCEPTIONS OF AMERICANIZATION IN
PUERTO LIMON, COSTA RICA

by

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This thesis examines perceptions and interpretations of American cultural influences in Puerto Limon, Costa Rica. It is aimed at describing typical discourse genres and evaluative patterns in which these cultural influences are interpreted by various social groups of Costa Rican society. The study is based on a series of qualitative interviews and observations conducted in Puerto Limon, Costa Rica in the summer of 1996. The findings show that there exists a largely positive reaction to these images and objects emanating from the United States, and behind this positive evaluation lie attitudes of conformity, fatalism, and reification. The study contributes to discussions of cultural imperialism and globalization by bringing the actors into the debate, focusing on the phenomenon from the point of view of those affected by the cultural change.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This study attempts to take stock in certain cultural phenome-
non which are unique to our particular historic period. In the
present age, people throughout the world are exposed to cultural
images and objects which, in the case of the vast majority of the
world, originate outside of their traditional culture. The diffu-
sion of Western popular and elite culture, has not only increased
in terms of its spread of the world, but in terms of the depth to
which it has influenced the populations of other societies (Patter-
son, 1994). Though the influence and spread of a society's culture
to others is not new, the rapidity and increase in Western (and Nor-
thern American in particular) cultural diffusion via mass media and
information technology is having widespread cultural effects in
local communities and societies throughout the world.

In the social sciences there has been a growing emphasis on
this topic, particularly in the areas of sociology, anthropology,
and mass communications. However, most of the work done in this
are focused on the political economy and the discussions of the cul-
tural implications have been largely speculative. It is proposed
here that it is necessary to view this cultural phenomenon from the
point of view of people that are being affected by it, and to under-
stand what it is they are perceiving. There is a lack of community
based research on this phenomenon, a gap which needs to be filled by focusing on local regions and peoples' perceptions of the cultural changes which are taking place in their daily lives as a result of the influx of American/Western culture.

This thesis examines the phenomenon of mass cultural transfer viewed through the prism of local perceptions in Puerto Limon, Costa Rica. It will contribute to discussions of cultural imperialism and globalization by analyzing the way in which the cultural exchange is seen and understood by recipients of the entering American culture, as well as how they understand and interpret the societal changes which accompany it. By interpreting peoples' perceptions of the entering American culture, it will show that these images and objects, emanating mainly from the United States, are seen in a positive light, and associated with progress and modernization. While taking into account the globalization theorist's views of cultural heterogeneity and transformation of cultural meaning, the findings lend support to the theories of homogenization which focus on the unilateral process of cultural exchange.

The second chapter is the theoretical departure point for the study. In it, I present various perspectives and interpretations of cultural globalization, giving an overview of the phenomenon as viewed in a macro context. The nature and prospects of a cultural globalization are considered from the two main theoretical camps: (1) Cultural Imperialism (Homogenization) and (2) Globalization (Heterogenization), which focuses on the local interpretations of
the entering culture that result in transformed meaning independent of its source. I conclude the chapter by addressing the need for research of people's perceptions of Americanization.

The third chapter explains the methods of the study. I discuss briefly the logic of interpretive methodology, the use of qualitative interviewing, and finally explain how the research was conducted. I end by discussing the use of Spanish in the research and writing process. The following chapter focuses on Puerto Limon. It looks at the city's social and economic situation, historical U.S. involvement, and participants' descriptions of their city and region. The chapter ends with a section on race, an integral variable in understanding this region of Costa Rica.

Chapter V is the interpretive analysis of the participants' perceptions of the U.S. cultural influence in their community. I recreate the manner in which citizens of Limon speak about the cultural influence from the United States. The chapter is divided into two main sections entitled Manifest Level, and Latent Level. The former refers to the concrete examples the participants gave to evidence the U.S. cultural influence. The latent level analysis illuminates the implicit assumptions which the participants had about the entering American culture. These common-sense perceptions reveal attitudes of reification, fatalism and conformity.

The paper ends by discussing the reified nature of the perceptions of Americanization. It is concluded that the reified process of Americanization in Limon serves to maintain the one-sided rela-
tionship between the United States and Limon, Costa Rica.
CHAPTER II

THE MACRO CONTEXT: CULTURAL HOMOGENIZATION VS. HETEROGENIZATION

This chapter gives a critical overview of the leading theories and interpretations of cultural globalization. While scholars argue as to when the process began, few dispute that in recent decades there has been an increase in transfer of Western culture worldwide via mass media and other forms. What is in question, however, is the significance of its impact on the societies and/or communities which the culture enters. The debate on the nature and prospects of this so called cultural globalization has involved two main camps which reflect a wide range of differing interpretations of the contemporary global situation.

Cultural Imperialism and Homogenization

On one side, the increased use of information technology is seen as having a homogenizing effect on much of the globe. According to Pieterse (1995),

the most common interpretations of globalization are the ideas that the world is becoming more uniform and standardized, through a technological, commercial and cultural synchronization emanating from the West, and that globalization is tied up with modernity. (p. 45)

On these bases, globalization of culture is often interpreted as cultural imperialism, or a domination of Western culture. This domination is said to have a negative, or even destructive impact
on local cultures.

This critical stance on the significance of world-wide communications in academia drew mainly from critiques of modernization, noting the general tendency of the United States and other northern nations to take more than they give from poorer, southern nations of the world. Luis Beltran (1978b) wrote that

the term cultural imperialism denotes a verifiable process of social influence by which a nation imposes on other countries its set of beliefs, values, knowledge and behavioral norms as well as its overall style of life. (p. 187)

From this point of view, cultural imperialism is part of an overall domination of Latin America by the U.S., inseparably connected with economic and political imperialism. Beltran (1978b) continues:

It is logical to expect a nation exerting economic and political influence over other countries to exert a cultural influence as well. When the influence is reciprocal with those of such countries, the case is one of balanced, legitimate and desirable intercultural exchange. But when the culture of a central and dominant country is unilaterally imposed over the peripheral countries it dominates at the expense of their cultural integrity, then the case is one of cultural imperialism. (p. 188)

Herbert Schiller (1976) sees it similarly, defining cultural imperialism as

the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the values and structures of the dominating center of the system. (p. 9)

While these concerns with globalization are relatively recent, general concerns with cultural homogenization due to mass media are
not new. John Steinbeck, in 1962, wrote about media effects on regional dialects:

It seems to me that regional speech is in the process of disappearing, not gone but going. Forty years of radio and twenty years of television must have this impact. Communications must destroy localness, by a slow, inevitable process. I can remember a time when I could almost pinpoint a man's place of origin by his speech. That is growing more difficult now and will in some foreseeable future become impossible. (p. 82)

While much of the homogenization process refers to western influences in general, this study is concerned mainly with the influence from the United States, which is doubtlessly the most significant country in terms of its cultural impact, and is the focal point of the debate concerning the significance of the global culture. Even Orlando Patterson (1994), a sociologist who has written strongly against the cultural homogenization theories acknowledges that "it certainly is true that the major diffusionary source of this culture is a single Western country: the U.S." (p. 105).

Various scholars from Latin America believe that the region is for the United States mainly a source for raw materials and a captive market for its manufactured goods (Galeano, 1989; Beltran, 1978b). Thus, in this study, I use the term Americanization, though it is understood that the phenomenon is larger, and does not refer exclusively to the United States in all of its ramifications.

Nicole Sabga (1995) refers to the United States as a "communication empire," whose "all consuming images are rendered in every mass communication form: news bureaus, newspapers, magazines, movies, radio, television, musical recordings, and books" (p. 25).
Here she points to an important aspect of the process of cultural homogenization, the significance of the shared imagery. Beltrand (1978a) notes the same by stating that

in recent times, everybody can be bombarded by the same images. This, because just a few interest groups, a few organizations, a few societies possess the means necessary to send these images. Consequently, a minority is sending certain selective values to the majority through the communication media. (p. 64)

An aspect of the supposed homogenization process, and perhaps the most crucial one explored in this paper, is the extent of the change in local cultures due to the influence of western communication and goods. David Howes (1994) claims that the introduction of Western goods has had a homogenizing effect on all cultures worldwide, promoting the common values of individualism, property, and free enterprise. In this sense, cultural imperialism represents not only imposition of popular cultural items, but affects more deep rooted cultural norms as well. Imperialism via the media, according to Salwen (1991), "can cause personal conflicts, social disruptions, distorted images of foreign cultures, and possible subtle alterations of culture over time" (p. 36).

Gees Hamelink (1983) sums up the negative view towards the significance of the increasing presence of U.S. and western cultural items: "One conclusion unanimously shared is that the impressive variety of the world's cultural systems is waning due to a process of cultural synchronization that is without historic precedent" (p. 3).

Or, as Marion Levy (in Applebaum, 1970) says:
We are confronted—whether for good or for bad—with a universal social solvent. The patterns of the relatively modernized societies, once developed, have shown a universal tendency to penetrate any social context whose participants have come in contact with them. . . . The patterns always penetrate; once the penetration has begun, the previous indigenous patterns always change; and they always change in the direction of some of the patterns of the relatively modernized societies. (p. 36)

These last two quotes are in line with modernization and dependency/world-systems theories, viewing the cultural changes as uni-directional and uniform. However, the assumption that this interpretation of the phenomenon is unanimous and universal, as seen below, is no longer true.

Globalization and Cultural Heterogenization

The other side of the discussion represents a different understanding of the contemporary global situation, focusing more on the heterogeneous aspects of global culture. The heterogeneity argument doesn't deny the influence from the West, but poses that this influence is accompanied by diversification, and is in some cases greatly exaggerated. In this sense, global realities are interpreted in different local contexts, producing different interpretations of the global phenomenon. Featherstone (1990) sums up this point of view:

While particular television programs, sport spectacles, music concerts, and advertisements may rapidly transit the globe, this is not to say that the response of those viewing and listening within a variety of cultural contexts and practices will be anything like uniform. (p. 3)

Pieterse (1995) views globalization as "a process of hybridization which gives rise to a global melange" (p. 45). This latter
interpretation of globalization is congruent with the postmodernist idea of emergent societies, which adapt, mesh, and conflict amidst the contemporary global backdrop.

From this perspective, the prospect of a global homogenized culture appearing quickly is not likely, as cultures themselves do not change quickly. To assume a presently emerging global culture would be "to overlook the vital role of common historical experiences and memories in shaping identity and culture" (Smith, 1990, p. 180). In light of the cultural heritages and traditions which exist here and in other parts of the world, "the project of a global culture, as opposed to global communications, must appear premature for some time to come" (p. 180).

Some denounce entirely the idea that homogenization of global culture is imminent. Orlando Patterson (1994) refutes the predictions of a global sameness of culture, claiming the effects to be largely positive.

Such charges are nonsense. It is simply not true that the diffusion of Western culture, especially at the popular level, leads to the homogenization of the culture of the world. Western/American cultural influence has generated enormous cultural production, in some cases amounting to near hyper-creativity in the popular cultures of the world. (p. 104)

Citing the effects of music in the global exchange process, he claims that it is "not homogenization, but the revitalization and generation of new musical forms that has been the effect of the global exchange process" (p. 105).

Of course these two ideas are not mutually exclusive. Jonathan Friedman (1994), an anthropologist who looks at what he calls "global
systemic processes" (p. 102), as opposed to globalization, proposes a synthesis of the poles of the debate. He goes on to say that "ethnic and cultural fragmentation and modernist homogenization are not two arguments, two opposing views of what is happening in the world today, but two constitutive trends of global reality" (p. 102).

Hannerz (Andrews, Carrington, Jackson & Mazur, 1996) echoes this view, referring to the effects of global media which spawn the existence of a transnational mass culture that is simultaneously homogeneous in terms of the commodity signs being circulated, and heterogeneous in terms of the way in which these commodity signs are consumed. (p. 453)

Perceptions

The debate, as shown above, usually focuses on the macro processes of cultural production, distribution, and consumption. In doing so, it often neglects the fact that cultural change is not automatic, that it involves social actors whose perceptions of cultural phenomena are crucial for their adaptation or rejection. Schiller (1976) noted that despite the remarkable eclecticism among scholars working within the approach broadly categorized here as political economics, all focus on the production of cultural information instead of the resulting effects (Salwen, 1991). In this study, I will attempt to focus on these resulting effects, by grounding the macro issues of globalization in the context of micro perceptions of cultural change in Limon.
Looking at people's perceptions of cultural change is a crucial missing element in the discussion of cultural globalization. Of interest here is not how the culture is transferred, but how it is perceived. While much has been made of the necessity to understand the intricacies and contradictions of the post-industrial or Post-Fordist (some would say postmodern) global economy, as Abu-Lughod (cited in Andrews et al., 1996) says that we also need a better understanding of what may be called post-Fordist consumption, that is, the emerging patterns of consumption and distribution that are the counterparts to transformations in the realm of production. (p. 453)

Here, the consumption aspect is looked at by grounding the study in the everyday life in which cultural change is "experienced by the common sense thinking of men living their daily lives among their fellow men" (Filmer, Phillipson, Silverman & Walsh 1973, p. 140). My aim is to present the way the exogenous cultural influences are perceived by people that are currently experiencing a change in their culture. I will look at the logic with which the entering culture is perceived. The underlying logic of how they understand the process of Americanization, is telling of the phenomenon itself. Now I will show that there is a structure of understanding.

Thus there are two dominant points of view concerning this somewhat recent phenomenon of mass, and in some cases, global cultural exchange. This theoretical framework serves as the departure for my study. I will contribute to this debate by grounding the issue, examining it through the prism of local perceptions in Puerto
Limon, Costa Rica.
CHAPTER III

METHODS

As indicated earlier, this is an explorative, interpretive study, based on qualitative methods of data collection. Most of the data comes from a series of loosely structured interviews conducted throughout the month of July, 1997 in Puerto Limon, Costa Rica. In addition, I have incorporated data from observational notes I took while in Limon, as well as information from others' ethnographic research previously done in the area.

Interpretation and Phenomenology

This study is interpretive in that it attempts to understand the language in which the participants talk of the Americanization process in their own lives. It is through this identifying and understanding of the terms in which they describe the cultural influence that we can better understand the larger phenomenon. "We need to examine members' everyday categorizations of how things hang together in terms of their implicit assumptions about what everybody knows since these terms have no sense outside of their ordinary usage by members" (Filmer et al. 1973, p. 65). By interpreting and understanding these implicit assumptions which people have about this cultural influence from the U.S., we can better understand its nature and effects.
Verstehen

Schutz (1977) says that philosophers as different as James, Bergson, Dewey, Husserl, and Whitehead agree that the common-sense knowledge of everyday life is the unquestioned but always questionable background within which inquiry starts and within which alone it can be carried out. (p. 232)

Much of the development of interpretive methodology owes to groundwork laid by Max Weber and Alfred Schutz, and commonly, Shutz' interpretation of Weber's concept of Verstehen (understanding).

Here, Shutz (1977) relates his often used concept common-sense thinking to Weber's Verstehen by stating that the fact that in common-sense thinking we take for granted our actual or potential knowledge of the meaning of human actions and their products, is, I suggest, precisely what social scientists want to express if they speak of understanding or Verstehen as a technique of dealing with human affairs. (p. 231)

This taken for granted aspect is what is most important. Weber (1977) himself emphasizes the significance of the latent, or common-sense understanding that Shutz stresses that the conscious motives may well, even to the actor himself, conceal the various motives and repressions which constitute the real driving force of his action.

Interpretive techniques are informed by phenomenological approaches to the lifeworld. For this study, the lifeworld is taken to mean what Shutz (1970) referred to as "the total sphere of experiences of an individual which is circumscribed by the objects, persons, and events encountered in the pursuit of the pragmatic objectives of living" (p. 320).
Logical Consistency and Adequacy

Phenomenological understanding denotes a distinct way of doing research, a method which incorporates a denial of positivism, where sociology is a discipline detached from the hard sciences. Differing from the criteria for positivist science approaches, interpretive research relies on its own logic of interpretation, specifically its principles of logical consistency and adequacy. These two principles (adequacy and consistency) are interrelated, but refer to different aspects of the interpretation process.

Adequacy--a scientific model of human action fulfills the postulate of adequacy, says Shutz (1977),

when it is constructed in such a way that a human act performed within the real world by an individual actor as indicated by the typical construct would be understandable to the actor himself as well as to his fellow-men in terms of common-sense interpretation of everyday life. (p. 237)

Consistency--there should be logical consistency with the findings and the constructs created by the researcher. "Compliance with the postulate of logical consistency," says Shutz (1977), "warrants the objective validity of the thought objects constructed by the social scientist" (p. 237).

My Constructs

This study seeks to develop such a logical consistency with the my constructs and the common-sense understanding of the phenomenon. The constructs which I have created to understand the perceptions of Americanization are divided into two levels of analysis,
the Manifest and Latent levels. The former reflects the concrete
and direct examples given by the participants of the cultural influ­
ence, while the Latent Level illuminates the more deep rooted per­
cections. The manifest level helps to provide context and complete
the picture; the latent level is the more interpretive understanding
of the phenomenon. Although the interviews were focused on consumer
goods and information from the U.S., the intention was to look beyond
this level, at the common-sense understanding of the interaction be­
tween this local community and the foreign culture.

In specifying the latent level, there are two concerns from
the point of view of consistency and adequacy. It should be logi­
ally consistent with the manifest level, and also the constructs in
the latent level, should be understandable to the actor, they are
returnable to the lifeworld. I use terms that are compatible to the
participants' descriptions.

Qualitative Interviewing

According to Rubin and Rubin (1995), "qualitative interviewing
is a way of finding out what others feel and think about their
worlds" (p. 1). Weiss (1994) says that

much of the important work in the social sciences, work that
has contributed in fundamental ways to our understanding of
our society and ourselves, has been based on qualitative in­
terview studies. Qualitative interview studies have provided
descriptions of phenomena that could have been learned about
in no other way. (p. 12)

As the main purpose of my study is to find out how people feel and
think about the U.S. culture, the interviewing process constituted
the bulk of my research. I explored people's perceptions of the U.S. cultural influence by meeting people, engaging in conversation and interviewing them in a qualitative, and more or less unstructured fashion. This type of research approach, I felt, was the best, and certainly the most challenging way to research and discern the perceptions and opinions of people in Puerto Limon. Since the main questions of a qualitative interview should "specify the arena of concern without limiting the discussion to particular themes or concepts" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 178), the questions I asked related specifically to cultural items, yet were not so specific as to inhibit the interviewee from discussing the subject in broader terms.

As my main research goal was to examine the implicit assumptions which the participants had, and less at their concrete opinions, this type of inquiry was the most reasonable, if not the only way to do the research.

The Participants

There were 17 taped interviews in total. While the selection of the participants in the study was not a representative sample of the population of Puerto Limon, the interviews included people of varying social status, thus providing the opportunity for a wide variety of responses.

Of the 17 interviewed there were 11 white and 6 blacks, 11 men and six women, and 14 employed and 3 unemployed. Participants
included an official in the local government, a nun, a Biologist
Professor from the University of Costa Rica in Limon, a dock worker,
two journalists, a fruit salesmen, an accountant, a university stu-
dent, a bakery owner, a taxi driver, a librarian, a supermarket em-
ployee, a hospital employee, and three unemployed adults.

Direction of the Interviews

Though the interviewing process was open-ended and unstruc-
tured, it was helpful to have a planned general direction of the
interviews. I asked the questions with a general direction in mind,
trying to move the conversation from topics concerning relatively
superficial culture items to more value-laden and ideological as-
pacts of cultural influences.

The general range of topics were (a) general perceptions of
cultural change, (b) media (television and radio), (c) clothing,
(d) food, and (e) ideology (individualism, property, free enter-
prise, civil liberties, freedom of speech, etc.).

As indicated, this served as only a loose outline for the
interviews. Many of the conversations with the participants went
in unanticipated directions, and the topics were discussed in vary-
ing orders, but this served as a plan for the general direction and
order of the questioning.

The Devil's Advocate

One tactic I used in several of the interviews was what Anselm
Strauss referred to as "the challenge" or "devil's advocate question" (McCall & Simmons, 1969, p. 71). With this approach to inquiry, "the fieldworker deliberately confronts the respondent with the arguments of opponents; the idea is to elicit rhetorical assertion and thus to round out the respondent's position by forcing him/her to respond to the challenge" (p. 71). Such was the case in several examples where the participant's espoused strong pro-American sentiment. To have them elaborate on their view, I would ask them something to the effect of: "But what of the possibility of the disappearance of your own culture due to all the American influence?" Often this approach was helpful in getting the participants to elaborate on their beliefs, and to give specific reasons for why they saw the influence as beneficial or harmful.

Consent Form

While a small amount of the research used in this text came from informal interviews, most were formal, in the sense that they knew and understood that I was speaking with them for research purposes. Each signed a consent form indicating that their names would not appear on any document produced from the research. However, in many instances, false names are used. A copy of the consent form (in Spanish and English) is provided as an Appendix.

My "In" and the Use of a Second Language

In qualitative and ethnographic research, the researcher often
needs a certain connection to the place or community he or she is studying. He or she needs an in, which is generally a personal relationship which helps provide a foot in the door. There are always material, real life considerations that influence how a study (particularly one of this type) is done. William F. Whyte expresses the importance of the researcher’s reality during a study: "A real explanation, then, of how the research was done necessarily involves a rather personal account of how the researcher lived during the period of the study" (Larau & Shutz, 1996, p. 9).

While I don’t think it necessary to speak in great depth of how I lived while in Limon, I should speak a little of what made my doing the research there possible.

My "In"

In this section, I talk briefly of how I came to choose Puerto Limon. As well it tells how I am in touch with local life in Puerto Limon, and what made my doing the research there possible.

Much of my ability to do the study relies on my relationship with a friend, a native of Limon, that I met while traveling in Costa Rica. It was during that time (Summer, 1994) that I first became interested in the topic of this paper. I noticed all the obvious items of U.S. culture which had taken root in what seemed to me an incredibly unamerican environment. I began speculating as to how this culture might be interpreted by Costa Ricans and people from Limon. I remained in contact with my acquaintance, periodical-
ly mentioning to him my ambitions of doing a study in Limon.

So when I began my study, I didn’t have to start out completely from scratch. I stayed with him and his family for most of the month, and it was largely with his help that I was able to contact several of the participants in the study. Also, I interviewed him and members of his family, which partially helped me to improve the questions and general direction of the interviews.

Spanish: The Use of a Second Language

Of my 17 taped interviews, 14 were conducted exclusively in Spanish, one half and half, and two entirely in English. Discussed here are the ramifications for the study due to the use of a second language in the research process.

The most significant aspect of the interviews being conducted in Spanish was that it required an extra step in the transcribing process. And though I am functionally fluent in Spanish, there were areas of the interviews that I had a difficult time in completely understanding. This required me to enlist the help of a native speaker for the transcribing of the interviews.

Regarding using the interview text within the paper, I was initially unsure whether the quotes should be left in Spanish or translated. I didn’t want to lose any meaning which the participants had intended, and knowledge of a second language does not necessarily qualify a person to be a translator. I decided ultimately, in order to maintain a reasonable level of readability, to trans-
late most of the quotes. However, I left untranslated those parts of the interviews that are difficult to translate given their idiomatic nature and/or cultural specificity.

Also, some of the text was left in Spanish to preserve meaning as some words and phrases don't readily translate from Spanish to English. For example, many of the participants spoke of dias festivos. This phrase more or less refers to holidays, but carries a slightly different meaning. Other instances such as these are found in the body of the paper; in these cases as well the text was left in Spanish (though a translation of its general meaning will be given in most cases).

This chapter served to explain the method in which the research was done for this study. I explained briefly the interpretive approach to understanding, the general nature of qualitative interviewing and some specifics of my interviewing process. Finally, I explained how the research was done primarily in a second language, and described my personal connections to Puerto Limon. The following chapter gives a brief social and historical view of Puerto Limon, including descriptions given by some of its inhabitants.
CHAPTER IV

PUERTO LIMON

Costa Rica is known to the U.S. and the western world largely as a vacation spot, mainly for its beaches on both coasts, rain forests, and volcanoes. In most travel books on Costa Rica there is a section devoted to the Caribbean coast; all point to the unique and extraordinary beaches. The descriptions of Puerto Limon, however, are usually less than favorable. In *Choose Costa Rica: A Guide to Retiring and Investing*, Howells (1994) describes the port city like this, "at best, Limon has always been a ramshackle affair--a tropical banana port, too large to have the charm of a village, yet too small to offer the amenities of a real city" (p. 58). Descriptions as such are given by most Costa Rican guide books, with references to Puerto Limon serving largely as a warning.

Puerto Limon is the capital city of the province of Limon, which covers the whole of the Atlantic/Caribbean coast. Of Costa Rica's 3.5 million citizens, Limon comprises about one tenth of its total. Puerto Limon's population is approximately 80,000 (Observatorio Demografico, June, 1997), though this estimate includes much of the surrounding area; considering only the downtown area and immediate neighborhoods, the city appears much smaller than the projected 80,000.
Socio-Economics

Costa Rica is often touted as being peaceful and democratic, especially by the western world. Thus it has come to be referred to as the Switzerland of the Americas. It is seen as the model for the rise of standard of living which accompanies development and tourism. However, the Caribbean region of the country continues to grow poorer. In La Nacion (the country's most widely read and distributed newspaper), March 23, 1997, the headline reads, "Limon, Epicenter of Poverty." The article reviews some of the major economic and social problems of the Caribbean province. The figures rely on studies which were done in July of 1995 and July of 1996 respectively.

Some figures reported were that unemployment increased 60% in the one year period; that families in the Atlantic zone without basic necessities rose from 6,503 to 9,803 in that year; that homes in extreme poverty rose from 2,771 to 4,993; and that the number of homeless rose from 5,401 to 8,635.

Two days later, March 25, an article entitled "Limon Bets on Tourism" shows that the local government is in favor of, and in dire need of (they say) an increased tourism industry. The president of the House of Commerce, Tourism and Industry in Limon is quoted as saying, "tourism is the great hope." While it is a fact that tourism has been largely responsible for the country's economic stability, Puerto Limon has seen little of the benefits of this industry based on largely foreign investment.
Local Visions of Limon

As Municipalidad de Limon (1992) states,

you see, the people from the Meseta, they like us and they
don’t like us; they like us during the Carnaval, and they don’t
like us when there is a strike; do you know why, because these
are the only contacts they have with us, the rest of the time
they don’t know if we’re sad, or if we’re working, and that’s
why they don’t really know Limon. (p. 3)

Presented below is a description of Limon as it is perceived
by a few of its inhabitants. Most of the participants spoke of
their province as being distinct from the rest of the country.

Twenty-six year old Fran, a supermarket employee, says of Limon:

Here in Costa Rica, people see Limon like another country,
another world. Coming down from the center of the country
into Limon, into our province, it’s like coming into a dif­
ferent country; we’re a different class of people. We’re
more liberal, more free. Here you can go around in shorts,
sandals, even barefoot. You can go around without a shirt
and people will look at you like you’re normal here. So,
the rest of the country sees us as unorganized, uncivilized,
dirty--all because of that.

A professor at the University of Costa Rica, Puerto Limon
echoes this view of Limon being distinct from the rest of the coun­
try, while touching on the topic of U.S. cultural influence:

Our province, you could say, is largely Afro-Caribbean, with
Britannic roots. But this Britannic influence has been les­
sening over time due to the influence of the United States.
Our city has a very bad economic problem, and we get little
help from the country. We are the main port to our nation,
but we are isolated with our problems.

Limon as a province, and particularly cities directly on the
Caribbean, as the participants indicated above, is distinct from the
rest of the country. The region is often considered to be more
closely linked to the Caribbean in general than with Costa Rica it-
self; this fact is largely due to its large population of peoples of African decent, that which is evidenced in the language and religion.

The fact that Puerto Limon has a large African population is in itself evidence of U.S. business interests in Costa Rica. The immigration to Costa Rica's Caribbean region is largely a result of the United Fruit Company's recruitment of Jamaican blacks which began at the end of the 19th century (Chomsky, 1996; Melendez & Duncan, 1993, Municipalidad de Limon, 1992). Thus, Puerto Limon has to a large degree been shaped by U.S. involvement for now well over a hundred years.

Race

According to Municipalidad de Limon (1992), "my grandfather was Jamaican, and my great grandfather Spanish... My mother was the daughter of a Bribri Indian" (p. 246).

A further description of the racial situation is necessary, as it is an integral part of the social makeup of Limon, which is remarkable for its mixture of different races. I believe it to be necessary also, as several of the interviewees refer specifically to black culture in Limon as the segment of society most influenced by the North American culture, and others evidence a change in race relations as an effect of this influence.

No studies have been done which indicate the racial breakdown by percentage in Limon, but popular opinions ranged from 25% to 40%
black, and one would tend to believe the actual percentage to fall between these numbers. Also, there is considerable intermarriage between blacks and Latinos, blurring the distinction. Said one woman of the interracial relationships, "We're creating a different race here in Limon."

The subject of race was clearly never far from the participants' mind. From the often said claim of Limon as a colorblind, undiscriminatory society to the strong racial derogatory comments (sometimes uttered by the same person), race was definitely an issue.

**Colorblindness and Separatism: Local Visions of Race**

On the bus en route to Limon, I interviewed the woman to whom I was sitting next. She is a black, middle aged hospital employee who has lived all her life in Limon. I asked her if life in Limon was at all segregated.

In Limon, no. There's Chinese, blacks, whites, all together. There's no racism because we (los negros) don't fight against el latino, el blanco, ni el chino. Everyone lives together. This bus has blanco, chino, negro, indio, whatever person and there's no discrimination. In San Jose, yeah, there's racism, but in Limon, no. Limon is a port, so there's a mixture of everything, like a rainbow of races, and we're all the same.

She uses the term latino above as being distinct from blancos which means whites.

A sixty year old bakery owner speaks in the same tone: "No, here there are no race relations. Se ve y pasa (you see it, but you don't really notice it)."
It is true that there seems to be very little racial tension on the surface of society in Limon, and this description of race relations (that of a colorblind, non-discriminatory society) is usually the first thing the participants have to say about this issue; and it is seemingly their honest opinion. But after speaking with some of the participants for an extended period of time, often the opinions would change to reveal an attitude far from colorblind.

The following quote is from a 25 year old Fran whose descriptions of Limon were quoted above. Initially, he too spoke of Limon as being characterized by its colorblindness, but after extended conversation he revealed a distinct opinion of blacks in Limon.

I've known blacks all my life. I've had lots of friendships with Jamaicans, Haitians, Trinitarios. To me it seems blacks are dreamers, always dreaming to be something else. Their way is like this: they like to dress very well, but they eat only a little. They would rather have a nice house, car and furniture than eat well. That's how I know el negro. He likes to celebrate, to dance; he likes sport, basketball more than anything else.

Geraldo Medina is a 55 year old white man who has lived in Limon all his life. His depiction of the race situation claims the black population to be racists:

To tell you the truth, they are racist, very racist. They're the only ones with the good jobs, also they give the jobs to other blacks. This has been like this in Limon all my life, the blacks with all the best things. Then they have the best houses because they have the best jobs. It's like this, el negro no deja caer el negro (blacks don't let other blacks down). They help themselves.

But even after having said that, he still supported the claim that there was no racism in his community, "Here in Limon, no hay racismo."
A man that works for a government agency downtown, of relatively high education, spoke as did most others, of the colorblindness of his community. Yet in describing what he and several of the participants referred to as the conformist nature of the people there (a concept alluded to in the next chapter), he refers specifically to the black people of Limon: "They've always been like this, getting into whatever presents itself."

In fact, both whites and blacks, on several occasions, mentioned the other group as having racist tendencies. Janet Sanders, a middle aged black woman, says "people will tell you that there is no racism here in Costa Rica, but there definitely is. We (blacks) have always been discriminated against." My friend, with whom I stayed and spent considerable time with, exemplified this type of double understanding of colorblindness and separatism. I had heard him talk many times positively about the unimportance of race in Limon, but with a little antagonism on my part, he finally supported the view that the blacks in Limon were racist and discriminatory towards the Latinos, citing various personal instances of discrimination.

So, it is necessary to understand Limon's racial diversity, and that this diversity is a meaningful aspect of society in Limon. Understanding this component of Limon's society gives a better backdrop with which to understand the perceptions of U.S. cultural influences.

This chapter has provided a general overview of the city of
Puerto Limon, Costa Rica, showing it to be a port city with economic and social problems, yet one which is diverse both presently and historically. These conditions, along with the obvious influence of American goods and images in Puerto Limon, made it an excellent place to conduct research of this type.
CHAPTER V

PERCEPTIONS OF AMERICANIZATION

This chapter presents interpretations of the perceptions of Americanization in Limon. It focuses mainly on the interview texts, but uses observation and other materials to help in the interpretation. It analyzes the cultural influence of images and objects which come primarily from the United States from the point of view of the participants, and seeks to understand how, and to what extent, this process, loosely defined as Americanization is interpreted by people who live in Puerto Limon. It begins by looking at some general responses regarding Americanization. Then, in the section entitled Manifest Level, I look at the particular spheres of cultural influence, or rather the empirical evidence to which the participants point (television, sports, food, etc.). The final part of the chapter is an interpretation of the participants' implicit perceptions of U.S. cultural influence, focusing less on specific manifestations of Americanization and more on what Shutz (1977) called the common-sense knowledge of everyday life as it relates to the cultural change. This I refer to as the Latent Level.

Americanization? Of Course!

To begin the discussion with each participant, I asked them if they had, broadly speaking, noticed an increase in the prevalence of
U.S. culture in their lifetimes. These are some immediate responses given: "In this place, absolutely. I believe that it's happening. Increase? Total! Yeah, in recent years, definitely. For sure! Of course!"

The influence of U.S. culture was perceived by everyone interviewed as a fact of life in Limon. While the meaning and significance attributed to the culture varied, its prevalence was disputed by none.

Manifest Level

This section addresses the topics that came out in the interviews as major spheres of American influence as seen by the participants. These are the manifest and concrete examples the participants used to show that the times and way of life have changed in Limon as the result of U.S. cultural influence.

While I asked questions relating to some of these specific topics, most of the responses given were offered without solicitation. These themes which emerged in the body of interviews are labeled under the headings of The Youth, Sports, Food, Television, Holidays, and Cultural Institutions. While each is presented as an independent section, there is considerable overlapping of concepts within the quotes, particularly concerning television.

Los Jovenes Quieren Disfrutar de su Epoca (The Kids Want to Enjoy Their Day and Age)

The above quote was from Henry Sawyers, 55 year old black man
who owns a bakery in downtown Limon. In talking generally about the
cultural change which is occurring in their community, he, and many
of the participants referred to the change in youth attitudes as
evidence of Americanization. Below are three:

It's like, when I come home, I see that the Limon that I was
used to, that I grew up in has changed, and I'm only 23. So
since I've been able to really think about it, in 10 years,
which I think is a very short time, Limon has changed drasti­
cally. The children, the things that they're dancing, the
things they're singing and watching and talking about, are
definitely not our culture.

The youth of today see the culture of your country in a dif­
ferent way (than in the past). It's always been that you all
have your type of culture and we have ours. But the kids,
the youth seem to see more values in las culturas that aren't
ours. Before, el campesino planted, harvested, and lived his
life. Now, the young ones don't want to live like that. What
they want is to dress well, to have a car. It's becoming in­
creasingly rare to find kids that live the lifestyle; It's
becoming lost.

Look, this is why it changes. It's changing because the little
ones are trying very hard to imitate the culture of over there.
They see the movies and they want to change. They want to live
like los americanos. The really get into the Michael Jordan
stuff. They make themselves copies, copies of people from the
U.S., then they feel very Americanized.

To my question, where do they get their information?, he answers,
"The television. They wake up with TV and go to bed with TV." He
shrugs it off saying, "La juventud quiere disfrutar de su epoca."

Sports

American sports, basketball in particular, is evidently an
influential aspect of culture in Limon. So it is no surprise that
nearly all the participants referred to U.S. sports as being an
indicative component of American cultural influence in their com-
munity. In each case, the participants' descriptions are given in terms of conformity, a concept explored later in this chapter. Sergio Valderrama, a 30 year old, white employee at the Health Ministry in Limon, says:

I think that the people have mainly been influenced by basketball stars, Michael Jordan, Dennis Rodman, people like that. So these things are becoming implemented in our culture, little by little, that aren't of our country.

Jorge Quiroga, a 50 year old white journalist says:

the people of Limon, we're very sports oriented. We're probably more into sports than anywhere else in the country. We're champions of basketball. The Limonense (a person from Limon), above all the youth of Limon, identifies himself more with basketball than soccer. And the basketball team they see like the NBA. So whatever Michael Jordan wears, they too want to wear.

Carlos Solano, a 33 year old unemployed accountant working as a cab driver, refers to U.S. basketball and television as having a strong impact:

Oh yeah, the NBA and television. If you were to ask who's the best basketball player what would you say. Everyone knows the best player is Michael Jordan of the United States. And so everyone thinks, I want to look like him. I want to play like him. I want to be him.

Food

The change in eating habits was marked by many of the participants as an example of the Americanization process in Limon. George Ritzer (1993), now famous for his views on the homogenization and modernization process as exemplified by fast food, and McDonalds in particular, spoke of this process as one which makes possible the obtaining of the same exact food product anywhere in the country,
and as the process continues, anywhere in the world.

While there are a number of McDonalds in the larger cities of central Costa Rica, there are none yet in Limon. However, the prevalence of fast food in general has increased considerably. Several of the participants spoke of this change in eating habits as an example of the changing culture. A school teacher talks of how this change is evident in her students:

Everyday we cook and care for the kids. And they leave the school and go and buy burgers. Some of them don't use good meat. We try to use natural juice, especially since Costa Rica is so gifted with all these different fruits. Also, now the fried chicken is everywhere. They would rather eat this type of food that costs an enormous amount of money rather than eat our regular food.

When I asked her why she thought they acted this way, she said quickly, "The TV of course. The TV, where every single thing tells them that that is what they should eat and do."

Florita Perez, a 40 year old white librarian cited a change in eating habits as her first example of the cultural change. In doing so, she referred to the United States as having a certain way, culturally speaking, of doing things:

There are a lot of things from your culture which are entering ours, and your culture, la forma de Ustedes (your ways), there are a lot of things that are different. The food for example, ours is rice and beans, and now your hamburgers, hot dogs and all that are entering our culture.

Here she makes an interesting statement, "la forma de Ustedes," referring to the United States' "way of doing things," or "our way."

She demonstrates a definite understanding of what is supposedly American, and characteristics which define the American way of doing
things. This exemplifies a reification of the process of Americanization, a topic dealt with later in this chapter.

Television

"La television es un buen maestro (the television is a good teacher.)"

"It is a rare house or building that it is not rigged with spiky combers of the air" (Steinbeck, 1962, p. 82). This comment by John Steinbeck, referring to the United States in 1962, applies easily to contemporary Puerto Limon. Looking across the landscape of the city, nearly every house has a television antenna on its roof, including the smallest and most simple homes.

Though the perceived influence of television was an intended subject of the interviews, it was usually unnecessary for me to initiate the topic, as it was often the first example they used in describing the general U.S. cultural influence. In many respects, participants' views of television's influence in Limon echo Beltran's (1978a) description: "As many other crucial things in their life, the intoxicating T.V. images that assail their minds indeed are, to a large extent, Made in the U.S.A." (p. 81). Joyce Derph (the 53 year old teacher describes TV by stating,

oh yes, T.V. and all the programs that are made in the T.V. Then color T.V. came, and apart from color t.v., cable came; now what you are seeing in the US we are now seeing here at the same time, because cable permits that.

Though her somewhat critical evaluation of television above is informative in describing how the television influence has increased,
this critical stance is the minority opinion. Geraldo Musina sums up the more common sentiment: "in regards to the television, it’s great. The United States has brought advancement, which is very good." Henry Sawyers’ statement gives perhaps the most positive evaluation of television’s influence, referring to its impact on the youth of society, he says that "la television es un buen maestro."

American Holidays

Another sphere of influence which was alluded to by many of the participants (and the one which I least anticipated) was the increasing prevalence of U.S. holidays. Albertina, a black, middle aged hospital employee who I interviewed on the bus to Limon cited these as an example:

Yeah, I see alot of people that do the same things that they do there (in the U.S.) now. Los Dias Festivos (Holidays) for example. Trying to copy the way of dress, the foods and so on, like Valentines Day. We didn’t celebrate that before at all, now it’s a big deal; it’s the day of lovers. And before we didn’t celebrate any of this Halloween, but now yes. She refers to television as being a possible cause for the interest in American holidays: "That (television) can influence a lot, today especially that there’s cable, it can affect a lot, since certain movies deal with Halloween or Valentines Day. . .so it influences, yeah."

Sergio Valderrama speaks of the change in his lifetime. "The kids, now you can see them celebrating your Halloween, something that when I was a young kid you didn’t even hear of." When I asked
him why these cultural practices, these myths, were appearing in Limon, he replied:

We can't compete. The U.S., with Hollywood and Colombia Pictures and all that, make movies to distribute to the whole world. The economic power that the U.S. has let this happen. It allows it to invade markets, and even bring the North American traditions with it, which is little by little entering countries, like the Santa Claus of Christmas for example.

His views here, along with several of the participants, speak of the cultural change in the same terms as modernization scholars which link the change in local cultures as part and parcel of the larger economic sphere. A professor at the University of Costa Rica, Limon concurs with this view:

it isn't much of a stretch to say that the overwhelming impact of the U.S. culture goes hand in hand with the political and ideological beliefs. We're associated with the capitalist life of consuming. You could say that consumerism has implanted itself here in Costa Rica.

The fact that these holidays are perceived as becoming increasingly prevalent is not shocking, but it seems significant that it has happened in such a short period of time. Participants repeatedly referred to the increasing presence of U.S. holiday customs with phrases such like: "In the past few years, you see al lot more of them (the U.S. Holidays); in the last five years or so. . . ., and in recent years. . . .", all noting that such prevalence is very recent.

Tipo Americano: American Style

From an observational standpoint, the acceptance and reverence of material objects of The United States in Limon is obvious. The
prevalence of the Nike Symbol (the swoosh) is an obvious example. Not only do a great deal of the people, particularly the youth, wear the American tennis shoes, but this particular symbol is seen in various contexts. I observed a number of black males that had the symbol carved into their hair, the symbol was prevalent in graffiti, and a number of times I saw people wearing hats on which the symbol had obviously been painted. Twice, while interacting with children, they were curious to know how to pronounce the words Nike, Reebok and Adidas. I found that in the intercultural encounters I had with many of the younger people, this was the information in which they were most interested.

When talking about Americanization, the tendency is to assume that before this cultural influence there was an autonomous culture which preceded the influence. In the case of Puerto Limon, Costa Rica, it is not that there was so much a pre-Americanized version which has been turned inside out by the U.S. culture, but rather that other influences (which have historically been varied in this port city, e.g., British) are being replaced with American versions, American style: Tipo Americano, as several of the participants worded it.

Jorge, 28, talks about the American style of clothing:

If you have a television, it's American; a car, Levis, they have to be tipo Americano. So I could have Levis, and hey, they're Levis, but on the back here it says made in Malaysia. But it's American style. I have a Reebok shirt that says made in Taiwan; I have a pair of Nike's, but made in China. At the world level, everything has to be tipo Americano.
This section includes participants' examples of changes in social institutions: education, language, and financial institutions. The descriptions given in this section demonstrate, perhaps, the most fundamental changes in the culture of Limon.

Quoted here again is 53 year old teacher, Joyce Derph. She talks of Americanization as exemplified by a change in religion. Hers is the most critical voice of all the participants:

I wouldn't call it an increase (of U.S. culture), I'd say complete taking over. It's not just an increase. . . .when I went to school when I was young, we learned from books made in England and Jamaica. . . .all English books. Our priests at the churches, they came from an English past. I can remember very well Father Farley. Father Farley was from England; then we were called an Anglican Church, and in every home you had a queen. I don't know why that we had the queen after England was so rude and harsh to black people, but anyway that was the order of the day. Then our churches became Episcopalian, and the books that we used at school came from the states. That's the way I know.

Here she talks of the change in education based on the U.S. model:

Everything conformed to the way the USA looks at schools. There was once when our schools weren't filled with these psychologists and counselors, saying stupid things before they tell them, shut your mouths and behave yourselves and learn. Now our schools are filled with, psychologists, sociologists, and they have some gist for every single thing. That's the way I think. I just want to stress the fact that the influence of the USA in Limon is total.

Fifty year old journalist, Jorge Quiroga, speaks of this replacement of other cultural items in terms of actual human presence:

"Before I can remember a time when you heard a lot of people talking French. There were a lot of French, Dutch, tons of foreigners, and not just Americans like today, but all sorts."
Carlos Solano reveals an understanding of Americanization, referring to U.S. products and the value of the dollar:

We want to be on a par in development. We're all copying the way of the U.S. These small, underdeveloped countries like Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua are all taking after them. For example, if a new brand of tennis shoes comes out, we all want to buy it. So what is happening is that our culture has been losing its value. Here, you know, they use both the colon (the colon is the Costa Rican monetary unit) and the dollar. The national money continues to lose value. Now the people would rather do business with dollars than colones, so sure it's changing, definitely. In the whole world we're going to see one type of currency—the dollar. It's going to control the whole world.

Here, he demonstrates a clear connection between the acceptance of Americanization and development.

The Latent Level: Conformity, Fatalism, and Reification

The first section of this chapter delineated the manifest, or topical level in which the culture was perceived by the participants. In this section, I'll illuminate the latent perceptions by interpreting the implied understandings and background assumptions the participants had of the changing culture, or rather illuminate what Schutz (1977) referred to as common-sense understanding. The assumptions which the participants had toward the notion of American and western cultural influence reveal a positive evaluation of Americanization which can best be described in terms of fatalism, reification and conformity.

Uncritical Perceptions

Though there were some opinions and perceptions in the pre-
vious subchapter which revealed somewhat of a critical view towards the U.S. cultural influence in Limon, it should be understood that this is to a large degree the minority opinion. How participants regarded the U.S. cultural influence can best be described as a lack of critique. This lack of critique was revealed more in what the participants didn’t say than what they did.

In fact, only 4 of the 17 people I interviewed showed a critical stance towards the U.S. culture, and these were the four most educated. The younger people with whom I spoke seemed to, for the most part, have little opinion regarding the significance of American television, clothing, music and the culture in general. Opposition to this influence appears non-existent. A predominant statement of the participants, the younger ones in particular was, "it’s the fashion of the day."

Pro Americanism

Anti-Americanism, negative sentiment against the United States, is an established term in academia and society, representing the critique and sentiment against the United States. We know that people in some Arab countries burn American flags (The Shah of Iran communicated to the National Soccer team that defeated the U.S. in the 1998 World Cup that they had defeated the Arrogant enemy). We are familiar with the image of the Ugly American that is seen as capitalistic, individualistic, and arrogant. Fidel Castro’s Cuba has been Latin America and the Caribbean’s most marked example of
this anti-American sentiment, one often echoed by leftist politics throughout Latin America. Such a point of view is all but non-existent in Limon.

Instead, the U.S. is seen largely in a positive light. Throughout the city there are positive references to the U.S., particularly in the area of merchandise. An obvious (and extremely prevalent) example of this was the wearing of t-shirts with the American flag on the front. Some other logos also expressing pro-American sentiment included: U.S. Air Force-Canal Zone, U.S.A.-American Pride, and U.S.A. basketball; where Dreams come true.

The majority of the interviews revealed the same pro-American sentiment. Speaking for the country in general, one participant believes that "90% of Costa Ricans support the politics of the United States. For example, when Bush invaded Panama, the people were totally in favor of it." Geraldo Musina is a 50 year old white, working-class man that has lived in Limon all his life. He speaks very positively of the U.S. cultural influence, referring specifically to the influence of television: "The television system has changed a lot. Especially with the youth, because the youth are more concentrated around the television. It is the best moral support for them, the television is very advanced."

Here we see the implicit assumption (a theme which will be elaborated on later) that this influence of American culture is associated with development and advancement. For Musina, the connection between the U.S. culture and advancement is obvious.
Playing the devil's advocate, I mentioned to him that I had spoken to people of an opposite point of view, people that were leery of the influence the TV might have on their culture, he replied:

Those are ignorant people, because thanks to the United States and the culture that they've taught us, at least we've been able to take a hold of some of it. . . . I've never been to the United States, but I've always been 100% pro American. Now all the power in the world is with the U.S. The Soviet Union died, and so did the Marxism of Lenin, and better for it. Now we have a good political system for the new generations.

This pro-American attitude relates to how people associate American goods with a better way of life. Through attitudes of fatalism and conformity, the objects and images from the United States, which are increasingly prevalent in Limon, are seen in the context of an overall modernizing and advancement process.

**Conformity**

The concept conformity plays a dual role in this study. First, it refers to the participants' actual use of the word, to describe their society's reaction to the cultural change. Secondly, I use it as a construct to analyze the implicit assumptions about the process of Americanization. For analytical purposes, I will distinguish between conformity as mentioned by participants, and Conformity as a construct.

As was mentioned, to describe the changing culture in Limon as a result of the influence of U.S. culture, many of the participants spoke of their society as having a characteristic of compliance, or
as "la conformidad de los limonenses." As twenty-nine year old Alex Gutierrez stated, "We've got a mentality of conformity here. Nos conformamos. Nos pensamos mas alla (we conform ourselves, he says. We are thinking in the ways of over there.)."

Berryl Derph is a 23 year old black woman, college educated in the U.S. She describes, very critically, the conformist attitude in Limon:

In places like these, it's really strong because people don't really have a concept of what things are for, so advertising. You know, it gets them. Like we buy Nike because it's got the nicest commercials, the nicest music. It's strong, really strong. You can use other things as an example; Nike is the first thing that came to mind. But at least if you're gonna dress in CK, dress with what's appropriate for your zone. I see some of these kids in this school wearing sweaters! In this weather? It's ridiculous. And that's where the advertisement plays a big role. It's made you believe that you look good anyway, no matter how much you suffer.

Moises Alou, a white professor at the University of Costa Rica, Limon, describes his region as being one particularly prone to conformity.

T.V. images from the United States make a big impression; a dance, or a sports item with a visible brand name. Particularly in this city it's especially strong because there's a cultural base that permits it. Here they're more easily tricked.

After describing the ways in which the change has presented itself, Sergio Valderrama, a government employee with a comparatively critical outlook on the changing culture explained it like this: when I asked him, "Where does the information come from? What makes them use this stuff and practice these customs?"

It's the invasion of the national market of foreign products. This same invasion brings commercials. With it comes Michael
Jordan, comes Shaq; different personalities and and North American athletes. So it goes planting itself in the head of the consumer. It's something that comes parallel, the invasion of products and the commercial stuff; Everything comes together. And also something that we have in our head to be so easily influenced by these commercials and these things where if fulano tal usa yo tambien tengo que usar (if so and so is wearing it, I need to wear it too).

They labeled their province and city as one which is easily influenced by popular culture and fads; though it is important to note that in some cases while describing the conformity, they are making statements about race as well, as with the following quote:

When the kids in the U.S. began using afros, they used afros. When they flattened their hair, they flattened their hair. When they started using the t-shirts, they did that. And the jeans--once we didn't use them to dress, only to work on the train. Then USA made it great. There was a lot of advertisement around it. Anything that will make you look better and feel better and everything. So, now all young people are using jeans. Then it came over--tennis shoes. Everybody used tennis shoes and now people are buying them for 20,000 colones (approximately US $100), because it says NIKE.

As well as being a way in which some of the participants described their community, we can use the term Conformity to describe the latent-level perceptions which the participants have towards Americanization. From this point of view, references to conformity among fellow citizens may be interpreted as implicit justifications of Conformity (a more general attitude towards the process). Indeed, references to the mass conformity, to thoughtless imitation of American ways, appear to have an important logical function in the popular discourse on Americanization. By referring to the overwhelming conformity, one, in a sense, deligitimizes opposition and resistance to cultural change. In a society where most try to im-
It is evident that the participants (excepting three which have a critical view of the U.S. culture) view the change with a certain sense of fatalism. They comprehend that a change is definitely occurring, but there is little understanding that there may be a choice involved. They speak of the influence that American television, sports, holidays, etc., have on their children and community as if it were a natural change. Social change in Limon is perceived and interpreted as irreversible and inevitable, like the change of the seasons. Henry Derph, a 55 year old bakery owner exemplifies this passive, fatalistic understanding of the change he sees in his society. Responding to my question of what he thinks about the impact it might have, he says, "What CAN I think of it? It's happening because the majority want it."

This fatalistic attitude of the interviewees is perhaps the most crucial aspect in understanding the impact of the foreign culture on the society in Limon. The fact that they don't really think much about it, or that it is not an aspect of their lifeworld, suggests that any change which occurs, or is imposed upon them, will meet little resistance. "That's just the way it is," is the general sentiment exhibited by most of the people I spoke with.
Reification

These attitudes of fatalism and conformity the people have towards these images and objects which are increasingly part of their culture involves reification of Americanization. "That's just the way it is." They do see the changes which are happening, and they do perceive a process to be occurring. This process is understood as one that develops by itself, and has a life of its own. Cognitively, reification provides the basis for Conformity and fatalism. If the process develops by itself, then it makes no sense to try to resist it.

How They Saw Se: Background Assumptions About America

The background expectations which participants had regarding my personal knowledge of the United States revealed some of their implicit assumptions of Americanization. How they saw me, and assumed what I would know to be true about United States, is further evidence of the common-sense understanding of what the United States represents. One participant ended her descriptions of the way she thought things to be in the United States by saying, "well, I don't have to tell you, you know it, you're from there." In some cases this way of understanding was evident in the way they responded to my inquiries, with a common reaction being, "Why would you be asking me these types of questions? You are from there; you know how it is." One participant spoke of the change as being an obvious benefit: "Of course we want to change and be like you. The U.S. is the
most advanced country in the world."
In this thesis, I have attempted to view the larger debate of global culture as interpreted through the prism of local perceptions in Puerto Limon, Costa Rica. I have shown that in Limon there exists a largely positive evaluation of entering American culture, and that under the surface of this positive evaluation of American goods and information lies a vision of Americanization that may be described in terms of reification, fatalism, and conformity.

The findings appear relevant for reevaluating some of the debate on globalization. This debate must take into account that the process of Americanization, aside from being the spread of goods and information from the United States, is also the spread of images and objects that takes place in an asymmetrical setting, where the sender has a far greater economic and political power than the recipients. The messages that the people in Limon are getting, the images that they receive in this asymmetrical communication, acquire significance which differs from the one they may have in the U.S., echoing Salwen's (1991) speculations that the media can cause "distorted images of foreign cultures" (p. 36).

These messages come from a more prosperous economic and political entity, the United States, and the messages themselves tend to shape the images in a favorable way. From this point of view, we
can understand these images and objects as having a symbolic power, where the way in which these things are perceived become as important, if not more so, than their original meaning. When these images and objects are considered in the same vein with the rest of modernization and other positive images, they are associated together.

One interesting observation that can be shown to help understand these popular perceptions is their similarity to primitive, early versions of modernization theory, sometimes called Americanization. In these earlier conceptions, modernization was understood as a unidirectional progress, "universal in impact and highly predictable with regard to end product" (Applebaum, 1970, p. 36). From this perspective, all societies, regardless of their cultural background, were to undergo the inevitable process of Americanization. This process was described as objectively predetermined and unquestionably positive. It seems that a popular version of this conception is held by many in Limon. A viewpoint that once was confined to the realm of development research has acquired a status of popular ideology, and so has reified the fatalistic vision of Americanization.

They see this process as objective and inevitable, and furthermore, as intrinsically progressive and therefore, good. This general acceptance and reification of Americanization in Limon, Costa Rica, suggests that the one-sided cultural flow will meet little resistance, and continue in its largely unilateral form.

This is, by no means, a complete denial of the hybridization
view of global culture. But the assumption that the reinterpretations of the mass cultural forms in the guises of local will lead to diversity could be premature. This point of view critiques homogenization theorists for "assuming that illiterate and semi-literate Third World peoples are powerless in their responses to Western popular culture" (Patterson, 1994, p. 105). In part this is right. It is true that people of the third world are not powerless in their responses to American popular culture. Yet, the majority of the people I spoke with displayed little resistance to the American culture in all its forms, showing attitudes of fatalism and conformity to the entering American culture, reifying Americanization.

It is not a matter of powerlessness, but passivity which defines people's reactions to and perceptions of United States' cultural influence. And while the interpretations of American culture in Puerto Limon may be more indicative of the characteristics of this city and region than of the phenomenon itself, the attitudes and perceptions given by the participants in the study, nevertheless, help support the view that this asymmetrical cultural relationship will continue unchallenged.
Appendix A

HSIRB Approval Letter
Date: 12 June 1997

To: Vyacheslav Karpov, Principal Investigator
    John McConnell, Student Investigator

From: Richard Wright, Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 97 06 03

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "Influence of United States Culture in Puerto Limon, Costa Rica" has been approved under the exempt category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: 10 June 1998
Appendix B

Consent Form Letters
(English and Spanish)
I have been asked to be interviewed for the research project "U.S. cultural influences in Puerto Limon, Costa Rica." I understand this research is intended to study the influences of foreign culture. I further understand that this project is John McConnell's masters thesis project.

My consent to participate in this project indicates that I will be part of an unstructured, exploratory interview on the said subject. I understand that:

- The interview session will be recorded
- I will provide general background information about myself such as age, level of education, etc..

I understand that all the information collected from me is confidential. To that end, my name will be changed in the transcriptions from tape to print. Once the tapes are transcribed, my real name will appear on no written document used in this study. All relevant data from the study will be retained for three years in a locked file in the Sociology Department here at Western Michigan University.

I understand that I may refuse to participate or quit at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty. If I have any questions or concern about this study, I may contact Dr. Karpov at (616) 387-5243 or John McConnell at (616) 344-9557. I may also contact the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (616) 387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 387-8298 with any concern that I have. My signature below indicates that I understand the purpose and requirements of the study and that I agree to participate.

______________________________    ____________________
Signature                                Date
Consent Form--Spanish

Formulario de consentimiento

Western Michigan University
Department of Sociology

Investigador Principal: Dr. Vyacheslav Karpov

Investigador Asociado: John W. McConnell

Yo doy consentimiento para participar en la investigación, "Influencias Culturales Estadounidenses en Limon, Costa Rica." Entiendo que esta investigación quiere estudiar las influencias de cultura extranjera. Entiendo también que este proyecto es parte de un tesis para la maestría de John McConnell.

El consentimiento de participar en este proyecto se indica que yo estare parte de una entrevista explorativa sobre dicho sujeto. Entiendo que:
- La entrevista estara grabada por un grabador-reproductor
- Suministraré información sobre mi vida, como edad, nivel de educación, etc.

Entiendo que la información que doy se considera confidencial. Para asegurar esto, mi nombre será cambiado en la producción de este tesis. Al transcribir las entrevistas del casete a papel, se cambiarán los nombres.

Entiendo que puedo retirarme de esta entrevista en cualquier momento, sin ningún prejuicio ni sanción. Si tengo preguntas sobre este estudio, puedo comunicar con:
- Dr. Karpov (616) 387-5243
- John McConnell (616) 344-9557
- Human Subjects Institutional Review Board (616) 387-8298

Mi firma indica que yo entiendo el propósito y los requisitos del estudio y que estoy de acuerdo de participar en esta entrevista.

_________________________  __________________________
Firma Fecha


