

UNIT 4 (OPTION 4) THE WORLD OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

This resource contains topical news updates and teaching suggestions that may be of use to teachers delivering Unit 4 / Option 4 of the Edexcel GCE Geography Specification. All information is drawn from newspaper reports filed during July and August 2010 (key sources being the Financial Times and Guardian).

DEFINING CULTURE AND IDENTIFYING ITS VALUE

■ The climate change threat to Greenland's 'fossil language'

Some cultures and landscapes are more vulnerable than others from environmental, socio-economic and political pressures. Climate change is becoming an important environmental pressure in this context. For instance, the Inughuit People of north-west Greenland are a 'micro-society' whose very existence is now threatened by climate change.

The Inughuit people are a tiny community whose members continue to live the hunting and gathering lifestyle of their ancestors. They speak a language called Inuktun that has never been written down. Through this language they pass down their oral traditions and keep traditional stories alive as a vital part of their culture.

Climate change, and the impacts that it is having on their homeland, means that the Inughuit may have as little as 10 years left as a cultural group. Their entire way of life is threatened. They currently hunt seals, narwhal, walruses and other mammals but seal numbers are already in decline. The ice is predicted by IPCC scientists to soon become so thin that the Inughuit people will also be unable to use dog sleds. After that they will be forced to migrate south and will probably move into modern housing. This will mean the death of their language, lifestyle and their unique culture.

Stephen Pax Leonard, an anthropological linguist from Cambridge University, is to spend a year living with the Inughuit. He intends to record this language and observe the Inughuit's way of life so future generations can use and understand it. He is keen to collect records of the traditional stories that the people tell, which will reveal how language and culture are interconnected. Usually languages die out because parents *want* their children to speak other ones; however, this is not the case for the Inughuits in north-west Greenland.

Activity: Revise & Research

Revise your AS Unit 1 compulsory case study of climate change in the Arctic and make notes (e.g. on IPCC predictions for the Arctic) that complement this story. Read more at:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/13/inuit-language-culture-threatened>

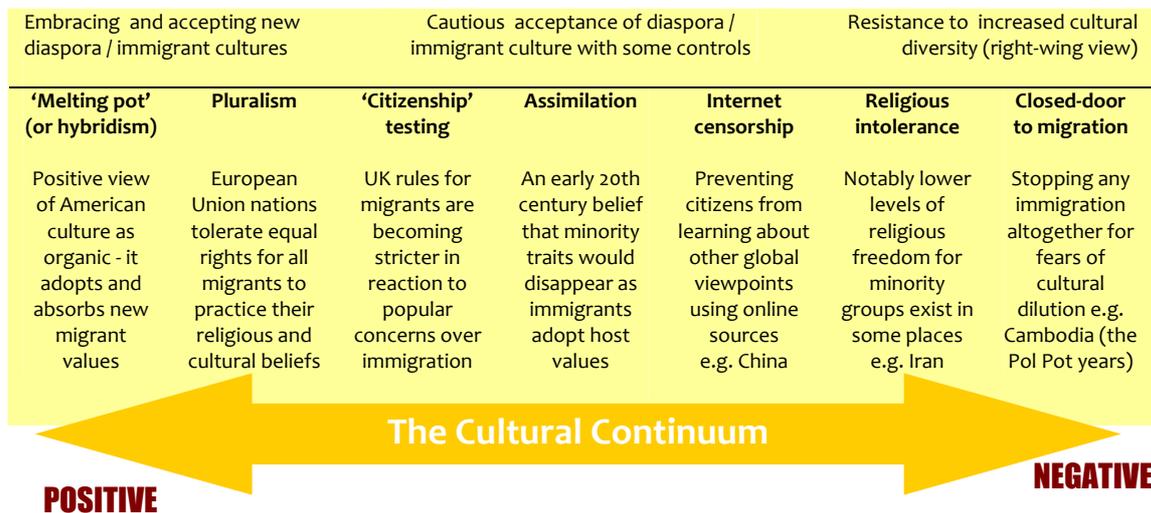
THE GEOGRAPHY OF CULTURE

■ French government limits the expression of Islamic culture ¹

Government and other players' attitudes towards human diversity and landscape diversity, both positive and negative, are important in preserving cultural diversity or moving towards cultural homogeneity. An interesting case study is the recent decision made in 2010 by France's National Assembly to pass a bill banning women from wearing a full-face veil in public. France is the first European Union country to ban Islamic women from wearing the niqab or burka (although Belgium is considering a similar move).

The vote reflects France's view that the veil should not be celebrated as an expression of cultural diversity. Instead, France's politicians overwhelmingly view the veil as a symbol of oppression against women and believe that it signifies the rise of Muslim fundamentalism. French culture has a long tradition of **secularism** and views the garment as basically being 'anti-French' i.e. not at all in the spirit of the French constitution.

Yet only about 2,000 women out of the French Muslim population of 5 million people actually wear a full veil. As a result, many more French Muslims have been left feeling that their culture and community is



being stigmatised and is under threat. The ban may yet be found illegal under EU law and probably faces further legal challenges. The 'cultural continuum' (above) suggests that the French government is attempting to bring about the **assimilation** of some Muslim women.

Discussion activity

- What is the difference between assimilation and pluralism?
- Is it right that some groups, whether religious or ethnic, might be given exemptions from specific parts of the law?
- What are your own views on this important issue?

THE IMPACT OF GLOBALISATION ON CULTURAL DIVERSITY

■ The spread of 'Globish'

The photograph opposite shows an English language class taking place at Nanning Teachers College, Congzhou, China². *Is the global spread of the English language causing cultural diversity to lessen?* Or are the different local forms of English spoken in various countries actually sufficiently different for us to say that language diversity is increasing, thanks to so many new distinctive, local and hybridised versions of English being created?

The story of 'Globish' tells us that it is difficult to evaluate the overall picture of how globalisation impacts on global cultural diversity.

Globish is a term used to describe a new English-based language or patois through which two non-speakers of English communicate. Globish may consist of as little as 1,500 words and does not adhere to the same grammatical rules that English recognises. Globish may be closer than any other to becoming the leading global language.



A splattering of English or Globish can help local culture make a political point that the whole world can understand. Protestors in Pakistan (after UK Prime Minister David Cameron made a suggestion that Pakistan could do more to help fight international terrorism) carried political banners written in English, or attempted English. One banner said: “David Cameroon – the loos mouth.” Although the spelling is not text book, English-speakers will understand the point being made.

A language expert in Sydney says: “We don’t talk about English. We talk about Englishes. Indian English, Chinglish, and Singlish (Singapore English). They are all legitimate forms of the language.”

The current dominance of English could one day become a disadvantage to its native speakers, who tend to only speak the one language. If a person speaks more languages then (s)he becomes a more flexible employee, particularly now that globalisation means TNCs look for managers who can run branches in more than one country. As Globish takes hold, an ability to speak ‘proper’ English could become less valuable!

■ **Disney to expand language schools in China** ³

Another dimension to the story of English: Disney is opening language schools in China, aiming to teach English to 150,000 children a year by 2015. Disney is the first western media company to open schools in China. The schools will teach children from between 1 and 11, using a curriculum that features their well-known characters. The cost will be \$2,000 a year per child, an amount that Chinese newly middle-class parents are easily expected to pay. The company has of course recognized that one benefit will be an increased interest in Disney products for a new generation of consumers.

■ **Cultural globalisation and the beauty industry** ⁴

Is globalisation leading to a spread of ‘western’ beauty products?

Women in Saudi Arabia now spend more on hair and cosmetic products per capita than any other women in the Middle East: this is a big change compared with how Saudi women behaved a few decades ago. Saudi women today swap beauty tips on Twitter and teenage girls enjoy ‘make up nights’.

Beauty salons also provide a good place for friends to meet up. Saudi women enjoy TV and wish to use the products they see advertised - and they will try to replicate many of the ‘looks’ used by western stars. In 2009, the ladies of Saudi Arabia spent £1.5 billion on cosmetics. The market is predicted to grow by 11 per cent in 2010.

This is in spite of the fact that Saudi women wear a full veil in public. Strict gender segregation is still practiced in the kingdom. So too are there bans on many forms of public entertainment. Therefore the women greatly enjoy getting together for ‘official’ wedding and engagement parties.

As more women enter the job market and graduate from Middle Eastern universities, the industry is expected to grow further. However, the country’s radical clerics criticise women behaving in this ‘western’ way, with one cleric even suggesting that women should show no more than one eye in public.

■ **The globalisation of the BlackBerry Messenger service meets with local resistance** ⁵

The role of **global media** corporations is important in conveying dominant cultural values and in influencing **cultural globalisation**. Students are expected to be able to critically examine the dominant world view that media corporations, such as Disney and Viacom convey, and how these may conflict with local values. This case study examines the globalisation of the BlackBerry Messenger service and the reaction from governments in countries such as Saudi Arabia and India who are resistant to this new cultural form of communication.

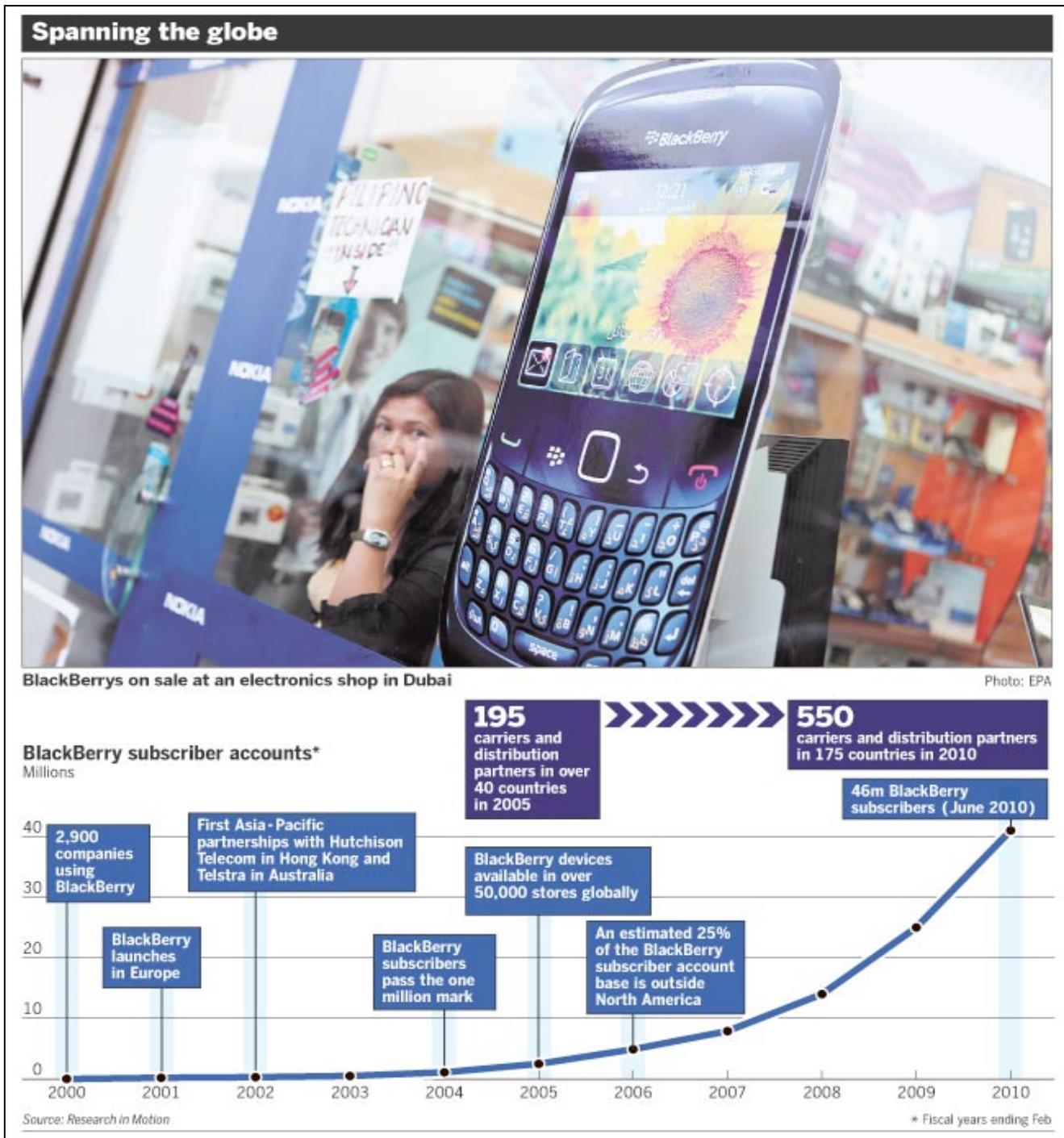
The BlackBerry smart-phone, the so-called ‘global number one tool for the universal businessman’, is under attack in certain nations. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are among those that have attempted to ban the controversial electronic device. The BlackBerry has even ended up being at the centre of an international row involving Middle East governments and spy agencies!

All of this is because the BlackBerry has the capacity to let its user communicate confidential information – which in many cultures is regarded a citizen’s right. The BlackBerry makes it impossible for a state government to monitor the communication of people using the device within the country.

The rulers of Saudi Arabia have now had some success in banning use of the BlackBerry. They claim to fear further terrorist attacks and consider the Blackberry to be a threat to national security. Other countries also have concerns over the use of the BlackBerry and the threat it poses to national security, including China, Indonesia and Lebanon. India is in discussion with RIM, the company who own and

created the device. It has been discovered that terrorists behind the 2008 Mumbai attacks communicated via the BlackBerry.

However, in many world cultures such as the UK, a more liberal philosophy means that the freedom to communicate via BlackBerry is likely to remain as a right that people can enjoy, despite the possible risks posed to the state. In 2010, the BlackBerry was on sale in 175 countries, available through 550 mobile networks and had more than 41 million users.



Source: Financial Times⁶

Activity (1) Revise & Research

Re-read your AS notes on technology and globalisation. Find out more about the BlackBerry ban at: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/d13816b4-a16c-11df-9656-00144feabdco.html>

Activity (2) Essay

“Globalisation has led to the rapid reduction of global cultural diversity.” Discuss (70 marks)

CULTURAL ATTITUDES TO THE ENVIRONMENT

■ National park faces sale ⁷

There is a clear conflict between environmentalism and consumer capitalism. One case study of this is the struggle faced by the US state of Wyoming to fund maintenance of its Grand Teton national park.

The Governor of Wyoming has threatened to sell off a lump of Grand Teton, one of America's most magnificent national parks, unless the current US administration can come up with more money to pay for education in the state.

Wyoming makes as little as \$3,000 a year from leasing some of the national park land to cattle ranchers and feels that it could make more income to benefit the state and its inhabitants. The chunk of land that the Governor may sell in the future is valued at \$125 million.

While cultural attitudes towards the environment may favour its preservation or conservation, other social values – especially the need for capital to fund vital social services - can create a conflict of interest.

Activity: Research

Find out more at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/06/wyoming-grand-teton-national-park>

REFERENCES

¹ <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/e8596f5a-8e98-11df-8a67-00144feab49a.html>

² <http://www.flickr.com/photos/goldendragon613/250121794/sizes/z/in/photostream/> (c) Rex Pe

³ <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/4d6cfd1a-8932-11df-8ecd-00144feab49a.html>

⁴ <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/ba5a8c12-9350-11df-bb9a-00144feab49a,so1=1.html>

⁵ <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/d13816b4-a16c-11df-9656-00144feabdco.html#>

⁶ <http://www.ft.com/cms/1a4b1e74-a17d-11df-9656-00144feabdco.JPG>

⁷ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/aug/06/wyoming-grand-teton-national-park>