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Preface

Jonathan Friedman

I remember seeing a cartoon some years ago in which a American politician standing in front of a crowd of supporters yells ‘send the immigrants home.’ Just behind him an Indian whispers in his ear: ‘I’ll help you pack.’ The world has certainly changed rapidly in the past few decades. It has been a shock for many, not least researchers in anthropology and sociology who have found themselves confronted by Others who have become actors in their own right and whose voices have gotten in the way of a certain classificatory calm that once dominated our understanding of the world. This all began in the mid-1970s, a period that I have tried to understand in global systemic terms in which declining hegemony is linked to rising cultural politics. This multilevel process can be depicted in terms of political economy, and social and cultural transformation.

Political economy

The political economic logic of this decline has been outlined in a number of publications and dovetails with certain other analyses (Friedman, 1994; Friedman and Chase-Dunn, 2005; Silver and Arrighi, 2005; Wallerstein, 2003). The logic is one in which a wealthy hegemonic centre becomes too wealthy to reproduce its position. Capital is exported en masse and the centre becomes a net importer of the products of its own exported capital. This leads to an increasingly negative balance of payments, increasing debt and declining state finances. Capital export, a highly uneven process, leads not only to the emergence of new and rising centres of production for the world market, but also to a more general decentralisation of capital accumulation. All of this goes today under the heading of globalisation and is often described in evolutionary terms. Yet it is different, because the process is more total in geographical extent, and more rapid and penetrating than in the past. But the logics, I would argue, are largely the same and, in fact, predate the so-called industrial capitalist world associated with Western hegemony.
When we first suggested that the West was in hegemonic decline in the mid-1970s it was considered to be nonsense. Today this is no longer the case and current events might be said to lend some credence to the approach. East Asia (minus Japan) was part of the underdeveloped world in the 1970s, but this is certainly no longer so. China has emerged as a major global power with its own supply-zone peripheries in South-east Asia. In production terms, China has become a workshop of the world, not least in strategic areas such as computers and electronics. It is expanding rapidly in Africa and South America and spending billions that the West can no longer afford on major infrastructural projects, soaking up raw materials and oil wherever possible. This may be compared to United States expansion after the Second World War when it penetrated and appropriated former colonial hegemonies of Europe in the Third World.

The rate of Chinese production as a percentage of world production has increased over the past few years, not least with the acquisition of IBM’s laptop division. These are changes that are part of the decentralisation of accumulation and the formation of new potential hegemonic centres. At the economic level, there has clearly been a shift in economic clout from West to East. While this shift in accumulation has occurred, the debt of the United States and Europe has also increased and the former has become dangerously dependent on Chinese investment (i.e. 50 per cent of United States government bonds). In fact the new and apparently failing American imperial surge is to be expected in a situation where real control over the world is decreasing.

The social and cultural transformation

This transformation changes the overall conditions of identification and cultural production in the global arena. In areas of decline, states become weaker and decentralisation pervades, not only state financing but even the large fordist companies that dominated the period of industrial growth. Both turn to flexibility to solve their problems, sub-contracting away part of their problems, by slimming and cutting, leading to a decline in real wages for many. Capital that remains in the centre thus becomes increasingly flexibilised or invested in financial and ‘fictitious’ forms of accumulation. Outsourcing is itself a process fragmentation into smaller units of action and, as suggested, it is not only an issue of capital but of all institutions. This explains the formation of military firms, the privatisation of violence in general and the complex of illicit trades that network the world today. Decentralisation of capital
accumulation has been paralleled by the political fragmentation process and the decline of a great many peripheral and sub-peripheral states, including the Soviet Empire. This has led to increasing conflict, warfare and poverty that in its term spurred massive migration to the old primarily urban centres of the West, where they form the core of a new underclass, and where drugs and violent crime have been on the increase.

In this situation there is a loss of future orientation or what might be called modernism, the social projects that dominated much of the last and this century. Instead, there is a retraction into roots and identity politics. When the future does not work, there is always the past. The latter is stable and theoretically unchanging, as much as it is refurbished according to specific needs. This stability offers a haven from a world of alienation in which mobility is no longer a general option and where the future no longer dominates the present. Alienation is okay if one is going somewhere as Goethe expressed it in *Faust*. But when the movement stops, alienation becomes unbearable. Thus the retreat, as it were, into cultural identity is a logical product of a decline of the modernist pole of Western identity. In this new situation there are still those who would maintain the latter in face of the rapid changes in the world. These range from a minority of intellectuals to those who occupy upscale positions within the world system in which modernism is necessary and workable with substantial amounts of cash. For other intellectuals there is a slippage towards a postmodernism in which the major target is the West as the embodiment of all that is modernist, that is science, rationalism, abstract knowledge and so on. Instead there is a celebration of ritual, wisdom in the form of different cultural knowledges and the primitive in the sense of a liberation from the prison of modernity itself. This can prevail in the most interesting places. In what is called ‘managerial New Age’ the rituals of channelling combine the Isis cult with a plethora of traditional magics – all in a kind of identification with the world’s cultures as a total set of human possibilities.

There is also a growth of primitivism in this period, an attraction to that which is repressed by culture/civilisation/modernity and which is understood in terms of a wellspring of all human creativity. This is expressed not only in some of the work by Foucault, but also in post-feminism, and more energetically in satanism, some forms of neo-paganism, the urban indian movement of squatters and the popular culture that developed around these phenomena. For the great majority of people, however, there has been a drift towards the neo-traditional, towards religious, ethnic and other forms of cultural identity or roots.
These tendencies are all part of the identity space of modernity and can be represented as in (Figure P.1; Friedman, 1994).

In other words, tradition, primitivism, modernism and postmodernism are all constituent poles of the modern. They are not either before or after the universe that we inhabit and which is a cultural structure of capitalism and the latter’s transformative effects on identity space. There have always been representatives of the four poles in the form of various political positions and identification, but their salience varies very much with the conjunctural cycles of hegemony. Particular political practices can even combine the poles in interesting ways, as in the combination of primitivism and modernism that can be found in movements, from Futurism to Nazism.

The decline of hegemony is, in this argument, the basis of the shifts in identity outlined above. But these shifts apply only to those who actually participate in modern identity space and this is not the case for the entire globe, not, at least, for many of the populations that anthropologists study. Primitivism and traditionalism are not about extant ‘primitive’ or ‘traditional’ social orders nor about the identities that are produced within the former. This is an issue to which we shall return below.

If graphic representations help then Figure P.2 might summarise the kind of argument that I am proposing. The cultural identities that are so explosively prevalent today are the product of a breakdown of the hierarchical order of Western hegemony and here we can include Soviet hegemony as well which lost out in the Cold War to a declining West. This is a general process affecting a range of identities, from the mid-1970s onwards.
In this period those researchers specialised on ethnicity, who had speculated about how long it would take for minorities to become completely assimilated to larger national populations, were shocked by the re-emergence of regional minorities. In Europe there were the Bretons and the Occitans in the most republican and assimilationist country of the continent. Tom Nairn (1977) had already completed his *The Breakup of Britain*, of course, and there was a consensus that former predictions had been wrong. But national identity was also changing. In this period popular interest began to gravitate towards the 'primitive'. In France, books about Celtic France replaced the usual literature on French civilisation. In Germany, one of the most popular series was *Heimat*, a very ethnographic project, about twentieth-century everyday life in the country. It could be said that national identity, which had been generally understood in terms of citizenship, began to move in the direction of cultural identity, that is the individual was no longer a member of the nation but the bearer of its cultural characteristics.

This is the era of minority ethnic politics in the United States. And in the world it is marked by the rise of indigenous politics. It consists of the revitalisation of cultural practices and demands for rights – from land to political sovereignty. Finally there began, following this, the development of cultural politics of immigrant minorities, often supported by states unable to manage integration. Thus the process of integration that led to national minority formation has been replaced by increasing diasporisation. Everything from language to cultural rights were common political issues. This has culminated in Europe with the larger-scale issue of Islamic and Islamicist politics. Some states that were among the most homogeneous have openly declared themselves to be...
multicultural. In a very top–down mangerial Sweden, the nation state is now officially the multicultural state, and Swedes are officially designated as just another ethnic group among the rest. In a television interview in the late 1990s, the newly appointed minister of integration claimed that he was definitely not a Swede as his genealogy contained Scottish and Danish blood (Ekholm and Friedman, 2006; Friedman, 2003; Swedish Government, 1997/98). There is, in some states, a kind of silent coalition between cultural politics of minority organisations and the state, but even where the state is strongly assimilationist, cultural politics has had similar kinds of divisive results.

The point here is that ethnicisation and cultural politics, just as the emergence of postmodernism and ‘occidentalism’, are expressions of declining hegemony. They are not separate phenomena but are linked in a unitary process of fragmentation. This process is double-edged. It creates a new integration between the individual and the smaller entity while weakening larger state-based integration. And it is the decline of modernist identity itself which triggers this new identification. In conditions of poverty, modernism still provides a strong sense of integration in the sense that it channels action to a politics of social transformation within a developmental cosmology. This is the basis of class struggle and the varieties of socialist ideologies that dominated most of the past century as oppositional projects. With the decline of the latter, the practice of identity can no longer find its source within the imaginary trajectory of the social order, but regresses to the cultural identities discussed above. One principal aspect of this transformation is what some have called ‘occidentalism’ (Buruma and Margalit, 2004). The latter authors argue that occidentalism is itself an integral part of Western culture, the negative part, and that it has been expressed in the form of romanticism, traditionalism and anti-modernism. These are terms that are included in the identity space depicted in Figure P.1.

Buruma and Margalit argue that anti-Western movements, from the Russian romantics, to Japanese Kamikazes to the current Muslim ‘fundamentalists’, share the same set of representations that have been culled from the Western occidentals. While this is something of an exaggeration, there are interesting connections between such movements and Western anti-Westernism. Here, again I would argue that this must be understood in terms of historical process. The trajectory of the left is interesting in this respect. From 1970 to 1990 there is a shift from the critique of imperialism in economic and political terms to the critique of Western culture as such, the latter being seen as the ultimate cause of the former. This is the ideological framework of much of cultural and
postcolonial studies. No longer the fault of the Rockefellers, now transmuted into Shakespeare and Keats, the occidentalist critique combines an attack on scientific rationality, literature and so on with its reduction and essentialisation to Western modernity as such. This accounts for the ambivalence of many Western intellectuals with respect to current terrorist violence as to all expressions of anti-Westernism. It is our fault they insist and we deserve it! This is not an empirical analysis of the phenomenon, but a simple moral positioning. The left then has also been part of the decline of modernism and the rise of cultural identity politics, even if much of it has been carried out within universities which is the last stronghold of their power, having by and large lost their foothold in the public sphere.

A note of caution

I have described a general phenomenon of emergence of cultural identification and its polarisation. But I have not discussed and will not do so here, the fact that this processes articulates with very different kinds of social situations. There is a very great difference between indigenous groups and immigrants both legally and socially. This is evident in a politics by which the former have attempted to separate themselves from the latter, in which relations to and their claims on states are of a very different nature. This is so even in terms of the way in which the states of which they are parts define themselves in relation to indigeneity. The difference itself is reflected in the current globalist onslaught on indigenous politics. If we add regional minorities and national populations, the articulations are again quite specific, so that any theoretical understanding of the phenomena must take such differences into account.

Double polarisation and globalisation

The decline of the hegemony of modernism has led to the proliferation of new cultural identities or at least of their revival. Most of the latter have been within states and led to internal fragmentation of social and cultural projects. They include not only indigenous groups, who are a minority in this respect, but more importantly the massive cultural politics that has been linked to contemporary migration, including the transformation of the nation state into the multicultural state. But this process that might be designated as horizontal polarisation pitting cultural identities against one another is only part of the story. There is
a simultaneous vertical polarisation that frames the former process and which must be taken into account in any full analysis of the contemporary situation.

This, expressed in increasing Gini indexes in many Western countries where the rich have become very much richer and the poor much poorer, is a process that began with the stagnation/decline of working-class incomes in the 1970s in the United States. It has combined with the immigration of cheap labour to many countries, the flexibilisation of the labour force in general and the decline of working-class politics, all which have contributed to generally more fragile conditions of existence, if not real poverty. The difference between political regimes is an interesting factor in this regard, such as the degree of state intervention in maintaining welfare levels, but these differences do not change the actual trends which are directly related, as we have suggested, to hegemonic decline itself. Those economists who proclaim that poverty is on the decrease because of globalisation forget to state that it is primarily because of the development of new potential hegemons like China and India that the statistics seem positive. Subtracting these two giants where enormous middle classes have emerged, the world is experiencing increasing impoverishment, including most of the West. The polarisation can be expressed as a combination of upward and downward mobility of the following type (Figure P.3).

Upward mobility can affect any sector and often creates divisions within any particular ‘horizontal’ category. This has been brilliantly demonstrated in the work by Elizabeth Rata (2000) on the stratification
resulting from the success of the Maori movement. Most interesting in this respect is the formation of cosmopolitan elites as a result of upward mobility. We suggested above that globalisation is itself an expression of declining hegemony. It is in such periods that vertical polarisation becomes prevalent. And it is the rising cosmopolitan elites that are the bearers of the discourse of globalisation along with those intellectuals who identify with this process. We suggest here that much of the postcolonial discourse of hybridity and fluid multiculturalism is a product of this process. That these two terms have a tendency to become part of a new dominant ideology is related to the extension of this cosmopolitan identity as a general characterisation of the world. We note that the core of this identification is not an intellectual product but an immediate experience of a certain position in the world. An employee of a transnational consultancy firm expressed it as follows:


Reformulated in official consultancy language:

Awareness of global interconnectedness is the key. Most globally aware individuals can tell you about the gradual process they experienced or the ‘ahha’ moment when they suddenly realised ‘it’s all one world’. From Earth Day to the Amazonian rainforest, it may have been their interest in ecology and the environment; for others it may have been actual travels, or exposure to international organizations like the United Nations or humanitarian relief agencies, even the Peace Corps. Space exploration has also contributed to the ‘one world’ realization. Whatever the source, being able to think and feel interconnected on a global level is what’s causing the paradigm shift here. The world is borderless when seen from a high enough perspective, and this has all kinds of implications: socially, politically and even spiritually. Regardless of how the awareness began, it generally culminates in a sense of global citizenship. The best approach is to develop a sense that ‘I belong anywhere I am, no matter who I am’. (Barnum, 1992, p. 142)

This is not the product of postcolonial studies but of the (neo)liberal world in which it has developed. It is the leitmotiv of official pronouncements from global institutions, from UNESCO to the World Economic
Forum, as well as from global media transnationals. This discourse has thoroughly penetrated the universe of globalising anthropologists who would urge us to think ourselves beyond the nation (Appadurai, 1993, p. 411) and who take to criticising indigenous peoples while siding up with immigrants-in-general:

Across the globe a romance is building for the defense of indigenes, first peoples, natives trammled by civilization, producing a sentimental politics as closely mixed with motifs of nature and ecology as with historical narratives...In Hawaii, the high-water mark of this romance is a new indigenous nationalist movement, still mainly sound and fury, but gaining momentum in the 1990s. This essay is not about these kinds of blood politics. My primary focus here is not on the sentimental island breezes of a Pacific romance, however much or little they shake up the local politics of blood, also crucial to rights for diaspora people, and to conditions of political possibility for global transnationalism. (Kelly, 1995, p. 476)

Here we see a reaction to ethnicisation of a specific type, the indigenous type, and praise for the transnationals of the world. I have referred to this as trans-x discourse, an expression of vertical polarisation in which anthropologists take the side of 'the world' and sometimes the 'universal' (Kuper, 2001) against the particularisms of the indigenising peoples of the world, here reduced to global rednecks. There is a significant overlap here of globalisation and inventionist discourse with respect to the systematic debunking of the inauthenticity of 'native' cultural representations. In previous work (Friedman, 1994, 1999a, 1999b) I have tried to understand this from an external perspective that is related to the polarisation process itself. The pervasiveness of trans-x discourse can even be found in the supposedly radical work of Hardt and Negri (2000) where the cosmopolitan is transformed into the nomadic:

Nomadism and miscegenation appear here as figures of virtue, as the first ethical processes on the terrain of Empire (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p. 362)

and the indigenous as the local is a sign of ultimate danger:

Today's celebrations of the local can be regressive and fascistic when they oppose circulation and mixture, and thus reinforce the walls of nation, ethnicity, race, people and the like. (p. 362)
The same globalist representation of the world is exactly replicated in these words and reinforces what is clearly a soon to be dominant ideology, the ideology of the dominant.

At the bottom of the scale there is a radically opposed discourse produced by certain indigenising populations, and here I refer to the wide variety of those that practice indigeneity and not those that are officially designated as indigenous. The case of the Washitaw Indians, a ‘new’ Black tribe equipped with a homepage, an empress, licence plates, and arms and an alliance with the rightist Republic of Texas. The alliance is possible because of that which is shared, including, here, the separation of the races. More important is the opposition to the Washington consensus, the American nation state, the Vatican, the Jews and all other cosmopolitans and their supposedly unified agenda of world dominance (Friedman, 1999a). This is a specific discourse; however, one that is part of a strategy of closure and exit from the world system. And while the latter may be characteristic of many populations who are ‘official’ members of the category of indigenes, they do not, by and large, share the extreme forms of rooting that joins some of these contemporary ‘Indians’ with the European New Right. The latter, it should be noted, are not mere extreme nationalists. On the contrary, they are quite open to the idea of its demise and replacement by a conglomeration of closed or even gated communities. They often are spokesmen for multiculturalism as well.

A plurality of cultures can coexist without either destroying or absorbing the one another only if embodied in organic communities, not merely isolated individuals. In the latter case, the outcome is not only the gradual erasure of cultural particularity but the very decomposition of individuality, which explains the inextricable connection in the US between cultural homogenization through the culture industry, the rise of the therapeutic industry, and the progressive disintegration of communities (de Benoist, cited in Piccone, 1994, p. 16).

Given this situation, we see reasons for hope only in the affirmation of collective singularities, the spiritual reappropriation of heritages, the clear awareness of roots and specific cultures . . . . We are counting on the breakup of the singular model, whether this occurs in the rebirth of regional languages, the affirmation of ethnic minorities or in phenomena as diverse as decolonization . . . . [whether in the] affirmation of being black, the political pluralism of Third World
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countries, the rebirth of a Latin American civilization, the resurgence of an Islamic culture etc... (de Benoist: 33 February–March 1980, 1920, cited in Taguieff, 1994, p. 119)

It is significant as well that an entire number of the Left journal, Telos, was devoted to the texts of the New Right. Its editor, Paul Piccone, elaborated at length on the similarities between the New Right and the old New Left. For those on the left who have found ways of supporting acts of terror via their own guilt, it should be remembered that the militia groups in the United States were by and large supportive of the attack on the World Trade Center.

While indigenising may produce such discourses which are, I stress, neither right nor left in political terms, actual indigenous populations do not partake of such discourses, although they clearly express aspirations for sovereignty. There is, however, a logical continuum involved here that should not be overlooked. Under the political pressure of ethnic competition, certain indigenous leaders in Hawaii have re-classified all the immigrant labour to the islands as colonisers.

The crucial distinction between global fields and the constitution of experience

This sketch, as we have already suggested, concerns reconfigurations within what might be called the Western identity space even if there are actors from outside of that space who participate within it. The vertical polarisation between the cosmopolitan and the indigenous is a relation between relative categories and not between actual social actors. It may be said to encompass the horizontal polarisation of ethnic and cultural fragmentation that it is also a categorical polarisation and not a relation between actual people. It is important to understand this in terms of a particular space of identifications and not confuse this space with other spaces insofar as it has often been the case that real populations have been conflated with the processes involved in revitalisation and ethnicisation. The latter refer to the social structuring of identity but not to its cultural content. That is, identity is not a mere invention. The latter is based on the practice of identification which is a selective operation performed upon a larger corpus of cultural materials that are integrated into the lives of a particular group.

Hawaiians may demonstrate using terms such as aloha, aloha ‘aina, malama, malama ‘aina – terms that are meant to express their specific relation to the land and even to their culture in more general terms,
often contrasted to the capitalist regime of private property. These may further be combined with ecological discourses that turn the population into the guardians of nature. This is where the accusations of invention and inauthenticity are invoked. But what is really happening is the outcome of the politicisation of aspects of a larger cultural space. This is not the invention of tradition, but the reconfiguration of political identity. The reason why it works is related to the resonance that such politics has within the everyday lives of those who participate in such movements. Hawaii is an extreme example in which the entire political order was destroyed, the culture forbidden, the population marginalised to such a degree that very little of Hawaiian life was preserved intact. But there are also many continuities in this process that can be traced in forms of socialisation, sociality, exchange relations, modes of religiosity – and it is these that form a basis of shared experience, implicit and immediate sets of understanding of the world upon which culture is elaborated and which provides the latter with an existential foundation.

When social life is understood in such terms, an invitation to a phenomenological approach to ethnography, then the issue of invention and authenticity can be recast in more comprehensible terms. It also clearly situates the difference between political identification as such, and the reasons that it actually works. The point here is that social experience is configured in radically different ways in different social orders and that this cannot be avoided by redefining culture as just a bunch of things, texts, rules and discrete objects. This has been one way that inventionists and globalisers have made common cause in eliminating the real differences that exist in the world. Now whether we call them alternative modernities or argue in some other way against difference, there is ample evidence indicating that such differences do indeed exist. Culture is not simply about symbols, labels and elective affinity. It is about the very organisation of social (shared) experience and this is a deeper phenomenon than the difference between different commodities. When Kwakiutl Indians potlatched with sewing machines they were not into an alternative modernity because of the machines. On the contrary, the latter were fully integrated into Kwakiutl forms of sociality. Now, of course, if culture is merely a set of objects it is easy to define a culture for every such set, but this simply avoids the issue of real differences in the way people go about the world. It also tames culture and makes it available as collector’s items.

This is not merely an issue for those involved in the debates concerning indigenous politics. It is just as applicable to phenomena such as Islamism where a certain cosmopolitanism both apologises
for and neutralises the phenomenon, while transforming Islamists themselves into passive objects, the product of a larger context. This kind of intellectual activity is a curious form of colonialism, paradoxical in the light of the progressive profession of its practitioners. Recent ethnographic work (Khosrohavar, 2002, 2006) explores the way in which very different experiences in several countries are linked to the construction of cosmological frame of interpretation of the world which is a particular kind of immediate sense. This cannot be grasped externally but must be understood emically, the result of real acts of constitution of reality.

Conclusion

It is crucial that social scientists maintain a perspective on the issues that does not suck them into the polarisation process itself. It is not unusual and it is also to be expected that many researchers should find themselves taking sides in the conflicts but it is important to maintain enough distance so as not to lose our bearings. The importance of Elizabeth Rata’s work is that instead of becoming involved in debates about authenticity, it concentrates on processes of social change within the Maori movement. While this was certainly a hot issue, it was not about the authority to represent or identify a particular culture, but about the real tendencies at work in a historical process, one that has parallels in many parts of this world in upheaval. We all participate in the world, of course, and often we are directly implicated in the contemporary politics of that world. It is crucial that social scientists engage their own world, but it is also crucial that they do so on the basis of as deep an understanding as is possible. This is not, of course, an argument for political correctness. Understanding should not be conflated with ‘understanding’. On the other hand, to say that we would struggle for a particular kind of modernist society should not be based on universalist assumptions. Otherwise, we fall into the same kind of theocratic discourse that we would seek to defeat. Universalism is in fact quite particular, both historically and, to a lesser degree, geographically. As an instrument of war, we have seen what it is capable of producing in recent conflagrations where universal principles have been implemented with disastrous results. If we wish to maintain our own social orders, I am afraid that we shall have to do it locally and in the name of sovereignty, the control of our own conditions of existence, something that would not make globalising cosmopolitans particularly happy. I myself disagree with many of the arguments of this book, but I also believe that
they are worthy of discussion and debate. It is such debate that is the cornerstone of a public sphere to which the authors all subscribe, and which is, if not a solution to real problems, a necessary way of coming to some kind of understanding of the contemporary situation. It is this openness which is in greatest need of protection in a world increasingly pervaded by political correctness that would simply ban particular expressions on the grounds that they are associated with some form of unacceptable evil. This is often a sign of intellectual weakness, an inability to confront issues upfront for fear of inadequacy, sometimes a mask for a hidden agreement with 'the other side'. This book raises some of the most crucial questions of the contemporary world. Let us hope that it opens the public arena.

Notes

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1. Chinese production as a per cent of world production in 2002: tractors 83 per cent, watches/clocks 75 per cent, toys 70 per cent, penicillin 60 per cent, cameras 55 per cent, vitamin C 50 per cent, laptop computers 50 per cent, telephones 50 per cent, television 29 per cent, washing machines 24 per cent, refrigerators 16 per cent, furniture 16 per cent, steel 15 per cent.