

## 6 FUNDAMENTALISM, DIASPORA AND HYBRIDITY

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Where identities are concerned, this oscillation between Tradition and Translation (which was briefly traced above in relation to Britain) is becoming more evident on a global canvas. Everywhere, cultural identities are emerging which are not fixed, but poised, *in transition*, between different positions; which draw on different cultural traditions at the same time; and which are the product of those complicated cross-overs and cultural mixes which are increasingly common in a globalized world. It may be tempting to think of identity in the age of globalization as destined to end up in one place or another: either returning to its 'roots' or disappearing through assimilation and homogenization. But this may be a false dilemma.

For there is another possibility: that of 'Translation'. This describes those identity formations which cut across and intersect natural frontiers, and which are composed of people who have been *dispersed* forever from their homelands. Such people retain strong links with their places of origin and their traditions, but they are without the illusion of a return to the past. They are obliged to come to terms with the new cultures they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them and losing their identities completely. They bear upon them the traces of the particular cultures, traditions, languages and histories by which they were shaped. The difference is that they are not and will never be *unified* in the old sense, because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, belong at one and the same time to several 'homes' (and to no one particular 'home'). People belonging to such *cultures of hybridity* have had to renounce the dream or ambition of rediscovering any kind of 'lost' cultural purity, or ethnic absolutism. They are irrevocably *translated*. The word 'translation', Salman Rushdie notes, 'comes etymologically from the Latin for "bearing across"'. Migrant writers like him, who belong to two worlds at once, 'having been borne across the world ... are translated men' (Rushdie, 1991). They are the products of the new *diasporas* created by the post-colonial migrations. They must learn to inhabit at least two identities, to speak two cultural languages, to translate and negotiate between them. Cultures of hybridity are one of the distinctly novel types of identity produced in the era of late-modernity, and there are more and more examples of them to be discovered.

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ACTIVITY 3 You should now read **Reading C, 'Diaspora cultures'**, by Paul Gilroy. The author here highlights the question of 'diaspora identities' through a study of 'black British' culture of the 1980s.

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Some people argue that 'hybridity' and syncretism — the fusion between different cultural traditions — is a powerful creative source,

creating new forms that are more appropriate to late-modernity than the old, embattled national identities of the past. Others, however, argue that hybridity, with the indeterminacy, 'double consciousness', and relativism it implies, also has its costs and dangers. Salman Rushdie's novel about migration, Islam, and the prophet Mohammed, *The Satanic Verses*, with its deep immersion in Islamic culture and its secular consciousness of the exiled 'translated man', so offended the Iranian fundamentalists that they passed sentence of death on him for blasphemy. It also outraged many British Muslims. In defending his novel, Rushdie offered a strong and compelling defence of 'hybridity'.

Standing at the centre of the novel is a group of characters most of whom are British Muslims, or not particularly religious persons of Muslim background, struggling with just the sort of great problems that have arisen to surround the book, problems of hybridization and ghettoization, of reconciling the old and the new. Those who oppose the novel most vociferously today are of the opinion that intermingling with different cultures will inevitably weaken and ruin their own. I am of the opposite opinion. *The Satanic Verses* celebrates hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs. It rejoices in mongrelization and fears the absolutism of the Pure. *Mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is *how newness enters the world*. It is the great possibility that mass migration gives the world, and I have tried to embrace it. *The Satanic Verses* is for change-by-fusion, change-by-conjoining. It is a love-song to our mongrel selves.  
(Rushdie, 1991, p.394)

However, the *Satanic Verses* may well have become trapped between the irreconcilable forces of Tradition and Translation. This is the view offered by the sympathetic, but critical, Bhiku Parekh in Reading D.

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ACTIVITY 4 You should now read Reading D, 'Between holy text and moral void', by Bhiku Parekh.

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On the other hand, there are equally powerful attempts to reconstruct purified identities, to restore coherence, 'closure' and Tradition, in the face of hybridity and diversity. Two examples are the resurgence of nationalism in Eastern Europe and the rise of fundamentalism.

In an era when regional integration in the economic and political fields, and the breaking down of national sovereignty, are moving very rapidly in Western Europe, the collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the break-up of the old Soviet Union have been followed by a powerful revival of ethnic nationalism, fuelled by ideas of both racial purity and religious orthodoxy. The ambition to create new, culturally



The tension between Tradition and Translation

and ethnically unified nation-states (which I have suggested above never really existed in Western national cultures) was the driving force behind the break-away movements in the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the move to independence of many former Soviet Republics, from Georgia, the Ukraine, Russia and Armenia to Kurdistan, Uzbekistan and the 'Muslim' Asian republics of the old Soviet state. Much the same process has been taking place in the 'nations' of Central Europe which were carved out of the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires at the end of the First World War.

These new would-be 'nations' try to construct states that are unified in both ethnic and religious terms, and to create political entities around homogeneous cultural identities. The problem is that they contain within their 'borders' minorities who identify themselves with different cultures. Thus, for example, there are 'ethnic' Russian minorities in the Baltic Republics and the Ukraine, ethnic Poles in Lithuania, an Armenian enclave (Nagorno-Karabakh) in Azerbaijan, Turkic-Christian minorities amongst the Russian majorities of Moldavia, and large numbers of Muslims in the southern republics of the old Soviet Union who share more, in cultural and religious terms, with their Middle-Eastern Islamic neighbours than with many of their 'countrymen'.

The other significant form of the revival of particularistic nationalism and ethnic and religious absolutism is, of course, the phenomenon of 'fundamentalism'. This is evident everywhere (for example, in the revived little-Englandism referred to earlier), though its most striking example is to be found in some Islamic states in the Middle East. Beginning with the Iranian Revolution, fundamentalist Islamic movements, which seek to create religious states in which the political principles of organization are aligned with the religious doctrines and laws of the *Korān*, have arisen in many, hitherto secular Islamic societies. In fact, this trend is difficult to interpret. Some analysts see it as a reaction to the 'forced' character of Western modernization; certainly, Iranian fundamentalism was a direct response to the efforts of the Shah in the 1970s to adopt Western models and cultural values wholesale. Some interpret it as a response to being left out of 'globalization'. The reaffirmation of cultural 'roots' and the return to orthodoxy has long been one of the most powerful sources of counter-identification amongst many Third World and post-colonial societies and regions (one thinks here of the roles of nationalism and national culture in the Indian, African and Asian independence movements). Others see the roots of Islamic fundamentalism in the failure of Islamic states to throw up successful and effective 'modernizing' leaderships or secular, modern parties. In conditions of extensive poverty and relative economic under-development (fundamentalism is stronger in the poorer Islamic states of the region), a restoration of the Islamic faith is a powerful mobilizing and binding political and ideological force, especially where democratic traditions are weak.

The trend towards 'global homogenization', then, is matched by a powerful revival of 'ethnicity', sometimes of the more hybrid or symbolic varieties, but also frequently of the exclusive or 'essentialist' varieties cited above. Bauman has referred to this 'resurgence of ethnicity' as one of the main reasons why the more extreme, free-ranging or indeterminate versions of what happens to identity under the impact of the 'global post-modern' requires serious qualification.

The 'resurgence of ethnicity' ... puts in the forefront the unanticipated flourishing of ethnic loyalties inside national minorities. By the same token, it casts a shadow on what seems to be the deep cause of the phenomenon: the growing separation between the membership of body politic and ethnic membership (or more generally, cultural conformity) which removes much of its original attraction from the programme of cultural assimilation. ... Ethnicity has become one of the many categories or tokens, or 'tribal poles', around which flexible and sanction-free communities are formed and in reference to which individual identities are constructed and asserted. There are now, therefore, [many] fewer centrifugal forces which once weakened ethnic integrity. There is instead a powerful demand for pronounced, though symbolic rather than institutionalized, ethnic distinctiveness.  
(Bauman, 1990, p.167)

The resurgence of nationalism and other forms of particularism at the end of the twentieth century, alongside and intimately linked to globalization, is of course a remarkable reversal, a most unexpected turn of events. Nothing in the modernizing Enlightenment perspectives or ideologies of the West — neither liberalism nor indeed Marxism, which for all its opposition to liberalism also saw capitalism as the unwitting agent of 'modernity' — foresaw such an outcome.

Both liberalism and Marxism, in their different ways, implied that the attachment to the local and the particular would gradually give way to more universalistic and cosmopolitan or international values and identities; that nationalism and ethnicity were archaic forms of attachment — the sorts of thing which would be 'melted away' by the revolutionizing force of modernity. According to these 'metanarratives' of modernity, the irrational attachments to the local and the particular, to tradition and roots, to national myths and 'imagined communities', would gradually be replaced by more rational and universalistic identities. Yet globalization seems to be producing neither simply the triumph of 'the global' nor the persistence, in its old nationalistic form, of 'the local'. The displacements or distractions of globalization turn out to be more varied and more contradictory than either its protagonists or opponents suggest. However, this also suggests that, though powered in many ways by the West, globalization may turn out to be part of that slow and uneven but continuing story of the de-centring of the West.

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