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8

Delusions of Difference

There is no global survey of world culture, akin to *Fortune 500*, the *Strategy Survey* of the International Institute of Strategic Studies or the UNDP's *World Development Report*. Yet a brief look at the state of world culture today would, at first sight, suggest great vitality and change: a world of over 10,000 spoken languages; a boom of both traditional forms of publication, such as books and newspapers, and new electronic forms of communication; an explosion of creativity in music, architecture, design. The means of communication – global media and everything associated with them – are growing in reach as new technologies come to the fore, even if, as with so much of the contemporary world economy, within an oligarchic form. For those inclined to see religion as an important component of culture, it too appears to be on the rebound – in the USA above all, and in the Muslim world, the link between secularization and modernity seems to be more and more attenuated. We have no global secularization index, but it would appear in some countries to be falling, or at least not continuing to rise. As for identity, community, ethnicity, there is no limit to their moral, and financial, claims. The global and the particular seem to prosper in counterpoint.

No one familiar with international politics at the start of the twenty-first century can be unaware of the importance placed on 'culture', meaning in a political context systems of belief about community and society and, not to be ignored, the implications of these for international relations itself. Those who write on the post-cold-war world, and on the impact of globalization, have much to say on this issue. Here too the twentieth century has bequeathed its vibrant, and in some cases virulent, bequest. As with so much of what characterizes the discussion on the contemporary world, the disagreement may be as much about historical depth, about the novelty of current developments, as it is about the trends themselves:

not all that appears tribal, primordial, atavistic necessarily is. Disagreement may also concern the degree to which that which is preserved as historically distinct really is either so historical or so distinct. 'Culture', notoriously one of the most difficult of all terms to define in social science, including international relations, is not new but has underlain much of previous history – be it empires, religions, trade routes, wars. We need to make a hard, rather than an overstated, claim as to how it matters now.

If we ask how and why all this affects international relations, then we can come up with several different answers, and several claims about the modern world. First, culture in a broad sense is said to be much more important for relations between states and peoples. Nationalism is, it is claimed, *the* dominant prevailing ideology in the world today, as an idiom of protest but also, as in the USA, in Japan and perhaps increasingly in parts of Europe, as one of asserting power and interest. The mistake in too much discussion of nationalism is to focus on just the nationalism of oppressed or protesting peoples, not on the nationalism, imperial in some degree, of powerful peoples. English concern with 'foreigners' and Japanese with *sangokujin* merit as much attention as Third World animosities. Second, we hear that international relations are becoming more and more dominated by cultural conflict, that 'Clash of Civilizations' which Samuel Huntington popularized and which nationalists and fundamentalists the world over are so eager to endorse.¹

Third, we read that within globalization the impact of culture, and the interaction of cultures, is a process parallel to the exchanges of goods and services that lie at the core of globalization as an economic process. Indeed one of the most challenging questions in globalization is that of assessing in what ways this leads to a greater unification and homogenization of culture, and how much to greater diversity, through fragmentation, creativity or rejection of the dominant. The argument outlined in Chapter 1, about the creation of an international mythology as a form of rejection of the global, suggests that culture will be as much a site of conflict as of co-operation. At the same time, this argument about culture and the international is matched by one about domestic politics and society – here too identity, community, tradition have, it is said, become more important and legitimate. Writers on areas of inter-ethnic conflict, such as Ireland or the Balkans, are often quick to evoke the 'primordial'. Finally, we have the ethical challenges posed by this; the division of much debate

within the international and domestic spheres into those who are broadly respectful of this diversity and wish to take it as a starting point – variously described as communitarians, relativists, nationalists indeed – and those who hold to a universalist aspiration, one in which, while there is diversity of cultural forms, the values, and the legal and political norms associated with them, are more universal. These are the issues which this chapter addresses. It may not help with short-run misrepresentation, and in the long run there is little to say: culture is, however, central to the intermediate time-frame, over which we may have some critical regard. It is, indeed, rather more conjunctural and less eternal than its proponents often suggest.

Those who make claims in the name of culture assert that in some way this is a given, something inherited from history, or tradition, or society which itself defines both what is, and what ought to be. Culture and tradition have, in this perspective, an independent authority. It can be argued, however, that in every case what matters is not this history, or lack of it, but the *contemporary* significance with which a symbol is invested. The music for that symbol of American patriotism, the Star Spangled Banner, was written by an Englishman, John Stafford Smith. The flag of St George, which came to be much displayed in England in the late 1990s, was named after an obscure fourth-century saint who died in Palestine. His cult, and the flag, probably reached England during the Crusades, and April 23 was designated as his day in 1222 by the Synod of Oxford. That he has nothing to do with England, never heard of the place and never went there means little, nor does the fact that he is the patron saint of several other countries, including Finland, Norway and Greece. The fact that the English, almost alone in the world, do not have a national day, but rather two birthdays for their monarch, adds to the curiosity of this case.

Flags are indeed extraordinary forms of symbolism: in themselves they have no meaning, they are just designs on a piece of cloth, just as words are mere phonemes. The red flag, for example, has had many meanings – the flag of piracy, of communism, until 1970 of the slave-owning Sultan of Muscat. The cult of the flag of St George has much to do with contemporary English dislike of Brussels and Scotland, less to do with the Middle Ages. Today flags have become symbols for broader conflicts: think of the rage which the flag of the newly independent Macedonia provoked in Greece, because it appeared to embody expansionist claims, or the row in the USA over the Confed-

erate flag which flew over the State House in Columbia, South Carolina. This pertains also to other symbols of difference and contention such as language, religion and dress. It also applies to that which has become, in modern times, but was less so in the past, the central object of contention, namely territory. It is not territory that tells people what to do, but people who invest it with a meaning. Rocks, rivers and mountains no more *have* a national character than the moon, or holes in the ground.

This is not, of course, how things appear to most people in the world, for whom these symbols have, and have always supposedly had, an intrinsic value to which they are devoted. Nationalism and religion make claims in the name of symbols: they exert authority over people, and send them to fight others, in the name of such identities – land, flags, crosses, crescents and so on. But it is not just retrospective nationalists and proponents of religion who give to cultural and allegedly traditional differences such importance: we are living in a period when across a broad spectrum of opinion, among politicians, secular intellectuals, and, not least, political theorists, the universal and the rational are questioned in the name of loyalty to the particular and the communal.

Here the claims of the particular, and of tradition and community, are given greater weight. This weight, moreover, has two sides – not only an ethical weight, in terms of what we as individuals ought to do, but also an analytic or explanatory weight, in terms of how we explain social behaviour within countries, and relations between peoples and states. The contemporary world, particularly the world since the collapse of communism, is one in which ethnic and cultural differences have returned: the primordial, the atavistic and the traditional are re-exerting their hold; the repressed are returning; a new nationalism is emerging. We hear much about ‘deep structures’ and, in a related trend, with the growing acceptance of sociobiological approaches that seek to explain human behaviour in terms of genetic inheritance and innate behavioural traits, an increased emphasis on the importance of borders, conflict, and antagonism in human behaviour. The history of individual peoples, and indeed of whole continents such as ‘Europe’, is now being written in terms of a cultural formation defined by something outside, ‘the other’. This cult of difference is seen not as an alternative to globalization but as part or even a result of it. Together with this renewed attention to culture in the historical formation of peoples and states, there is a growing

attention to the role of the cultural in changing and shaping the new post-modern transnational and global world – the very speed of informational and cultural interchange, and the rise of diasporas promote a greater intermixing and impact of culture.

A prime example of this contemporary usage of culture as a form of explanation is Professor Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilisations'. Huntington argues that we can divide the world up into six or seven major cultural zones, or civilizations, and that increasingly international relations will be determined by relations between these. The conflicts of the coming era will be cultural, as other ideological distinctions recede. Holding to the view of international conflict as inevitable, itself a dubious proposition, Huntington has, in part, a residual argument; 'If not culture, then what?' he says. Pride of place in this world view is ascribed to the clash between the Islamic and western worlds: 'Islam has bloody frontiers' he proclaims, the implication being that, wherever there is a clash between the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds, it is Islam, seen as a coherent political entity, which is at fault. But arguments analogous to Huntington's have much wider diffusion. In the Far East, instead of Islam, China or 'Confucianism', or 'Asian values' can be substituted. Such views are espoused as much by liberal, and critical thinkers, and by a range of post-modernists, as they are by the exponents of traditional or 'realist' conflict.²

It is, however, possible to take issue with this approach, to offer an alternative view of the role of culture, and religion, in the contemporary world. We may have given far too much ground, in definition and explanation, to those who espouse such arguments as we have to those who ascribe ethical import to community and identity. Much of this is bad history, bad sociology, and bad international relations. It may also be bad ethics. What can be termed 'fault-line babble' has come to be the intellectual malaise of our time. As with the flag of St George, we need to have an informed history and sociology of how culture changes and interacts with other phenomena, to be sceptical about the moral claims made in their name. The point about territorial conflict is not that any piece of rock or forest has an undisputed, or historically, prime owner, or that a piece of cloth with some arbitrarily designed pattern has sacred properties, but that modern states, and nationalists, have made a fetish of them. Too often we find other concerns, not least power and interest themselves, lying behind the apparent injunctions of culture.

A Necessary Sociology of Knowledge

The first place to start is with the questioning of culture and civilization as givens. In one of the most famous of all works of historical sociology, Barrington Moore's *The Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, published in 1967, the author writes as follows:

Culture or tradition is not something that exists outside of or independently of individual human beings living together in society. Cultural values do not descend from heaven to influence the course of history. To explain behaviour in terms of cultural values is to engage in circular reasoning. The assumption of inertia, that cultural and social continuity do not require explanation, obliterates the fact that both have to be recreated anew in each generation, often with great pain and suffering. To maintain and transmit a value system, human beings are punched, bullied, sent to jail, thrown into concentration camps, cajoled, bribed, made into heroes, encouraged to read newspapers, stood up against a wall and shot, and sometimes even taught sociology. To speak of cultural inertia is to overlook the concrete interests and privileges that are served by indoctrination, education, and the entire complicated process of transmitting culture from one generation to the next.³

Barrington Moore invites the reader to ask at least two questions. The first is, how ideas, symbols, cultures are transmitted. One cannot deduce the present from the past, nor can one, as is rather too common, transpose valid insights into how an individual is shaped by his or her past, and particularly their childhood, to the history of collective entities, such as nations or peoples. If an identity, or language, or animosity holds today it is because it has been in the interests of someone to continue it. When a Frenchman says to me tetchily '*Mais, vous avez bien brûlé Jeanne d'Arc*' (But you burnt Joan of Arc at the stake), he is saying something about an airline ticket queue, or a football match, or the BSE disease transmitted by cows, or the intrusions of the English language into contemporary French, not what happened at her trial at Rouen in 1431.

In the Middle East, much is made of the past, and of the ancient animosities of peoples: but these are continued, or revived, or selected for present purposes. During the Iran-Iraq War, Saddam Hussein used to refer to Khomeini as a *magus*, a Persian or Zoroas-

trian priest, and his battle against Iran as Qadissiya, the battle in 648 when the Arab Islamic armies defeated Iran. For his part, Khomeini used to refer to Saddam as a Yazid, the name of the Ummayyad caliph who killed the founder of Shi'ism, Hussein bin Ali. Both accused the other of going to Tel Aviv every week to get their instructions, something one has reason to doubt. Interesting variations of diatribe can be noted here: in the Mediterranean Arab countries, once known as the Levant, western aggressors are termed *salibiin*, or crusaders, but this is not the term Saddam used when the USA and its allies attacked Iraq in January 1991: then he denounced them as 'Mongols' and US President George Bush as Hulagu, the Mongol ruler who sacked Baghdad in 1258.

The continuity of identity, and animosity, depends on the mechanisms of reproduction that Barrington Moore identifies. In Britain it may take a relatively harmless form – history textbooks, names of streets and pubs, the *Sun* newspaper on a bad day. The *Sun* has indeed published a book, *Hold Ye Front Page*, which it hopes to place in every school in Britain, with invented chauvinist headlines for English history as a whole. In the Balkans, this takes a more lethal form with television and music denouncing other communities, and transmitting a history of hatred and paranoia. It was the modern media, in the service of modern states and leaders, which ensured that the same thing happened again. The reason 'hate-speak' is needed is because hatred is not self-perpetuating: it depends on people to transmit it.

Barrington Moore also invites examination, as does much of the sociology and history of nationalism, of how a particular past is constructed. The essentialist, nationalist or religious answer is that there is one past, one culture, one tradition, one 'true or', a key word this, 'authentic' identity. The argument then becomes what the true identity, or tradition, is. But this is not how things are. On the one hand, the past is not one text, or message, but many: it is, to use a metaphor from gastronomy, and as are the texts of the great religions, not a fixed price, but an à la carte menu. The best exemplar of this is language: we inherit, and live in, languages with meaning and rules, but we are in large measure free to say what we want within them. Structure does not obstruct, but may actually facilitate, agency. We choose what we want from the varied records available – and the choice is dictated by contemporary interests, and concerns, not by what is given in the past. If you want to use your national traditions, or religions, to prove the validity of monarchy,

you can do so, the same for republicanism. Every religion can, and has been used, to justify a variety of socio-economic forms – not just socialism or capitalism, but feudalism and slavery too. Tolerance, and intolerance, slavery and individual freedom can all as easily be derived from core texts.

In the Arab-Israeli context, we can see the uses to which holy texts are put: among Palestinian Muslims, those who favour a peace with Israel cite the example of the *hudna* or truce signed by the Prophet with non-believers; those against cite verses of the Koran enjoining struggle against the infidel. On the Jewish side, the argument has revolved in part around the question of whether a Jewish state can give away Jewish land: those against territorial concessions say you cannot, those in favour cite the story from the scriptures whereby King Solomon gave away land to the King of Sidon. When it comes to gender relations, and the position of women, a similar variety of interpretations is possible. We select, define and ransack the past for what we need, just as in our own accounts of ourselves as individuals we choose those bits of our past that are most pertinent to present needs. A university, when celebrating its centenary, highlights those alumni who bring it renown, not those who might be redolent of scandal or subversion. Every nation salutes its great heroes, not those it chooses to forget; the Ukrainians do not celebrate the most famous Ukrainian of all, Leon Trotsky from Kherson, or the second most famous Dr Leopold von Sacher-Masoch from Lvov, formerly Lemberg, who first described the condition that bears his name. The third most famous, Chmielnicki, is remembered as a nationalist rebel, not as what he also was, the most famous anti-Semite before Hitler. The English choose to forget the eighteenth-century radical Tom Paine. There are few, if any, pubs named after this most famous and influential of English writers, although there is a good ale, brewed in Lewes, Sussex, that bears his name. The statue to Paine in his home village of Thetford, Norfolk, was paid for by American servicemen stationed near there during World War II.

The contemporary formation of tradition and culture goes further than that. Beyond selection, amnesia, and reformulation lies invention itself, the pretence of antiquity for that which is not. This ‘invention of tradition’, in the words of a famous work, applies equally to religion as to nationalism.⁴ The role of invention in nationalism is well known and its examples legion: from the kilt of the Scots invented in the 1820s, to the ‘ploughman’s lunch’ of the English, a pub snack

fabricated by an advertising agency in the 1960s. The combination of selected and invented past is evident everywhere. The English chose as the anthem of their 1998 entry to the World Cup a song about chicken vindaloo, an Indian, or more precisely Goan, dish, itself probably named after the Portuguese for 'welcome' *bem-vindo*. In 1995 the ambassador of one former Soviet republic, invited to contribute its 'national' flower to a fiftieth anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany in London, chose its entry from a mail order catalogue.

A striking example of the varying origins of symbols is to be found within the Jewish tradition. One of its core symbols, the candelabra or *minora*, is indeed of ancient origin: it can be seen on the walls of synagogues as at Katzrin in the Golan Heights from nearly two millennia ago. The other core symbol of Jewish identity, the Star, or literally 'Shield' of David or *magen david*, is not an ancient Jewish symbol at all: it has nothing to do with the historic King David. A hexagram symbol of the unity of all being, it was used by mystical writers of all three major religions in the Middle Ages. Only in the late nineteenth century did it come to be a symbol of specifically Jewish identity. On the Palestinian side, perhaps the most widespread symbol is the red *keffiyeh* or headdress: the traditional Palestinian Beduin headdress was dark blue or indigo, and the red version was designed in the 1920s by a merchant family in Manchester, originally Sephardim from Aleppo, who had received a commission from the British government for the new Jordanian army. By the 1970s it had come to symbolise Palestinian nationalism. None of this affects the validity of, or affect associated with, these symbols today or the legitimacy of the political claims made in their name.

The same selection by modernity may be found in fundamentalist religion. The Taliban in Afghanistan claim that they are waging a war on images of living beings in the name of Islam: films and photographs are banned, there have even been public smashings of TV sets. The television is *sundug-i sheitun*, 'Satan's Box'. But there is on closer inspection nothing in the Koran that forbids such images: the Islamic prohibition, closely intertwined over the centuries with similar trends in Judaism and Christianity, rests on two sayings or *hadith* attributed to the Prophet. The Catholic obsession with the celibacy of the clergy and the loyalty of Jewish orthodox or *haredim* to the dark hats and long coats or *kapota*, which are those of an eighteenth-century Polish squire, are equally constructed. It is not antiquity, or authenticity, but current definition that determines the uses and

associations of these symbols. When it comes to two other repositories of the authentic, language and food, even more selection, and invention, occurs: words are regarded as genuine or not, food is national or not, based on the flimsiest of criteria. Perhaps nothing, other than ancestry and kinship, is as contingent.

Transnationalism in Context

The claim of historically constituted cultures, civilizations, languages, ethical systems is one pillar of the argument for cultural conflict and civilizational incompatibility. The other is an argument from history – that these blocks, like the blobs of colour denoting countries on a map, have been there from time immemorial and, by some combination of history and nature, and perhaps divine will or providence, represented natural entities. More specifically, as far as Huntington and his fellow thinkers are concerned, these cultures have always been in conflict and will continue to be so. Neither of these propositions holds up. The peoples, religions, cultures of the world have distinct compositions, and are in some measure distinct today. But over the centuries they have interacted, perhaps more so in the past than they do now: it is the modern state, not ancient community, that has parcelled out the world. If one looks at the origin of the three monotheistic Middle Eastern religions, one can see that their theology, texts, values have a common source. They have continued to interact over the millennia. Food is equally porous: no historic, as opposed to contemporary, validity applies to English cooking if it includes potatoes and tomatoes, pepper and the ingredients of Lee & Perrins sauce, all brought from across the oceans by the developing world market of recent centuries.

This interaction may, in addition, help to set in context something that is too readily seen as peculiar to the modern or post-modern condition, the movement of ideas and symbols across frontiers. Here we see a good example of the short-sightedness, or conceit, of much contemporary discussion. Modern communications do certainly permit a rapid and voluminous transmission of cultural material around the world. But it is the rapidity and volume which are new, not the phenomenon itself. If we take the great religions, then they spread, if not with the speed of a computer, but with that of a horse or a sailing ship. The ideas of Christ, and Mohammed, and of count-

less preachers, saints and heretics were transmitted around the Mediterranean world. When Martin Luther fixed his 95 theses, denouncing the sale of indulgences, to the door of All Saints Church Wittenberg on 31 October 1517, CNN was not there to record the moment: but within a few years his ideas had contributed to a major upheaval throughout Europe. In the eighteenth century, the ideas of European political thought informed debate in the Americas, just as American radicalism affected Europe. The same applies to another defining characteristic of contemporary cultural and political analysis, that of hybridity: the assumption here is that hitherto identities were unitary, and discrete, and that it is only in modern times that this changed. But hybridity is recurrent throughout history – with no disrespect to their faithful, all great religions are syncretic, borrowing themes, symbols, dates and forms of ceremonial from their multiple predecessors and, once established, imitating even as they contend with, their opponents. The Christian halo is a relic of earlier sun worship. The history of, say, iconoclasm, or holy war, in Judaism, Christianity and Islam is one of borrowing and imitation, amidst rivalry. The same applies to language. A Dutch philologist once expostulated to me: ‘You English speakers don’t have a language. English is just a bastard creation of German and French.’ He was right, but this bastard has been the vehicle for great human creativity and amusement. Long may it continue.

In politics too, the picture is fluid. If we look at the pattern of interstate relations in modern times, or earlier centuries, they do not follow cultural or civilizational boundaries. The Ottoman Empire is conventionally presented as the great non-European ‘other’ against which Europe defined itself. In Austria the nationalist Jörg Haider has chosen as one of his heroes Count von Starhemberg, who defended Vienna against the Turkish siege in 1683. Yet the Ottoman Empire was not engaged in constant conflict with European powers. It allied with France and Britain against Russia in the Crimean War, and with Germany and Austria against France and Britain in World War I. In the twentieth century the most ferocious wars were between states, and peoples, of the same cultural bloc – France, Britain, Russia and Germany in Europe, Japan and China in the Far East, Iran and Iraq in the Middle East. If anything, it is what Freud termed ‘narcissism of small differences’, rather than inter-civilizational or inter-cultural conflict, the ‘narcissism of large differences’, which has constituted the world of today.

The Misuse of the 'Other'

Beneath this picture of cultural conflict lie two other, deeper, assumptions, both of which merit being identified and challenged. One, already questioned in the quotation from Barrington Moore, is that of the determination by the past of the present. Talk of the 'returning' repressed, the primordial, the substratum assumes that which it sets out to prove. The past *may* influence or determine the present, but even in individuals, let alone in collective entities, this needs to be argued for rather than assumed. Where present interest is masked by the recourse to the past, then the attribution to the past should be questioned. It is not only nationalists or the faithful who do this, but also the supposedly most radical and innovative of all political actors, revolutionaries: the twentieth-century revolutionary looked back to 1917, the Bolsheviks looked back to the French Revolution, the French revolutionaries to ancient Rome. Khomeini, of course, looked to Mecca and Medina, and the Prophet, in the seventh century. But all that claims derivation or authority from the past is not so easily explained by that past.

There is a further assumption, in the writings of Huntington, as in those of so many others who comment upon the post-cold-war world and its conflicts, that in some way confrontation, conflict, the identification of an enemy are essential and enduring features of political and social life. This may take the form of Arnold Toynbee's historical theme 'Challenge and Response', it may take the form of contemporary analysis of the role of the 'other' in the formation of national, and broader civilizational, identity. In this context, anthropological work on boundaries and identity, and sociobiological work on animal behaviour and genetic selection play their part. In this neo-Darwinian age, it is easy to go down such a track. There is, obviously, validity in the claim, rooted in history, of confrontation with the external as a stimulant to internal change: it is true of individuals, who mature through facing tests, and it is true of societies.

This, however, is a contingent claim, not a necessary one. The opposite may also be true: individuals may be overcome, or traumatized, by challenges and may, by contrast, be encouraged to grow through love and support. Similarly, societies may be stimulated through challenge, but they also may be inhibited by external confrontations. Nor is external challenge a necessary precondition for human development. The physical growth of individuals has nothing to do with external

challenge, everything to do with endogenous growth. If we look at some of the major processes of modern history, the same applies: the creation of new societies in the Americas, one of the most momentous transformations of the past half millennium given subsequent evolution, was not carried out against any external enemy – pre-Colombian Americans did not threaten Europe, or the European colonies established in the New World. The Industrial Revolution was only in part a result of external pressure, more of endogenous growth and opportunity. The Internet has not met an external ‘other’, but has been generated by enthusiasts.

When we come to the contemporary, post-1989 world, we hear much about the need to create new challenges to replace the communist threat. Threat inflation by those with a vested interest, financial and bureaucratic, in continued funding for conflict is one such resort: the Pentagon is not slow to engage in this. Those who view the international arena in what are termed ‘realist’ categories also assert this – this is the theoretical charge behind Huntington’s question ‘If not culture, then what?’ But we can detect a broader argument, latent in much of the discussion about the Middle East and China, and their relations with the west, about some basic need – societal, ideological, strategic, it is not clear which – to find a substitute enemy.

The most obvious candidate, as far as the west is concerned, and one which Islamist fundamentalists are not slow to offer themselves, is of course ‘Islam’. But the premise itself needs examination. Not only is it questionable on historical grounds, but it is also questionable as an account of recent world history. Communism, in its effective lifetime from 1917 to 1991, did tend to exaggerate its challenge to the west, while, at the same time, engaging in denial that it presented any challenge at all. All revolutionaries exaggerate: they shout about how they are going to change the world, with the helping hand of a determinist history. All of that aside, communism *did* challenge the west: it appealed to many millions around the world, and people fought and died for it. In the inter-war period, when western democracies and economies were collapsing, communism appeared to offer a superior economic alternative – a claim that was widely held, by friend and foe alike, into the 1960s. The Soviet leader Khrushchev’s boast to the west ‘We shall bury you’ alarmed as much as it inspired. At its height, after World War II, the USSR presented a strategic challenge to the west in the nuclear field, and in the wars of Asia and Africa its forces mounted an effective, and

deadly, conventional military challenge. It is false history, and by extension a false analogy, to claim that *since* communism was 'invented' as a threat, consequently that of Islam, or some other post-1989 threat, is equally invented. Communism was not invented, it was real enough, whatever the exaggeration on both sides. No post-1989 challenge comes near to filling that gap. The 54 Muslim states are not a coherent economic or military unit and compete with each other as much as with the rest of the world. Nor is there any need for the Muslim world to do so: the argument about the necessary 'other' fails the tests of history and the contemporary world alike.

Beyond Cultural Conflict

Against this background, it may become possible to assess the place of culture and cultural conflict in globalization. Culture has come to occupy a special place in the discussion of globalization that is itself worldwide. Whatever happens to war or the international economy, here at least it might seem that we can indeed retain an argument about conflict and its generation for the coming century. Yet it may be that this apparent link between globalization and cultural conflict is misleading: and that it is largely because politicians and writers, in developed and underdeveloped societies, are invoking it that it may acquire a reality as the myth comes to determine political behaviour.

As this chapter has suggested, other factors may, however, be at work. On the one hand, culture has become not the residual source of conflict, but the residual appeal for political legitimacy – aspirants to power, or those who wish to confirm their existing power, resort to it as a way of mobilizing support. The source of the conflict lies not, therefore, in the diversity of conflicts, but in the competition for power within and between states, something that is certainly not going to go away, whatever happens to globalization. At the same time, there is, beneath an apparent flowering of difference, a modular process in train that is making societies more homogeneous: globalization itself, indeed the whole history of the internationalization of social and political forms over recent centuries, reinforces this. For example, every state has to have certain attributes – a capital, a flag, a national anthem, an airline, a national football team, a national dress, a national food. Each presents itself as different, yet the genesis is the same. The example of legislatures, as of national

airlines, is suggestive; each gives itself a separate name, invoking something from the national past, but it is the pressure for similarity that drives the production of distinct names. Bundesrat and Sejm, Knesset and Majlis, Congress and Dáil, Parliament and Duma speak to a different past, but are shaped, indeed demanded, by a similar present. In the case of national airlines, be it Aer Lingus, Aeroflot, El Al or Lufthansa, this had better be even more true, given the consequences of flying in the face of the laws of aerodynamics and air traffic control.

At the same time, an emphasis on cultural diversity may mask the power of more material forms of difference. Culture may conceal the reality of other issues that are very much in dispute but which the rhetoric of globalization itself obscures, most obviously, differences of economic interest. Countries whose primary products' prices are dependent on developed states, or whose exports are prevented from competing in developed markets, have real grievances. The rhetoric of Ayatollah Khomeini and other Islamic fundamentalists is as much about underdevelopment, unequal trade, arms purchases and the imposition, real or imagined, of autocratic regimes on their societies. Cultural rejection is a form of resistance to domination, yet by concentrating on culture it may divert attention from the other, political and economic, inequalities that reinforce that domination.

The logic of globalization in its economic and political forms is not to promote, but rather to ignore, differences of culture. In some respects, globalization promotes a more homogeneous world, and a destruction of those differences that make for human diversity. But globalization is also compatible with a variety of languages, religions and cuisines, because it is precisely in the contemporary world that these do not matter. The global elite being forged by business and finance is drawn from the whole world: it has a shared lifestyle and idiom, but within that differences of culture subsist. It was Voltaire who said in the sixth of his *Lettres Philosophiques* over two and half centuries ago that capital was blind to religious difference:

Go into the London Stock Exchange... there you will see the representatives of all nations assembled for the benefit of mankind. There the Jew, the Mohammedan and the Christian treat each other as if they were of the same religion, and they give the name of infidel only to those who are bankrupt.⁵

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