chapter 19

Identities and Belonging

A major theme of this book has been that of commonality and difference. In various places we have talked about the ways in which people are pushed apart, treated in unequal ways or socially excluded. In this chapter we are concerned with social inclusion – with how social ties are generated and sustained at different levels. One sociologist (Scheff 1990: 4) has proposed that the maintenance of social bonds is 'our most crucial human motive'. That relationship between closeness and distance, he continues, gives rise to a theoretically optimal level of differentiation 'which balances the needs of the individual and the needs of the self'. It involves being able to maintain ties with others who are different from self'. These bonds are often formalized in associations, but are usually more loosely expressed in COMMUNITIES or other units of belonging.

There are many units of social solidarity – such as the family, organizations including work and voluntary associations, an ethnicity, a religion or a nation. Given the main theme of the book, we are also interested in the possibilities of creating communities at a global level. These different expressions of community can be seen simply as indicating differences in scale, starting from the most immediate and intimate and ending at the most macroscopic and remote. It might be tempting to assume that the ties that bind people most strongly are those that are most immediate and intimate and that those that seem most

Major Concept

COMMUNITIES

Communities are marked by deep, familiar and co-operative ties between members. In this sense, 'community' is close to Durkheim's idea of social solidarity, which emerges from commitment to a shared set of values. He calls this 'the collective conscience'. A formal definition is given by Nisbet (1970: 47). For him, community 'encompasses all forms of relationship which are characterized by a high degree of personal intimacy, emotional depth, moral commitment, social cohesion and continuity in time'.

abstract are the weakest, or virtually nugatory. However, this view is much too simple, as can be seen in the following examples:

- *The nuclear family* Some of the previously most intimate of social bonds, for instance, the nuclear family in industrial societies, are undergoing massive changes. In the USA, for example, over the period 1970–95 the marriage rate fell by 30 per cent, the number of people who had never married doubled, the divorce rate increased by 40 per cent, unmarried-couple households increased by sevenfold and half of all children expected to spend a least part of their childhood in single-parent homes (Tischler 1996: 353–4). Such data partly reflect changing gender expectations, the restructuring of the labour market and more relaxed attitudes to sexual norms, including gay and lesbian partnerships. However, there is no doubt that family life, as conventionally conceived, has radically altered in a significant number of countries in the West.

- *Transnational communities* By contrast, 'time–space compression' has encouraged an increasing volume and intensity of ties (through tourism and migration for example) of people that were previously less intimately linked. Further interconnections and interdependencies have been promoted mainly by the spread of a worldwide economic market and a network of increasingly powerful transnational actors and organizations, such as the TNCs. A sense of global community has also been promoted by common challenges facing all the world's inhabitants – from a threat to the biosphere to poorly policed nuclear arsenals. These planetary problems have generated an awareness of global issues (we have called this 'globalism') and a form of worldwide politics, seen in the growth and support for global social moments like the 'greens' and the feminists.

The bonds felt and experienced by social actors at these different levels are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they are reactive, contradictory and complementary. On the one hand, the scale, pace and intensity of global changes have led to fears of atomization and anonymization. A powerful set of reactions has reasserted the salience and continued viability of local communities and forms of belonging. On the other hand, some intimate characteristics of small, old communities have been transferred to a larger scale. A nation, for example, you will remember from Chapter 5, was memorably described as an 'imagined community'. Again Faist (1998: 221) and others have shown how transnational communities are 'connected by dense and strong social and symbolic ties over time and across space [by] patterns of networks and circuits'. They are 'communities without propinquity, in which community and spatial proximity are decoupled'.

We are thus able loosely to classify 'communities' under the rubrics of *local*, *national* and *transnational*:

1. We call the behaviour of communities that act on a relatively small-scale 'localism' (a convenient word used to cover all movements based on family, kin, ethnic and sub-national sentiments).

2. A second level, 'nationalism', seeks to create anew, re-assert or reform the nation state as a continuing focus of loyalty and association.

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CONTENTS

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3. Finally, working, as they see it, *with* the grain of history are those states, groups, organizations and individuals that recognize diversity and difference and seek to foster creative and positive bonds between peoples of different national backgrounds. We will call this tendency 'transnationalism'.

THE RESURGENCE OF LOCALISM

Despite, or perhaps because of all the global forces acting to make people come together, fierce struggles have ensued to continue to keep people apart. Instead of global integration in the wake of the Cold War and increased economic globalization, we have been confronted by many localized ethnic and religious conflicts. As political ideology has receded it has partly been replaced by the politics of identity and community. Premdas (1996) claims that there are some 4000 'ethnocultural' groups worldwide, uneasily enclosed in 185 states. With migration, commerce and travel, nearly all states are now multi-ethnic to some degree: the few exceptions include Somalia, Korea, Botswana and Swaziland. Forty per cent of the world's states have more than five significant ethnic communities. By 1996, there were 100 ongoing sub-national conflicts, about 20 classified as 'high intensity'. To contain these conflicts, some of the peace dividend has had to be spent on 70 000 UN peacekeepers costing $4 billion each year to maintain.

Many observers have been alarmed at the increasingly militant demands for ethnic exclusivity, minority language education, religious separatism, and exclusive territorial entities. The conflicts between Kosovars and Serbs in the Balkans, Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda, Christians and Muslims in the Lebanon, Jews and Arabs in the Middle East, Tamils and Sinhalese in Sri Lanka, Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland – all these examples and many more show the persistence, tenacity or re-emergence of ethnic and religious differences.

This phenomenon presents a paradox to the theorists of globalization. If social, political, cultural and economic changes are all thought to be moving in a global or, macro-direction, how come we see, throughout the world, evidence of the contrary tendency – namely the assertion, or sometimes the re-assertion, of local identities? A partial solution of this paradox may be found in the writings of Stuart Hall. He suggests that globalization at the cultural level has also brought about the fragmentation and multiplication of identities and this may require, paradoxically, a return to the familiar. Hall (1991: 35–6) describes it like this:

> The face-to-face communities that are knowable, that are locatable, one can give them a place. One knows what the voices are. One knows what the faces are. The re-creation, the reconstruction of imaginary, knowable places in the face of the global post-modern which has, as it were, destroyed the identities of specific places, absorbed them into this post-modern flux of diversity. So one understands the moment when people reach for those groundings, as it were, and the reach for those groundings is what we call ethnicity.

In other words, ethnicity is not an irrelevant anachronism to the gathering pace of globalization but a necessary reaction to it. It is true that we are becoming increasingly interdependent in economic and cultural terms, that

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there is an increased awareness that we are 'one world' facing common ecological, political and security problems. Yet this very process of globalization, the very rapidity of the dissolution of the known world, creates an unexpected effect. People reach out to the habitual, to the communities where they find familiar faces, voices, sounds, smells, tastes and places. Confronted by the pace of globalization they often need ethnicity *more* not less. Confused by the effects of post-modernity, relativism and the deconstruction of their known world, they re-affirm and reify what they believe to be true.

For many people, ethnic ties are a matter of loyalty, of pride, of location, of belonging, of refuge, of identity, trust, acceptance and security. It is the type of attachment that most parents feel for their children and most siblings feel for one another. As Allahar (1994) suggests, such ties imply an unquestioned affinity and devotion purely on the basis of the intimacy of the tie. It is the closest form of association that can be achieved by a collectivity of humans. It expresses their gregariousness and preference for group membership rather than the social rejection of a misfit or the isolation of a hermit. By embracing an ethnic identity, groups of human beings acknowledge that they are part of society and that their survival depends on forces bigger than the individual. The locality into which they were born and which has nurtured them is an object of affection – in that place are others who share their origin and their likely fate.

MARGINALIZING LOCAL IDENTITIES

We have briefly explained why ethnic ties are much more resilient than many observers predicted. Their continuing strength accounts for the simultaneity of globalization and localization. However, we also need to clarify why the force of ethnicity was (relatively speaking) neglected in social theory until the 1980s. There is no doubt that the continuing power of ethnicity, race and religion was overlooked by those who believed that only one global future was possible. In the post-war world ethnicity was also marginalized by the two dominant interpretations of social change, modernization theory and Marxism, which we will discuss in turn.

Modernization theorists

Derived from the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century notions of progress, modernization theorists posited increasing secularization, urbanization, industrialization and rationalization – spread by the emerging state bureaucracies. Ethnicity and nation were things of the past – a receding reality. It had, of course to be conceded that even modern nations, such as Nazi Germany, had experienced massive upsurges of a dangerous nationalist spirit. But this had been defeated and many of the characterizations of the phenomenon used the language of primitivism to describe National Socialism. For example, it was denounced as 'abnormal', 'deviant', or 'atavistic'. The implication was that since Nazism had been vanquished, Germany could be normalized and returned to the modern fold. The academics and educators who were sent into Germany after the war specifically had the task of 'de-Nazifying' the state. Ultimately,

rationalism, secularization, constitutionalism and liberal democracy would prevail. This package had, in turn, to be sold to the 'emerging nations'.

Marxists

The second dominant interpretation of social change was Marxism which, like modernization theory, was dismissive of ethnic and national loyalties. As we mentioned in Chapter 6, Marxists argued that ethnicity and nationalism were used cynically by dominant or rising classes for instrumental purposes of their own. Competing élites need masses for raw street power and ethnic appeals worked to arouse the poor and uninformed. Marxists sought to abolish ethnicity as merely an **epiphenomenon** or as an instance or false consciousness. For Marxists the only form of true consciousness was class consciousness. But while class may indeed be a powerful form of association, powerful enough sometimes to rival or overdetermine ethnic consciousness, it makes little sense to call the one 'true' and dismiss the other as 'false' consciousness.

An **epiphenomenon** is something that appears to be of great causal significance, but is really derived from some other primary basis. In overvaluing an epiphenomenon observers mistake a symptom for a reason.

Class consciousness arises, as Marx averred, from an objectively different relationship to the means of production, distribution and exchange shared by those who sell their labour power, own capital or trade in commodities or services. These different positions give them different interests. As is now generally accepted, contemporary capitalism has produced the conditions whereby these interests have become overlapping and thereby diluted. However, a more fundamental critique of the idea of a superordinate class consciousness, is that class awareness is predominantly an awareness of *interest*. And despite the mantras of the Marxists and the free marketeers alike, people live not just by interests alone, but by their emotions. They live by anger, grief, anxiety, jealousy, affection, fear and devotion – precisely those emotions harnessed by localism.

HOW DOES LOCALISM ARISE?

We have argued so far that kinship, ethnicity and religion are much more powerful forces than many of us would, perhaps, like to accept. We have also suggested that localism does not disappear when confronted with the rival claims of class interest, the demands of nation-building, or the impelling force of globalization. The Marxist charge of 'false consciousness' is contradicted by the weight of historical evidence that many more people are prepared to fight and die for their ethnic group, nation and religion than for their class. One barely needs to spell this out. Class war takes the form of strikes, marches and meetings (very rarely are the barricades of class revolution raised). But ethnic, religious and national wars often take the form of mass destruction, ethnic cleansing, saturation bombing, genocide, nuclear attack, defoliation, inquisitions and terrorism.

Even if we accept that ethnicity, race and religion are uncomfortably powerful *subjective* forces, how do we explain how ethnic differences arise? There are four ways, discussed in turn, in which ethnicity can be moulded by structural factors and established patterns of social behaviour:

1. Legal and political restrictions that force differences to remain or create them for the first time.

2. A history of coerced labour that has moulded ethnic work hierarchies.

3. Differences in appearance.

4. The forms of belief that pattern people's responses to difference.

Figure 19.1   Members of the Orange Order, Northern Ireland, commemorate the defeat of the Irish at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690

Legal and political restrictions

In many settings there were legal and political restrictions on which occupations and activities were permitted to subordinated groups. We will give just one, admittedly extreme, example. Until the end of legal apartheid in South Africa in 1989, people designated as 'Bantu', 'white', 'coloured and 'Asian' were legally separated from one another, while the Bantu (black) section of the population was subdivided into ethnicities such as the Zulu, Tswana, Venda and Xhosa. While we can all recognize the artificiality of a number of these distinctions, the argument has to be pressed one stage further. Legalized ethnic distinctions were given force in economic, educational and occupational terms and this determined the limits of opportunity in terms of access to good housing, jobs or health care. Ethnic identities were, in short, not freely selected but *imposed* by law and the threat of state violence.

History of coerced migration

Ethnic, racial and religious differences also arose through various kinds of coerced migration. Colonial and mercantile powers often brought different

peoples to new settings for work on their plantations or to further their commercial interests. For example, ten million African slaves were trans-shipped across the Atlantic while 1.4 million Indian indentured workers were sent to the sugar plantations. The governor of Dutch Indonesia even sent warships to capture Chinese on the mainland to help develop his colony. These patterns of involuntary migration led to complex, often three-way, interactions as indigenous people faced outsiders, who faced other outsiders, who all faced representatives of the colonial powers. Alluding to the time and circumstances in which immigrants were brought in, we can see how occupational categories fused with ethnic identities. Thus, we have an evolution of a sort of paired 'ethno-class', a phenomenon evoked by these familiar descriptions such as 'Chinese traders', 'Indian "coolies"', 'Sikh soldiers', 'Irish navvies', 'Lebanese middlemen' or 'Scottish engineers'.

Differences in appearance

A third objective factor which limits the way in way in which ethnicity is subjectively constructed is the one that is both obvious, yet uncomfortable to state openly. Quite often peoples look rather different one to another. In popular language they are white, brown, black or yellow, dark- or light-

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Box 19.1   Changing identities: Barry Cox becomes Gok Pak-wing

An American journalist, Gregg Zachary (1999), describes how Barry Cox, a 21-year-old man from Liverpool, has pushed at the limits of how far he can change his own social identity. Cox has an English working-class background, eats meat pies and likes cricket. At high school he became fascinated by Chinese popular culture. He experimented with martial arts and enjoyed the soundtracks to the Jackie Chan movies. Hanging around his local fish and chip shops he met many of Liverpool's Chinese community, some of whom run the local 'chippies'.

Frustrated that he could not understand those Chinese who did not speak English, he studied Cantonese and found he could understand and learn it. He worked as a waiter in a Chinese restaurant so that he could practice his language skills and now works in a Chinese grocery store. He has a Chinese name, Gok Pak-wing (meaning 'long life'), and dates a British-born Chinese woman. Gok Pak-wing and his partner's Shanghai-born parents are concerned that she can't speak Chinese.

Although working in a grocery store, Gok's ambition is to be a Chinese pop star. He has already won some local contests, singing such 'Canto-pop' songs in Cantonese as 'Kiss under the moon', 'Kiss once more' and 'Ten words of an angel'. The title of his original song, which his fans love, translates as 'I think I am Chinese. I want to be Chinese'. Despite his obviously English appearance, he seems to have convinced some of his fans. One asked him 'Are you English or Chinese'. Another insisted that his intonation was so good 'his father must be Chinese'.

Cox/Gok's English mother, Valerie, says. 'He lives, breathes and sleeps Chinese. I think he'd actually be Chinese if he could'. Cox/Gok concurs: 'If I didn't mix with Chinese and sing Chinese, what would I be doing now? I'd just be a normal person, nothing special about me. Although I know I'm not Chinese, I'm trying to put myself in a Chinese body.'

Source and all quotes: Zachary (1999)

Heterophobia – the fe[...]
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skinned, Nordic-, Mediterranean-, Latin American- or Asian-looking. Of course these are absurdly unscientific categories, and we recognize that the human species overwhelmingly shares a common set of characteristics and traits. We do not want here to engage in ridiculous exercises in racial typology. Rather we want simply to affirm that *appearance* – technically phenotype – can provide constraints to how far one can imagine oneself into another ethnicity. There are, in other words, bodily limits to the manipulative use of identity changes although many adventurous individuals have managed to push those limits quite far (Box 19.1).

Belief systems

The fourth factor to consider derives from an appreciation of social behaviour. What is the meaning of ethnicity to the actors themselves and how do they respond? The very visibility (or sometimes the fevered imagining) of ethnic differences allow them to be seen as 'primordial' or fundamental, reaching to the very heart of one's social being. This perception may not by shared by an outside observer, but the participants in ethnic interactions and conflicts may firmly believe they are describing reality. Sociologists must start from an acceptance of the gap between the observer's view of reality and the subjective and often irrational meanings, that people use to make sense of their worlds. We need to accept that distinction, because people act out what is in their heads, not in ours. 'What is real in the mind, is real in its consequences' is a tried and tested sociological adage.

Let us illustrate this idea with a simple example in a social setting. If, say, Serbs believe that the Croats are about to bomb their cities, loot their property, rape their women and murder their children, they will seek to defend themselves or will anticipate an attack by initiating one themselves. The Croats respond in kind thus reinforcing the Serb's original perception that Croats are bombers, looters, rapists and murderers. Fiercer attacks are therefore justified. Within a short time historical battles are recalled, vengeance is afoot and further recriminations and atrocities transpire.

Heterophobia – the fear of difference.

The mechanisms involved in these encounters are certainly irrational, but they are not inexplicable. Fear of the unknown and **heterophobia** are both marked by a psychological state of unease, extreme anxiety, discomfort and a sense of loss of control (Bauman 1994: 62–82). Competition over jobs, desirable sexual partners, housing, status, or territory compounds psychological *angst*, driving it into a higher gear. Sensing attack, people seek a bond with their friends and a clearer definition of their enemies.

This bonding is sometimes so powerful that some people think it is sacred. The ethnic or racial group, a religious faith – sometimes even a whole nation – become objects of worship, civil religions for which some are prepared to die. Slogans such as 'White is right', 'For king and country', 'Deutschland über alles', 'Christ died for you', 'Black power', 'We must defend ourselves against Muslim fanatics' may seem paltry enough ideas to a 'laid-back' student or an intellectual sophisticate, but they are real enough to the many people who believe in them.

Box 19.2   Islamophobia and how to recognize it

Heterophobia and ethnocentrism are part and parcel of the same phenomenon. Fear of an unknown group leads to anger and misapprehension. Like the pioneer white settlers in the USA featured in Hollywood Westerns the group draws the wagons around itself and prepares to repel all invaders. This 'clannishness' leads to further disparagement, to further defensiveness and so on, in a dispiriting downward spiral. One of the most virulent of all recent hate campaigns is that directed against people of Islamic origin. 'Islamophobia' is a newly coined world and means the dread and horror (from the Greek word *phobia*) of Muslims.

Examples of Islamophobia include those provided by two experienced and, to many readers, respectable English journalists. In the wake of the Oklahoma bombing, in which numerous lives were lost, there was an immediate and unwarranted suspicion in the USA and UK that this was the work of 'Muslim fanatics'. Bernard Levin, a columnist in *The Times* (21 April 1995) wrote: 'Do you realize that in perhaps half a century not more, and perhaps a good deal less there will be wars, in which fanatical Muslims will be winning? As for Oklahoma, it will be called Khartoum-on-the-Mississippi, and woe betide anyone who calls it anything else.' Charles Moore, then editor of the *Spectator* and subsequently editor of the highly respectable *Daily Telegraph*, supplied another doom-laden warning, with social Malthusian overtones (see Chapter 11). Moore opined: 'Because of our obstinate refusal to have enough babies, Western European civilization will start to die at the point when it could have been revived with new blood. Then the hooded hordes will win, and the Koran will be taught, as Gibbon famously imagined, in the schools of Oxford' (*Spectator*, 9 October 1991).

The Runnymede Trust in the UK, set up to promote good race relations and the understanding of cultural diversity established a special commission of academics, writers and religious figures to study the rise of Islamophobia (Stubbs 1997). They argued that unreasonable fear of Islam had seven tell-tale features:

- Muslim cultures are seen as monolithic and unchanging.
- Muslim cultures are regarded as wholly different from other cultures.
- Islam is seen as implacably threatening.
- The Islamic faith is used, it is alleged, mainly for political or military advantage.
- Muslim criticisms of western cultures are rejected out of hand.
- Racist immigration restrictions are associated with Islam.
- Islamophobia is assumed to be natural and unproblematic.

Each one of these supposed 'features' can be challenged by historical and comparative evidence. For example, Islam, as practised in the Middle East, is very different from the religion in Chechenia, Iran and Malaysia. The 'sufis', 'Islamicists', 'modernists' and 'revivalists' all have different interpretations of the Koran. As in the history of Christianity different sects abounded. Moreover Islam civilization has closely interacted with western civilization and made contributions in such diverse areas as architecture, philosophical thought, medicine and the numerals (1, 2, 3, 4, and so on) we all use in our daily life.

This is no place for a detailed refutation of western images of Islam. Rather, as sociologists we need to be critically aware of the structures of power that underpin different discourses and always question 'common-sense' and stereotypical thinking in order to disclose the social structures and processes that inform them.

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NATIONALISM AS A REACTION TO GLOBAL CHANGE

Like ethnicity, race and religion, nationalism also seems to be on the increase while globalization runs apace. As we saw in Table 5.1, the number of recognized nation states has proliferated since the foundation of the UN in 1945; from 51 states at the outset, the UN recognized 185 states in 1999. Despite this formal increase in the number of nation states, a number of observers, as we have shown in Chapter 5, suggest that the autonomy of many nation states has weakened. The nation state may become the 'piggy in the middle', rushing from the global to the local level in an attempt to still keep in the game.

The unity of the nation state rests on a myth of a continuous legitimate authority of a single people. But in practice most nation states are diverse, multi-stranded, rich-layered and plural. Indeed it is part of the achievement of the modern nation state that this complex history has been ideologically suppressed. Mechanisms were developed for dealing with cultural diversity. The religious wars were resolved. Dissidents often emigrated or were expelled. Different languages were reconciled into single *lingua franca*. Flags, anthems, sporting teams, capital cities, grand buildings, icons and symbols reinforced the nation-builders' message. War, trade competition and imperialist rivalries consolidated the processes of national unification. Despite the impress of this history several limitations to the national project remain:

1. The concept of a homogenizing nation means that some features of the national heritage are arbitrarily selected while others are rejected or sidelined.

2. The notion of an essential national character is seriously flawed. Parekh (1995: 141–2) claims that 'the very language of nationality, nationhood and even national identity is deeply suspect. It cannot avoid offering a homogenized, reified and ideologically biased abridgement of a rich complex, and fluid way of life, and drawing false contrasts and setting up impregnable walls between different ways of life'.

3. The nation is sometimes presented as the lowest common denominator. Yet, given its fluidity it is better represented as a series of 'add-on' elements that arrive with each new wave of immigrants.

4. The nation is offered as an object of affection. One is enjoined to love one's country, to revere its institutions, even to fight and die for it in war. In these claims, the nation is a rival form of identification to the sub-national ethnic group. But the nation state is often too large and too amorphous an entity to be the object of *intimate* affection. By contrast, one can marry a spouse of one's own kind and feel the warm embrace of kinship; one can kneel in common prayer with one's co-religionists; one can effect easier friendships with those of a common background; one can eat one's own ethnic cuisine and, in a sense, ingest one's ethnicity. (The reference by African Americans to 'soul food' conveys this idea.)

THE LIMITS OF A MULTICULTURAL NATIONHOOD: THE USA

The inherent difficulty of making something as large as a nation state an object of common affection does not mean that many national political leaders have not tried to pull off that trick. The best known example of an attempt to create a nation from people of diverse cultural backgrounds is the case of the USA. Other nations (such as Australia, Canada, Brazil and post-1994 South Africa) have sought to embrace people of different backgrounds, either because their territories include several groups each claiming a territorial right, or because they were settled by successive waves of immigrants. These 'immigrant countries' comprise some of the most powerful and dynamic nation states in the world. For the nation-builders in these countries the challenge was to create one nation from a multitude of different components. The Latin slogan *Ex pluribus unum* ('from many, one') became the organizing principle. Speaking for the USA at the end of the nineteenth century Theodore Roosevelt put it bluntly: 'There can be no fifty-fifty Americanism in this country... there is room here only for 100 per cent Americanism, only for those who are American and nothing else' (cited in Rumbaut 1997).

This idea of 'Americanism' can be understood both as a state ideology and as something that was diffused from the bottom as well as the top – in night school classes, newspapers, neighbourhood schools and even from church pulpits. Perhaps the most memorable version of this popular message was provided by the American playwright, Israel Zangwill, who in 1908 wrote a Broadway hit called *The Melting Pot*. In his play, one of the characters, a refugee from the pogroms of Eastern Europe, makes this impassioned speech:

> America is God's crucible, the great melting pot where all the races of Europe are melting and reforming! Here you stand, good folk, think I, when we see them at Ellis Island, here you stand in your fifty groups with your fifty languages and histories, and your fifty blood hatreds and rivalries, but you won't be long like that brothers, for these are the fires of God you've come to – these are the fires of God. A fig for your feuds and vendettas! Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians – into the crucible with you all. God is making the American (Glazer and Moynihan 1963: 89–90).

Although he did not invent the phrase, after Zangwill's play the expression 'the melting pot' subsequently became a slogan for all those who believed that civic nationalism, or modernization, or education, or class allegiances, or better communications, would dissolve prior ethnic loyalties. Probably the best known sociological discussion of melting pot theory was Milton Gordon's *Assimilation in American Life* (1964) which, although published over a generation ago, is still widely read. Gordon argued that there was an 'assimilation sequence' whereby people moved from cultural assimilation to structural assimilation and inter-marriage and finally to 'identificational assimilation' (that is, they consciously chose to assimilate).

As Rumbaut (1997) notes it was perhaps difficult for Gordon to imagine what a furore would be caused by his rather innocent use of the idea of assimilation. For many sociologists at the time, as well as many immigrants to the USA, assimilation merely expressed the process of 'learning the ropes' and 'fitting in'.

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The bulk of the 35 million immigrants over the period 1870–1914 were European immigrants, who appeared to be only too pleased to be escaping the squalor of the great industrial cities and the depressed agricultural conditions of such countries as Ireland, Italy and Greece. Loud declarations of loyalty to the USA were heard from many of these European immigrants.

Yet doubts soon began to set in. Just before Gordon's book was published his fellow sociologists Glazer and Moynihan (1963) had questioned whether the process of assimilation in the USA had gone as far as was commonly believed. The great exceptions to the assimilation process were the African Americans, who were still trying to assert their basic civil rights, let alone assimilate. The history of coerced (rather than free) migration and slavery had a great deal to do with this outcome, but Native Americans, Asians and others also suffered a high level of discrimination. Even the European groups were highly differentiated in the extent to which they were assimilated – in their private and social lives, certainly, but also in their capacity to compete for public goods they often remained stubbornly unmeltable.

A more fundamental critique of assimilation revolved around the question: 'What are immigrants supposed to assimilate to?' Clearly not all cultures were regarded by the powerful élites as enjoying equal status. Many immigrants found they were being asked to assimilate to an 'Anglo' norm – in terms of language, education, political institutions, religious convictions, social conventions and public expectations. It is now three generations on from the staging of Zangwill's play and we still are waiting for the contents of the pot to melt. If anything, there is an increased conviction and even fear on the part of political commentators that the nation-building project is in serious danger of falling apart (Schlesinger 1992). The ease and cheapness of travel in a global age has reduced the need for taking a 'one-way ticket' to a single American citizenship and way of life.

It seems that the nation state is going to have to adapt to a more complex mosaic of cultures, religions, languages and citizenships. Often an official declaration of 'multiculturalism', 'cultural pluralism' or 'a rainbow nationhood' signals the end of the attempt by policy-makers to assimilate all elements of the population. Canada, Australia and post-apartheid South Africa have probably gone furthest in welcoming this outcome, while the authorities and many commentators in the USA have remained rather wary. However, detailed empirical work by sociologists like Rumbaut (1997) demonstrates that although assimilation is incomplete, this does not necessarily lead to alienation from the core institutions of the USA. Assimilation takes a selective form among the children of recent immigrants. For example, Hispanics may continue to speak Spanish in community settings, are likely to practice Catholicism and will have close links to their home countries. However, they will use the conventional ladders of social mobility and will don their 'straight' Brooks Brothers suits and speak standard American English when interviewing for a job with the American Federal Bank.

TRANSNATIONALISM: CITIES AND DIASPORAS

We have talked of how localism and nationalism have reacted and adapted to global change. But perhaps the most exciting forms of response are the revival and development of forms of transnationalism or cosmopolitanism. Two forms

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that preceded the nation state and have now revived are *the cosmopolitan city* and the transnational *diaspora*.

The cosmopolitan city

The important role of the city as the reception point to people from many parts of the world can be inferred from the classical Greek roots of the word – *kosmos* (world) and *polis* (city). As we have discussed the functions of global cities at length in Chapter 15, we will briefly remind you of the argument made there. Cities (we argued) pre-dated the nation state system and even during modernity continued as places where diversity rather than ethnic uniformity obtained. It may be that the city state concept will be renewed in the global age (so that places such as Singapore will play equivalent roles to earlier city states such as Venice). But even if the city state form does not take hold universally, 'the global city' within existing nation states will increasingly contain the disparate elements moving from place to place as travel, tourism, business links and the labour market become more organized on a global scale. The social structure of these global cities has indeed already been reshaped to accommodate to their new position in the international division of labour.

Diasporas

While global cities have provided important spatial vessels to contain plurality, the revival of a long-established social organization, a transnational diaspora, has come to symbolize the way in which people are themselves subverting or transcending the nation state system. The word 'diaspora' has particular associations with the Jewish (and later the Armenian and African) peoples living out of their natal lands. These associations particularly evoke the idea of 'victims' – groups that were forcibly dispersed at one moment in history when a cataclysmic event happened. Nowadays the concept is used more widely and imaginatively to include groups which are essentially voluntary migrants (Cohen 1997).
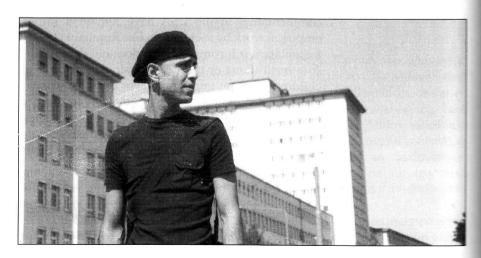

Figure 19.2   The Turkish 'hip-hopper', Murat Güngör, whose music raps about social relations and the everyday life of migrants in Germany

Whatever the impulse for migration, for many people there is no longer the need for 'indentificational assimilation'. Home and away are connected by rapid transport, electronic communications and cultural sharing – part of the process we call globalization. It is now possible to have multiple localities and multiple identities. Nation states can resist these tendencies and seek to stop globalization, but they are increasingly spitting in the wind. They can alternatively go with the flow and seek to adapt to the increasing mobility and complex social identities of their home populations. In practice, a double tendency seems to be emerging. Some cities (the 'global cities') are adjusting to the new pluralist realities, while certain politicians still seek to mobilize or exploit traditional nationalist loyalties, which still carry some conviction with threatened social groups. The cosmopolitanism of Paris and the support given to Le Pen (the leader of France's National Front) in the provincial towns and cities is illustrative of this duality.

As we have seen earlier, among many peoples there is a renewed search for 'roots', what Hall (quoted earlier) called a 'reach for groundings'. Yet this inclination need not imply a narrow localism, a retreat from global realities, an incapacity to respond to the challenges of the ever widening marketplace and to the new ethical and cultural demands stemming from globalization. To meet both needs, for a meaningful identity and a flexible response to burgeoning opportunities, a double-facing type of social organization is highly advantageous. Just such an organization exists in the form of a diaspora. This is not just a contemporary function of diasporas. They have always been in a better position to act as a bridge between the particular with the universal. Among other arenas, this has allowed them to act as interlocutors in commerce and administration.

Many members of diasporic communities are bi- or multi-lingual. They can spot 'what is missing' in the societies they visit or in which they settle. Often they are better able to discern what their own group shares with other groups and when *its* cultural norms and social practices threaten majority groups. Being 'streetwise' may affect the very survival of the group itself. It is perhaps because of this need to be sensitive to the currents around them that, in addition to their achievements in trade and finance, diaspora groups are typically over-represented in arts, the cinema and the media and entertainment industries. Knowledge and awareness have enlarged to the point of cosmopolitanism or humanism, but at the same time traditional cultural values, which sustain solidarity and have always supported the search for education and enlightenment, have not been threatened.

Diasporas and global business

Cosmopolitanism combined with ethnic collectivism are also important constituents in successful business ventures. Probably the most upbeat analysis along these lines is that provided by Kotkin (1992) in his comparative study of why some peoples seem more successful as entrepreneurs than others. In his quest he provides cases studies of five 'global tribes' – the Jews, the British, the Japanese, the Chinese and the Indians. Gone, for Kotkin, are the traumas of exile, the troubled relationship with the host culture and other negative aspects of the classical diasporic tradition. Instead strong diasporas are the key to determine success in the global economy. As he writes (pp. 255, 258):

Rather than being a relic of a regressive past, the success of global tribes – from the Jews and British over many centuries to the Chinese, Armenians and Palestinians of today – suggests the critical importance of values, emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge and cosmopolitan perspectives in the emerging world economy. In an ever more transnational and highly competitive world economy, highly dependent on the flow and acquisition of knowledge, societies that nurture the presence of such groups seem most likely to flourish… Commercial opportunism overwhelms the narrower economic nationalism of the past as the cosmopolitan global city-state takes precedence and even supplants the nation.

Diasporas score by being able to interrogate the universal with the particular and by being able to use their transnationalism to press the limits of the local.

COSMOPOLITANISM: A CRITIC AND A FAN

As a practice and preference, cosmopolitanism is clearly a massive threat to those who assert that the only way to respond to globalization is to assert a determined loyalty to their ethnic group, nation or religion. Hitler hated the Jews and sought to massacre them precisely because of their multi-faceted international and diasporic identity. To be a critic of cosmopolitanism from such a stable is perhaps to be expected. Far less predictable is a critique mounted by a liberal American historian. In his posthumous collection of essays, Lasch (1995) talks of 'the darker side of cosmopolitanism'. The loosely defined 'privileged classes' or 'élites' are said to be in revolt against the nation state. This is because they no longer identify with it. 'In the borderless global economy, money has lost its links to nationality… The privileged classes in Los Angeles feel more kinship with their counterparts in Japan, Singapore, and Korea than with most of their countrymen' (p. 46). This detachment from the state means they regard themselves as 'world citizens' without any of the normal obligations of national citizenship.

The identification of the élites across frontiers is paralleled by a concern only with their immediate neighbourhood:

The cosmopolitanism of the favoured few… turns out to be a higher form of parochialism. Instead of supporting public services, the new élites put their money into the improvement of their own self-enclosed enclaves. They gladly pay for private health care and suburban private schools, private police and private systems of garbage collection; but they have managed to relieve themselves, to a remarkable extent, of the obligation to contribute to the national treasury. [This is] a striking instance of the revolt of the élites against the constraints of time and place (p. 47).

Lasch's concern is a legitimate one, particularly in the context of the USA. He is very impressed by the virtues of 'small-town democracy' and the traditions of *noblesse oblige* whereby the rich, powerful and fortunate assumed their civic responsibility to look after the less privileged. In a country where (compared with a number of European countries and neighbouring Canada) welfare systems are very underdeveloped, there was a particular reliance on voluntary work with, and charitable support for, the sick, poor and elderly. However, one

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should not imagine that Lasch's arguments apply purely to the USA. In global cities everywhere, the attachment of the denizens (privileged foreigners) to the state in which they find themselves often can only be described as minimal. This alienation clearly can have dangerous social consequences.

If Lasch sees the danger of cosmopolitanism, Beck (1998: 30) sees its opportunities. Cosmopolitan movements can transcend the appeal to national traditions, values and solidarities in favour of *human* values and traditions in every culture and religion. Such movements can address planetary concerns through new concepts, structures and organizations that can support the need to create transnationalism from below. For Beck the notion of 'world citizenship' is to be embraced not feared. New forms of 'post-national understanding, responsibility, the state, justice, art, science and public understanding' (p. 30) can emerge. This is turn can lead to more advanced forms of democracy, toleration, liberty and mutuality.

REVIEW

In assessing the different levels of community and belonging – localism, nationalism and transnationalism – we have seen that the great hopes of a 'new world order' and of 'a peace dividend' after the end of the Cold War have been sadly disappointed. The world has not witnessed the emergence of a compliant, single culture in which all peoples learn have been forced to love one another. Perlmutter (1991) helpfully depicts the world as being organized vertically by nation states and regions, but horizontally by an overlapping, permeable, multiple system of interaction – communities not of place but of interest, shared opinions and beliefs, tastes, ethnicities and religions. Unlike those who argue that a single homogenized global culture is emerging, Perlmutter more plausibly suggests that multiple cultures are being syncretized in a complex way. The elements of particular cultures can be drawn from a global array, but they will mix and match differently in each setting.

There are many that seek to resist this form of 'hybridization' (see Chapter 20) by creating new certainties, like new states defined on the basis of a single ethno-nationality. The states that emerged from the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of Yugoslavia provide abundant examples of this inclination. Long-standing residents of many of these 'new nations' were bundled out unceremoniously and told to return to natal lands with which they may not have an association for several generations. At worst this drive for ethnic territorialism leads to 'ethnic cleansing' and even systematic attempts at genocide. Others have resisted hybridization by insisting on a purist parody of their religion or ethnicity. They frequently make demands for job quotas and for first-language teaching in publicly funded schools.

This new insistence on ethnic and religious difference has created many dilemmas for established nation states, which have exhibited a huge variation in the extent to which they are open to newcomers or, by contrast, require cultural and social adjustment on the part of immigrants and residents. A tendency to recognize sub-national claims for devolution or autonomy is evident in the UK, Spain and elsewhere. There is also a big change in attitudes towards immigrants. About half the world's nation states now accept dual citizenship.

Even 'immigrant countries' (for example, the USA), which promoted a singular idea of assimilation on the basis of cultural and social obedience and exclusive citizenship, have been forced to retreat. The world is simply not like that any more; the scope for multiple affiliations and associations has been opened up outside and beyond the nation state. Globalization has meant that there is no longer any stability in the points of origin, no finality in the points of destination and no necessary coincidence between social and national identities (Khan 1995: 93).

Transnationalism has begun to supersede nationalism. We have described how a chain of global cities and an increasing proliferation of sub-national and transnational identities cannot easily be contained in the nation state system. Among the most important of the established transnational identities are diasporas and world religions, the earliest of which preceded the age of globalization by thousands of years. Transnationalism is also evident in key shifts of attitude and behaviour. Many people, not just the people who can be called 'world citizens' or 'cosmopolites' are more willing to recognize and accept cultural and religious diversity. There is an increased knowledge and awareness of other cultures derived from the global media and travel. Knowledge and awareness at least sometimes leads to tolerance and the respect for difference. We remind you of Perlmutter's (1991: 901) remark that now, for the first time in history, 'we have in our possession the technology to support the choice of sharing the governance of our planet rather than fighting with one another to see who will be in charge'. The long era of the naked imperialism is over, along with the one-sided cultural and political flows characteristic of that form of international relations.

If you would like to know more •••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••

There are many readers and textbooks on ethnicity and nationalism. Among the most significant are Anthony D. Smith's *Ethnicity and Nationalism* (1992) and the same author's *Nations and Nationalism in a Global Era* (1995) although it is difficult to choose among this sociologist's many works on the question.

A well-balanced reader titled *The Ethnicity Reader* has been edited by Rex and Guiberrnau (1997).

Michael Ignatieff's *Blood and Belonging* (1994) is a powerful book, based on a television series.

Schlesinger's *The Disuniting of America* (1992) is one of a number of accounts by liberal and conservative American academics and commentators decrying what they see as the excesses of multiculturalism.

Two books on diasporas are Robin Cohen's *Global Diasporas* (1997) and N. Van Hear's *New Diasporas* (1998)

For new developments in the field of transnationalism, consult the web site www.transcomm.ox.ac.uk.

Group work •••

1. Using conventional reference books, plot out the diverse elements and sects within Islam.

3. Divide into two debating teams, the one addressing the proposition that the USA is in the process of 'disuniting', the other that 'assimilation' is still working to integrate that country.

4. What indices would you use to established who is a cosmopolitan? ('Someone who reads a magazine of that name' will be regarded as an inadequate answer!)

5. Divide into two groups. One will address the proposition that global cities can contain transnationalism. The other group will explore the way in which diasporas express transnationalism.

Questions to think about •••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••••

1. In what ways is it erroneous to group ethnicity, race and religion under the category 'localism'?

2. Why does localism arise in the midst of globalization?

3. Why were the force of race and ethnicity so systematically undervalued?

4. To what extent have the immigrant countries failed in their quest to assimilate people of different cultures?

5. Do diasporas 'solve' the problem of bridging local sentiments and global imperatives?