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Identity-politics in the global age

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Our world, and our lives, are being shaped by the conflicting trends of globalization and identity.

(Castells 1997: 1)

Despite claims that, in the light of the twin events of September 2001 (hereafter 9/11) and 2008, ‘the age of globalization is over’ (Rosenberg 2005), globalization – whether illusory or real – remains one of the key buzzwords of the contemporary world. At its most basic, globalization refers to processes of increasing interconnectedness between peoples and societies such that events in one part of the world impact upon other peoples and societies far away. Expressing fundamental aspects of what Anthony Giddens terms ‘time-space distanciation’, it may be understood as ‘a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions-assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact-generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction and the exercise of power’ (Held et al. 1999: 16). Although no universally agreed definition exists, at the heart of the concept of globalization lies the idea of change. The world in which we live in is said to be in the midst of a profound economic, political and social transformation affecting every aspect of our lives, including our understanding of who we are: our identity. Globalization assumes that the world is becoming more global. Here global means connected with the natural habitat of humankind, our planet, Earth. It assumes that, until very recently, the concept of the global, as opposed to the international, national or even universal did not exist, or could not be imagined. In recent decades, however, as a result of advances in communications, it is possible to view images of the world from outer space. This has enabled us to visualize our common planet as a globe. Viewed from space, our planet has no natural borders or frontiers and human beings are merely one of the many different species of life living on it. The concept of globalization, therefore, assumes a progressive movement towards a global consciousness and ultimately a global identity. But is a global identity possible?

It will be argued in the course of this chapter that a global identity is, in fact, unlikely because identities are both relative and culturally constructed. Identities are relative because the ‘self’, one’s understanding of whom one is, is always dependent upon the existence of an ‘other’,
whom one is not. As psychoanalytical theory suggests, our understanding of whom we are comes from outside through a process of identification. Jacques Lacan (1977) argued that, since identity comes from ‘outside’, it is inherently a ‘fictional’ construct: all identities are ‘imaginary’ based on the fundamental misrecognition (méconnaissances) of the child with its image. The subject and the social order in which the subject finds a place are both in a continuous process of becoming. Both are always in a process of formation.

However, there are clear cultural limits to the malleability and/or what Bauman terms ‘liquidity’ of contemporary identities which militate against the emergence of a global identity. Identities are cultural and social constructs. For Manuel Castells, identity is a process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or related set of cultural attributes, that is/are given priority over other sources of meaning, defined as ‘the symbolic identification by a social actor of the purpose of his/her action’ (Castells 1997: 6). Most human beings find meaning through identification with a particular cultural community, defined in terms of language, religion, ethnicity and territory. Each cultural community has its own particular values, myths and memories which are, in turn, a product of that community’s unique history. There is no global culture: there are no global languages, common values, myths, memories or interests – apart, perhaps, from a common interest in preserving our natural environment. It follows that, if globalization is about the creation of a global consciousness, then it must first erase the historical differences between particular communities. However, this has not been the case. In fact, globalization, or rather the contemporary intensification of the globalizing processes, does not resulted in the erasure of localized, cultural identities, but rather in their transformation. It is suggested that culture need not refer to a set of all-encompassing, biologically determined and territorially rooted ‘primordial attachments’ (Geertz 1963), as Castells appears to be close to suggesting, but to that which permits the individual to have a bios: to enjoy a life endowed with meaning and dignity; in contrast to the ‘bare life’ (Agamben 1998) depicted by much of modernist social science.

This chapter will focus on the impact of globalization on cultural identities. The first section will examine the contemporary globalization debate (see Held et al. 1999; Held and McGrew 2000; Scholte 2005). It will be argued that both the globalist, or hyperglobalist, and the sceptical positions may be seen as problematic because they assume a contradictory relationship between the local and the global. Hyperglobalists assume that globalization will inevitably result in the displacement of local, particular identities by a new global political or cultural identity. Sceptics, by casting doubt on the reality of globalization, tend to assume that local, territorialized identities remain immune to so-called ‘global transformations’. The Transformationalist ‘synthesis’, however, sees the processes of globalization and localization as mutually interrelated (Robertson 2003). In the next section, the relationship between globalization, the nation-state and identity will be discussed. Four main claims concerning the emergence of a global civil society, the persistence of the nation-state, the clash of civilizations and the hybridization of identities will be advanced and then critically examined in the subsequent section on the grounds of homogeneity, ahistoricity, essentialism and malleability. Finally, in the concluding section on future developments it will be suggested that growth of the Internet in particular has facilitated and often enabled the formation of transnational networks among individuals and groups with a shared cultural background or interests. Reworking Benedict Anderson’s conception of the nation as an imagined community, I will argue that globalization, through the Internet, has made the imagination of ‘deterritorialized’ diasporic identities possible on a global scale. This is not to claim that territorially based ‘local’ identities are no longer significant: the nation-state remains the basic unit of international political and socio-economic life and, as such, represents (and defines) ‘home’ for the overwhelming majority of the world’s population. Rather, it is merely suggested that globalization has permitted the deterritorialization of localized identities and that
these identities co-exist, and frequently clash with, other identities which have been similarly transformed by globalization. These range from concepts of the ‘self’ to that of ‘humanity’ and include gender, class, regional, racial and hybrid identities which have been discussed elsewhere (see Elliott 2007).

The globalization debate: historical and intellectual development

Three major approaches, or theses, have been established in the recent literature on the relationship between globalization and the nation-state: the hyperglobalist thesis, the sceptical thesis and the transformationalist thesis (Held and McGrew 2000; Held et al. 1999). It will be suggested that the transformationalist thesis, which developed in response to the sceptical criticisms of the hyperglobalist thesis, offers the most analytically useful account of contemporary globalization. These three approaches to the globalization debate will briefly be introduced before examining their differing perspectives on the impact of globalization upon collective identities.

The hyperglobalist thesis

For globalists or ‘hyperglobalizers’, globalization is seen as primarily an economic phenomenon. Economic globalization refers to the increasing and deepening enmeshment of national economies in global systems of production and exchange. A ‘global’ economy organized on the basis of market principles and production for profit has emerged following the collapse of state socialism and few states remain excluded from financial and economic markets. Manuel Castells has argued that a global economy is a historically new reality and is distinct from a world economy in that it has the capacity to work as a unit in real time and on a planetary scale. The dynamic driving globalization is capitalism; capital, to put it crudely, has been ‘liberated’ from national and territorial constraints, whilst markets have become globalized to the extent that the domestic economy has to adapt to global competitive conditions. The key beneficiaries of the globalization of the world economy have been multinational corporations (MNCs), which at the turn of the millennium accounted for 70 per cent of world trade (Held and McGrew 2000: 25); and, more perniciously, financial speculators who have profited from the removal of currency regulations, first in the UK in 1992, forcing the sterling to leave the European Exchange rate mechanism, and, with more far-reaching consequences, at the time of the East Asian Financial Crisis in 1997.

The de-nationalization of economies through networks of production, trade and finance has in turn helped revolutionize telecommunications. The Thatcher–Reagan economic reforms at the start of the 1980s in particular laid the groundwork for the ‘technological revolution’ by encouraging domestic and international competition in the telecommunications industry. The British Telecommunications Act of 1981 denationalized the telecommunications industry in the UK by privatising British Telecom (BT). This was mirrored in the US by the breaking up of AT&T’s monopoly in 1984 with significant results. In return, AT&T was permitted to compete to provide value-added and enhanced information. The 1990s saw three ‘revolutions’ in information technology (IT) that have helped transform our lives: the World Wide Web, e-commerce and the wireless. Ironically, the Internet itself is an early product of this collaboration. The Internet began in the 1960s as a US Defence Department project to build a data network to connect its researchers (ARPANET) and has been transformed into a potentially universal, all-encompassing space as a result of technological innovation and corporate sponsorship. The invention of Hyper Text Markup Language (HTML) by a group of researchers at CERN in Geneva led by Tim Berners-Lee in 1991 paved the way for an image-driven,
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user-friendly World Wide Web easily accessible through corporate browsers such as Microsoft Internet Explorer and Netscape Navigator. The World Wide Web deterritorialized the Internet by organizing website content by information rather than by location. Each day the number of webpages increases nine times faster than the human population and the estimated online population at the turn of 2010 was 1.8 billion (www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm).

Hyperglobalizers argue that the technological revolution has eroded the economic sovereignty of the nation-state generating a ‘borderless economy’ and ushering in a ‘global age’. The nation-state, in the words of Kenichi Ohmae, ‘has become an unnatural, even dysfunctional, unit for organizing human activity and managing economic endeavour in a borderless world’ (Ohmae 1993: 79). Hyperglobalists point to the constructed nature of national or particular communities. The nation is seen, in Ernest Gellner’s words, as ‘invented’ (Gellner 1983) to legitimize state power. Now that, under the impact of economic globalization, the nation is losing an important part of its old functions, that of constituting a territorially bounded ‘national economy’, nationalism is, particularly for many Marxist-inspired scholars no longer an important dynamic of historical development.

The sceptical anti-thesis

In contrast, sceptics would agree with Krasner that ‘sovereignty is not being transformed fundamentally by globalization’ (Krasner 1999: 34). The claim that globalization is undermining state sovereignty is at best ‘exaggerated and historically myopic’ (ibid.: 34) and at worst globalization is a self-serving myth (Hirst and Thompson 1996) propagated by neoliberal state elites to both ‘naturalize’ and ‘internationalize’ market orthodoxy. Furthermore, as the resurgence of ethno-national movements following the collapse of Soviet Union and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia suggests, nationalism retains its emotive appeal and the nation-state provides the only realistic framework for the contemporary world order (Smith 2000).

For Hirst and Thompson, the hyperglobalist view is ‘pernicious’ for two reasons: first, because it is empirically weak; and second, because ‘it demands policies that result in established entitlements being sacrificed in favour of market-based increases in growth that will prove illusory’ (Hirst and Thompson 1996: xii). Drawing upon statistical evidence, Hirst and Thompson have concluded that contemporary levels of economic integration and interdependence are by no means unprecedented. Japan and the UK, for example, were less ‘open’ to foreign trade and investment in 1995 than they were in 1913. Indeed, the level of state autonomy under the Gold Standard or Pax Britannica in the period leading up to the First World War was much lower than it is today. The claim that we are entering a radically new phase in the internationalization of economic activity needs to be qualified by a comparison with other historical periods. Even that symbol of contemporary economic globalization, the Internet, is not historically unprecedented as by the turn of the century a system of international communications, the telegraph, had developed, linking parties together in much the same way as the Internet does today.

Rather than living in a globalized world, we are witnessing greater regionalization of international economic activity which has become increasingly concentrated in three major financial trading blocs: North America, the European Union and the Asia-Pacific. The South continues to be marginalized in the new ‘global’ economy with over two billion people still living on less than $2 a day. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the so-called ‘digital divide’. Whereas a majority of people living in the developed world have access to the Internet, the overwhelming majority of Southern population do not! The global average penetration rate remains at 26.6 per cent with regional rates varying from 76.2 per cent in North America to 8.7 per cent in Africa (www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm).
In many ways the world’s underprivileged and poor have fewer possibilities for migration than they had in the past, particularly in the period between 1814 and 1914 when an estimated 60 million people left Europe for the ‘new worlds’ of the Americas and Oceania. Despite an increase in the total number of international migrants, statistics from the United Nations Human Development Program (2009) show that the global migration rate has remained remarkably consistent over the past half century at around 2 per cent of the human population. States remain sovereign in that ‘while the state’s claim to exclusive control of its territory has been reduced by international markets and new communications media, it still retains one central role that ensures a large measure of territorial control: the regulation of populations’ (Hirst and Thompson 1996: 257). The case of the European Union illustrates the paradox of greater freedom of movement within major financial trading blocs with stricter immigration controls on those travelling from marginalized states (the South). Increasingly, the function of the state in the North has been to attract foreign direct investment whilst keeping unskilled foreigners out. A global market for labour does not exist in the same way as it does for capital as most labour markets continue to be nationally regulated and only marginally accessible to outsiders. State capacity, far from becoming irrelevant, has acquired new significance in the globalizing world economy for states alone possess the organizational ability necessary to overcome obstacles to change and, more importantly, to absorb and socialize risk. Indeed, some sceptics have claimed that the technological developments furthering economic globalization have actually helped increase the states capacity for regulation (Krasner 1999: 313).

The sceptical thesis, however, by focusing on the limitations, historical antecedents and the detrimental effects of the contemporary phase of globalization does not necessarily invalidate the globalist thesis. Globalization may not necessarily be new and the globalization of the world economy has been exaggerated by both the hyperglobalists and state elites but that does not alter their central premise that power has shifted away from the state and towards non-state actors such as MNCs, International Organizations (IGOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the post-Cold War period. Furthermore, the fact that globalization has led to the increasing marginalization of the poor in the ‘new global economy’ merely reinforces the globalist thesis that a global capitalist world economy is now in existence although it does challenge the neoliberal assumption that economic globalization leads to greater prosperity for everybody and, in the long run, to an equalization in incomes. In other words, if neoliberal economists are mistaken in their belief that everybody benefits from contemporary economic ‘globalization’ and if some sceptics can prove that ‘globalization’ has resulted in greater material inequality within societies and between societies, then ‘globalization’ must exist; it must be a ‘reality’.

The transformationalist synthesis

Both the hyperglobalist thesis and the sceptical thesis may be seen as problematic. Hyperglobalists tend to overstate the effects of economic globalization on state sovereignty whilst sceptics tend to overstate the degree of autonomy that states enjoy in the international system. It is clear that sovereign states are not only actors within, but also products of, an international system which is undergoing transformation. The transformationalist synthesis may be seen as a qualified defence of the globalization thesis. Globalization, or rather the intensification of the globalizing processes, is seen to be transforming but not eroding state power. For transformationalists, the contemporary phase of globalization has its origins in the ‘technological revolution’. The advent of ‘techno-capitalism’, developments in systems of communications initiated in the late 1960s has ‘reconstituted and restructured’ state power (Held et al. 1999: 8–9). Although
the state remains the principal actor within the global political order, it is no longer the unique centre of authority and governance. Held argues that ‘a “new sovereignty” regime is displacing traditional conceptions of statehood as an absolute, indivisible, territorially exclusive and zero-sum form of power’ (Held et al. 1999: 9). Similarly, Sassen argues that although ‘sovereignty remains a feature of the system . . . it is now located in a multiplicity of institutional arenas’ and that this ‘reconfiguration of space may signal a more fundamental transformation in the matter of sovereignty’ (Sassen 1997: 29, 14).

Uncertainty lies at the heart of the transformationalist synthesis. Uncertainty exists not only about the direction and meaning of change, and also about how change itself should be represented. Globalization is seen to have ushered in what Beck terms the ‘risk society’. The globalization of capitalist modernity has greatly increased the hazards and insecurities that we face on a global scale: from terrorism, as exemplified by Al-Qaeda, to the risks posed to our natural environment by global warming, which have belatedly been recognized and institutionalized through the Kyoto Protocol. Similarly, financial integration, which has produced a convergence in exchange rates between currencies, has also brought with it a contagion effect in that economic crisis in one region may rapidly ‘infect’ other regions of the world economy as exemplified by the currency crises in East Asia in 1997–8 and the Eurozone in 2010. An even clearer illustration of the perils of untrammelled capitalist globalization can be found in the contemporary global financial crisis which had its ‘local’ roots in the sub-prime mortgage crisis and the collapse of Lehman Brothers in the US with ‘global’ consequences.

Transformationists share with post-structural or postmodern accounts a rejection of the determinism of the Enlightenment ‘meta-narratives’ of liberalism and Marxism. Unlike the hyperglobalist thesis, proponents of the transformationalist synthesis are unable to make predictions about the future but agree that we are living through an age characterized by profound economic, political, social and cultural change encapsulated through the contradictory but mutually dependent processes of globalization and localization. Globalization is rendering boundaries and territorialized identities less salient, whereas localization is highlighting borders and intensifying the deep attachment to the land. The tension between globalization and localization may be seen in all realms of human activity, from the economic and political to the social and cultural. In the economic realm, the globalization of trade, production and investment refers to their expansion beyond state boundaries whilst localization refers to attempts to prevent the repatriation of profits by encouraging MNCs to reinvest in the local community. In the political realm, globalization facilitates the expansion of authority, policies and interests beyond state boundaries through supranational regional institutions such as the EU whereas localization refers to attempts to devolve power to the regions. Finally, in the social and cultural realms, the globalization of ideas and values refers to attempts to imagine a world beyond the nation-state, whilst localization implies attempts to preserve the traditions, values and identity of one’s particular community.

However, as Robertson notes, these two seemingly opposed processes are not as contradictory as they appear. Our understanding of ‘home’, ‘community’ or ‘identity’ is not static but profoundly influenced by global processes of socio-economic and cultural transformation. Seen in this light, localization can be seen as an aspect of globalization rather than its polar opposite (Robertson 2003: 37). Robertson collectively subsumes these processes under the term ‘glocalization’. Denoting a global outlook adapted to local conditions, the ‘glocalization’ entered the social sciences through Japanese marketing practice in the 1990s. However, it will be suggested that, following Robertson, ‘glocalization’ involves not only the adaptation to but also the (re)construction of localized identities.
Major claims and developments: globalization, the nation-state and identity

In this section, the impact of globalization upon collective identities will be examined. Four main claims, based on the three theses outlined above, will be advanced and critically examined in the next section. First, globalist assertions that the nation-state is gradually being eroded by the emergence of a global civil society based on the rights of the individual will be outlined. Next, the sceptical view that the nation-state continues to define the political identity of its citizens will be considered before turning to the Samuel Huntington’s thesis that civilizational identity will gradually supplant that of the nation-state. Finally, the transformationalist view that globalization results not so much in a clash of civilizations but in the emergence of mixed, hybrid identities will be examined. This will be further elaborated upon in the section on future developments.

Global civil society

Globalization in a conventional sense refers to the globalization of liberal capitalist modernity. Following the collapse of Soviet-style Communism in the 1990s, it has been argued by neoliberals that liberal capitalist modernity remains the only viable mode of economic, social and political organization. For neoliberals, globalization is merely the belated universalization of freedom as represented by liberal democracy and the market economy. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, liberal-democratic institutions have emerged in most states and even self-proclaimed ‘socialist’ states such as the PRC participate in a world economy organized on capitalist lines. Francis Fukuyama in The End of History and the Last Man (Penguin 1992) famously saw the fall of the Berlin Wall as the culmination of the Hegelian dialectic. For Fukuyama:

There is a fundamental process at work that dictates a common evolutionary pattern for all human societies . . . something like a Universal History of mankind in the direction of liberal democracy.

(Fukuyama 1992: 48)

The idea of a universal history of mankind was first suggested by Immanuel Kant in his An Idea for a Universal History of Mankind. Kant suggested that history would have an end point or a final purpose that was implied in man’s current potentialities and which made the whole of history intelligible. For Kant, as for Hegel and Marx after him, this end point was the realization of human freedom, defined as the universalization of a just civic constitution. Only when all states accept such a constitution, adopting a republican form of government, and join a Foedus Pacifacum, a pacific federation or union guaranteeing the Right of a foreigner not to be treated with hostility when he arrives on someone else’s territory would there be an end to conflict and, therefore, perpetual peace.

Although most globalists acknowledge that a global cosmopolitan ethic is at best embryonic, or presently limited to the developed North and the European Union in particular, they insist that globalization will inevitably lead to the dissemination of a global political cultural identity and the creation of a global civil society. The term ‘civil’ society emerged in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth century to denote a type of society distinct from the state of nature. For Thomas Hobbes, the state of nature was conceived of as a ‘war, as if of every man, against every man’ characterized by mutual fear, distrust and anarchy. Civil society, in contrast, was characterized by the rule of law, based on certain fundamental rights enforced by a political
authority also subject to the rule of law. The origins of the term civil society lay in the *societas civilis* of classical antiquity: a zone of ‘civility’, entailing respect between members of a political community, based on security and trust.

Civil society received its first systematic consideration in John Locke’s *Second Treatise on Civil Government*. For Locke, the term ‘civil society’ referred to a society of free men, equal under the rule of law, bound together by no common purpose but sharing a respect for each other’s rights. A civil society was seen to have been constituted by a social contract whereby men exchanged their natural freedom in return for rights guaranteed by law. For Thomas Hobbes, the fundamental right had been a security which could only be provided by a *Leviathan* commanding absolute authority. However, for Locke, ‘natural’ rights included those of the preservation of life, liberty and property which was guaranteed by the sovereign.

Immanuel Kant’s conception of a ‘universal civil society’ differed from that of Locke in that the individual’s natural rights were balanced by a categorical imperative to treat other individuals as ‘ends’ in themselves. It was this categorical imperative which provided the basis for the realization of a ‘community of ends’. As Mary Kaldor points out, this was attained through conflict between man’s ‘asocial socialibility’: man’s ability to live in society as a social being and his tendency to think and act as an individual, ‘to isolate himself, since he also encounters in himself the unsocial characteristic of wanting to direct everything in accordance with his own ideas’ (Kaldor 2003: 25–6).

Contemporary neoKantians such as Kaldor, have seen in post-Cold War developments such as the spread of liberal democratic institutions, a renewed commitment by both intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations to humanitarian activism and intervention, and perhaps most importantly growing trends towards regional integration within the EU a realization of Kant’s idea of ‘a universal civil society’. For Kaldor:

> [T]he coming together of humanitarian and human rights law, the establishment of an international criminal court, the expansion of international peace-keeping, betoken an emerging framework of global governance, what Immanuel Kant described as universal civil society, in the sense of a cosmopolitan rule of law, guaranteed by a combination of treaties and institutions.

*(Kaldor 2003: 7)*

**Persistence of the nation-state**

Sceptics on the other hand, are suspicious of claims of the emergence of a global civil society based on the universality of human rights or security. Human rights are seen as the weapon of strong states, their abuses used to justify coercive intervention in weak states such as in Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq and perhaps Libya. Whilst tribunals have been set up by the UN Security Council to deal with mass human rights violations in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia and Rwanda, powerful states, including the ‘liberal’ United States, have refused to ratify the Treaty of Rome that proposed the establishment of an International Criminal Court (ICC).

The persistence of the territorially defined sovereign state as the basic unit of international relations since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 remains the central plank in the sceptic’s argument against the existence of a global political culture. The Westphalian state, as Stephen Krasner has pointed out, is a system of political authority based on territory and autonomy (Krasner 1999). No external actor enjoys authority within the borders of the state. Since the French Revolution of 1789, the state’s sovereignty over its territory has been increasingly legitimized by reference to the political community of the nation. The nation, for sceptics, continues to
be territorially defined. Territory is ‘home to the members of the community, the site of their history, a witness to their past struggles, triumphs and defeats’ (Parekh 2003: 9). It demarcates members of a particular political community from others and forms an important part of their individual and collective identities. Whilst globalists consider the nation as ‘invented’, some sceptics follow A.D. Smith in viewing nations as having pre-modern ‘ethnic cores’. The nation, Smith asserts, is built upon the myths and memories of a territorialized ethnie. The success of nationalist movements depends on the ability of elites to mobilize these myths and memories in the defence of a common national culture. A global culture, on the other hand, is essentially memoryless as there are no ‘world memories’ that can be used to unite humanity (Smith 2000: 241). Therefore, the task of the globalist project is futile:

It is one thing to be able to pack imagery and diffuse it through world-wide telecommunications networks. It is quite another to ensure that such images retain their power to move and inspire populations, who have for so long been divided by particular histories and cultures, which have mirrored and crystallized the experiences of historically separated social groups.

(ibid.: 241)

The ‘global’ images circulated through the mass media and ‘information superhighway’ are invariably those associated with a particular culture and historical period; namely that of the modern West. Those images and symbols whether from New York, Disneyland or Hollywood are read in different ways and in different languages by different national communities.

Clash of civilizations

In contrast with the sceptical position, Samuel Huntington’s (in)famous ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis, first published as a riposte to the liberal triumphalism most closely associated with one of his pupils, Francis Fukuyama, in Foreign Affairs (1993) and subsequently in The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order (1996), takes into account the transformative impact of globalization. The national community, Huntington contends, is under threat from increased international migration and a greater assertion of non-Western identities by migrant communities encouraged by mistaken policies of multiculturalism. Western societies should instead inculcate Judaeo–Christian values domestically and attempt to ward off a rising Islamic–Confucian challenge internationally to their hegemony.

The crux of Huntington’s argument is that globalization has led to a re-awakening of civilizational identities both inside and outside the nation-state. Huntington accepts the impermanency of the nation-state and implicitly regards it as a modern construct to be contrasted with the primordiality of larger ‘macro’ identities based on culture, language and, particularly, religion. The world, according to Huntington, is divided up into seven or eight civilizations: Western, Slavic-Orthodox, Islamic, Confucian, Hindu, Japanese, Latin American and, possibly, African. The differences between these civilizations are seen as not only ‘real’, but also ‘basic’:

The people of different civilizations have different views on the relations between God and man, the individual and the group, the citizen and the state, parents and children, husband and wife as well as differing views of the relative importance of rights and responsibilities, liberty and equality, equality and hierarchy. These differences are the products of centuries. They will not soon disappear.

(Huntington 1993: 25)
Although Huntington acknowledges that civilizational differences do not necessarily give rise to violent conflict, he contends that the most important – and violent – future conflicts will occur along the ‘cultural fault lines’ which separate these civilizations from one another. At face value, this claim seems to have been borne out by the subsequent events of 9/11 and the ensuing ‘war on terror’. Despite pretensions to the contrary the West, as led by the US and NATO, has indeed confronted a resurgent Islamic civilizational identity centred on the transnational Umma as violently espoused by Al Qaeda. Within the West, there has been a retreat from multiculturalism and a strengthening of economic, cultural and political ties most particularly within the European Union. These developments have arisen, Huntington argues, as a consequence of the greater interactions between different civilizations which result from the world becoming a ‘smaller place’.

**Hybridity**

Finally, transformationalists and post-structuralists would question the very existence of fixed, civilizational identities grounded on language and religion, seeing them instead as hybrid, fluid and constantly changing. Identities, for transformationalists, are always plural. Globalization permits the construction of ‘new’ *syncretic* identities which co-exist with ‘older’ identities based on ethnicity, religion and language within the ‘self’ (Hall 1997). In contrast with the search for ‘assimilation’ or ‘purity’, transformationalists and post-structuralists in particular celebrate the ‘fuzziness’ of modern identities. Being ‘between cultures’ is seen as a source of strength rather than weakness as it opens up ‘multiple worlds’ in which to inhabit and multiple sources of political obligation: to the local, regional, national and global.

Chinese and Indian IT workers in the US, Vietnamese and Algerians in France, Bangladeshis in the UK, Turks in Germany and Moroccans in Italy, do not cease to be Chinese, Indian, Korean, Vietnamese, Algerian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Turkish or Moroccan but rather become both Chinese or Indian *and* American, Vietnamese *and* French, Bangladeshi *and* British, Turkish *and* German, Moroccan *and* Italian. In the process of acquiring more than one political home, the meaning of one’s political identity changes. Being Chinese or Indian in the US is different from being Chinese or Indian in one’s homeland – it refers to one’s *place of origin* rather than one’s *place of settlement*. One’s place of origin becomes *deterritorialized* through the process of migration. The offspring of the Indian and Chinese IT workers may never see their ‘homeland’, or place of origin, India or China, but they will not cease to be Indian or Chinese within the context of their place of settlement, the United States, just as many of their fellow citizens continue to categorize themselves, and be categorized as Irish Americans, Italian Americans, and African Americans many generations after their ‘arrival’ in the US. The significance of being Indian or Chinese therefore changes in what may be termed a *diaspora* context.

Furthermore, they may also acquire a regional identity, or rather regional identities, which may reflect not only their place of settlement but also their ancestors’ place of origin. Here Hawaii provides us with a good example of things to come. Okinawan migrants to Hawaii emigrated before their homeland was formally integrated into the Japanese mainland and kept their own culture, language and identity. Known as the *Uchinanchu*, Okinawan ethnicity was clearly distinguished from mainland ‘naichi’ Japanese migrants. However, contemporary Hawaiians of Japanese and Okinawan descent are considered ‘local’: not only are they not mistaken for the hordes of Japanese tourists (some from Okinawa) who descend on Waikiki every year but also they are viewed as ‘more’ Hawaiian than *Haole* (i.e. Caucasian) migrants from the US mainland. A ‘local’ Hawaiian of Japanese and Okinawan descent, therefore, can lay claim to four socio-cultural identities: Okinawan, Japanese, ‘local’ and American. In
Hawaii, this is the rule and not the exception. Although ‘haoles’ make up the largest single ethnic group, the vast majority of the Hawaiian population are of ‘mixed’ descent with indigenous Hawaiian blood intermingled with successive waves of migrants from East Asia: Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Filipino.

Globalization, with its roots in the colonial political economy, will lead to a similar ‘creolization’ of ethnic identities on a global scale. Nowhere is this better illustrated than in one of Hawaii’s most famous sons: the forty-fourth president of the United States, Barack Hussein Obama. The son of a Muslim Kenyan father and a Caucasian mother from Kansas, Obama was born in Hawaii and raised in Indonesia (he has a half-Indonesian step-sister who is an academic at the University of Hawaii at Manoa) before returning to continue his education in the fiftieth state. Elected to serve in the Senate as representative for Illinois, Obama can lay claim to possibly seven different socio-cultural and regional identities: Hawaiian, Illinosian, Kenyan, Kansan, Christian, Indonesian (possibly) and American! This no doubt goes some way to explaining the breadth of his appeal not only among Americans, who voted for him in 2008, but also global audiences as exemplified by the award of the 2009 Nobel Peace Prize.

Main criticisms

In this section, some of the main criticisms of the above claims will be briefly outlined. In the interests of clarity, these will be subsumed under four main headings: homogenization, ahistoricity, essentialism and malleability. Criticisms of global civil society will be addressed under the first of these headings, those concerning the persistence of nation-states as the only realistic framework for political action under the second, the clash of civilization thesis under the third and the final heading will address some of the criticisms with hybridization.

Homogenization

The first criticism sees in liberal conceptions of global civil society a blueprint for political, economic and cultural homogenization on a global scale. Global civil society, in a liberal sense, refers to the space of un-coerced human association embodying a universal cosmopolitan ethic, existing in opposition to the state and a states-system representing the interests of particular national communities. The liberal conception of global civil society assumes the existence of the ‘unencumbered individual’, that is, individuals unfettered by cultural or social norms and values. However, in reality, human beings are born and live within a particular political community, and are bound to their fellow citizens by special ties. These ties usually include a common interest in maintaining the stability and integrity of their community. Since human beings grow up within a particular community, they tend to feel a part of it and define their identity in terms of it. They, in the words of Bhikhu Parekh, ‘see their community as theirs, feel a particular sense of responsibility for it, experience pride or shame when it does or does not live up to certain ideals, and take interest in its problems’ (Parekh 2003: 8). Membership of a political community gives people what Aristotle termed a bios: a life endowed with meaning and dignity. This differed from zoe, which expresses the simple fact of living. For Giorgio Agamben, zoe was a ‘bare life’: one which could be ‘killed but not yet sacrificed’ (Agamben 1998). The distinction between bios and zoe, between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the political community, corresponds to the modern system of states but is not tied to a Westphalian imaginary. Other forms of political community can exist which are not tied to territory, culture, language or religion but there is always an ‘outside’: an ‘other’ or external threat against which to defend the community which demands the sacrifice of some of its members.
A universal, cosmopolitan ‘global’ civil society has no ‘outside’. It demands that the ‘other’ become like the ‘self’: free, equal and bearers of inalienable rights to life, liberty and property. This gives rise to a contradiction: what if people choose not to join this new universal, ‘rights-based’ community but prefer the security afforded by their socially and culturally defined communities with their particular and sometimes exclusive traditions which may impinge upon the freedom and rights of others? Should they be forced to be free? Many advocates of a global civil society would agree and supported wars in Kosovo, Afghanistan and, some initially at least, Iraq which were justified on the grounds that tyrannical regimes systematically abused the rights of their citizens. Thus, the creation of an un-coerced human association embodying a cosmopolitan ethic paradoxically entails the legitimization of greater levels of coercion and violence against others.

This is best illustrated by the changing rationale for the West’s longest contemporary war: Afghanistan. Whereas initially US intervention was legitimized on the grounds of national security and targeted Al-Qaeda for their alleged involvement in the 9/11 attacks, their Taliban ‘protectors’ quickly became the targets for the military campaign and the Taliban regime subsequently fell in the first few months. Thereafter, began a protracted guerrilla war waged by remnants of the Taliban regime against the Western-backed government of President Hamid Karzai which necessitated a prolonged occupation of the country by NATO troops. With the election of President Obama, it was hoped that the war would quickly end, given the new president’s opposition and commitment to ending the war in Iraq. However, an additional 30,000 US troops and another 10,000 from NATO allies have been deployed in Afghanistan to counter the threat of a resurgent Taliban, not to the US but to its own people. It is, as yet, unclear how the dismissal of the main architect of the strategy, General McCrystal, will affect US policy in Afghanistan but it seems safe to conclude that, for the moment at least, the defeat of the Taliban and the achievement of a ‘liberal peace’, one which is dependent upon the creation of a democratically elected government, market economy and rule of (Western secular) law, remains a central Western objective. The people of Afghanistan, therefore, are being forcibly prevented from choosing to live in an Islamic theocracy with its own admittedly patriarchal customs and ‘repressive’ laws.

**Ahistoricity**

If the advocates of a global civil society are guilty of overstating the benign effects of globalization and turning a blind eye to the violence that the creation of a global civil society entails, then supporters of the contemporary world order based on the nation-state are equally guilty of a myopic and ahistorical tendency to equate what is for what will be. Simply put, the contemporary world order, based loosely on a set of general agreements first drawn up at the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 in Europe and then forcibly exported to the rest of the world through colonization, is a historical product which is undergoing possibly unprecedented degrees of change. Far from being a permanent feature of the global political landscape, nations are ‘imagined communities’ which first came into existence in late modern Europe following the agricultural and industrial revolutions (Anderson 1991). ‘Invented’ by state elites through processes of linguistic and cultural homogenization (Gellner 1983), nations are neither ‘natural’ nor very old and were preceded by the establishment of territorialized states under dynastic monarchs. Once the king’s head was ‘cut off’ by a guillotine in eighteenth-century France, sovereignty passed from the monarch to the people living inside the realm. Over the course of the next two centuries, the subjects of the political community became its citizens endowed with rights and obligations to one another.
However, the very nature of national citizenship and, in particular, the ties that bind members of political communities to one another, is being transformed by the profound economic and technological changes associated with globalization. Even for critics of ethical universalism, such as Bhikhu Parekh, the “we” that constitutes and defines the political community is expanding to encompass those hitherto perceived as “they”, and the moral gap between general duties and special duties, between those to human beings in general and to our fellow citizens, is beginning to narrow (Parekh 2003: 11) as a result of increased interdependence between different political communities. Parekh argues that globalization has indeed transformed citizenship but not in the ways in which advocates of a global civil society envisage. Instead of global or cosmopolitan citizenship, globalization, or rather, the common risks and dangers which human beings in general face as a result of technological, economic and environmental change, has made globally oriented citizenship possible. Whilst a global citizen has no political home and is in a state of what Martha Nussbaum calls ‘voluntary exile’, a globally oriented citizen recognizes the reality and value of having a political home yet seeks to forge alliances with others. Parekh’s globally oriented citizens call not for cosmopolitanism but for internationalism. Internationalism, for Parekh, ‘respects the basic moral impulses lying at the heart of nationalism and cosmopolitanism whilst avoiding their pathologies’. Like nationalism, internationalism accepts the ‘natural’ division of the world into different communities and acknowledges the special ties that bind members of a political community together. However, unlike nationalism, internationalism accepts the general ties and common interests and concerns that bind human beings together. Globally oriented citizenship involves examining the policies of one’s state, taking an active interest in the affairs of other countries and an active commitment in the creation of a just world order (Parekh 2003: 12–13). Such an order would include democratizing the structures of international institutions such as the United Nations Security Council, the IMF and World Bank and ensuring greater integration whilst respecting the sovereignty of member states over certain issues of national interest in the manner of the EU.

Parekh, however, assumes that globally oriented citizens have one ‘political home’ from which to discharge their obligations to others. This home, as we have seen, remains territorially defined. Increasingly, however, as a result of either the unevenness or the structural inequalities built into the processes of economic globalization, people seek opportunities to leave their territorially defined political homes in search of employment opportunities. Although states in the developed North have responded by introducing strict quotas on immigration as can be seen in the construction of a ‘Fortress Europe’ through the Schengen agreement, declining birth rates and ageing populations in general have led to labour shortages and greater incentives for migration from South to North. Consequently, many people have multiple ‘political homes’ as attested to by the rise of people with dual nationality and citizenship. Furthermore, even within states which deny the possibility of dual citizenship, there are multiple political loyalties which if not respected have the potential to threaten the integrity of the nation-state. Whereas most Europeans enjoy freedom of movement within the EU and are consequently allowed multiple ‘homes’ even if they hold citizenship of one member states, citizens of France, Belgium and several other European countries face restrictions in what they can wear. On 19 May 2010, the French cabinet approved a draft bill to ban face covering garments in public spaces, a ruling which has subsequently been ratified by parliament. This effectively disenfranchises many Muslim (and Sikh) French citizens who consider the headscarf or Turban (see Shani 2007) an integral part of their collective identities. While Parekh amongst others sees multiculturalism as a way to respect the cultural difference of ethno-religious minorities within the nation, it is clear that this is now a transnational rather than national issue. There are more Muslims living in the EU than Danes and Belgians and the ‘veil issue’ has the potential to radicalize Muslims...
throughout the Europe in the same way as the depictions of the Prophet Mohammed by a Danish cartoonist or even the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

**Essentialism**

It is the spectre of a resurgent, *transnational* Islamic civilization centred upon the *Umma* violently contesting the hegemony of ‘Western’ Judaeo-Christian values both domestically and internationally which animates Huntington’s ‘clash of civilizations’ thesis. Undoubtedly, the events of 9/11, the London attacks of 7 July 2005 and earlier the Madrid train bombing of March 2003 has led to a greater receptivity towards Huntington’s thesis and precipitated a move away from multiculturalism in Western societies, of which the ban on the veil is merely the latest manifestation (despite French claims that it does not target Islamic minorities and is in keeping with its secular values). However, even at the height of the ‘war on terror’ as the United States under a born-again Christian did battle on two fronts with two ‘Muslim’ enemies, the West and the Islamic world were far from united. Even if we choose to ignore the mass, popular protests against the war in Iraq and its growing unpopularity within the US itself, there remains the opposition of two powerful Western states: France and Germany. Turning to the Islamic world, we see support for the war in Iraq by many Sunni Gulf states yet some popular sympathy for the Taliban and Al-Qaeda as seen by the participation of foreign mercenaries in both Iraq and Afghanistan. The categorization of both the secular tyranny of Saddam Hussein and the Taliban theocracy of Mullah Omar furthermore obscures substantive social, political and cultural differences between the two regimes. Certainly Huntington’s thesis cannot account for the Sunni-Shi’ia schism which divides the Islamic world and the internecine nature of civil war in Iraq which claimed far more lives that the actual invasion.

Indeed, it would be no exaggeration to claim that the animosities within civilizations have given rise to far bloodier conflicts than between civilizations. The tragic history of the first half of the twentieth century appears to bear this out as, with the exception of Japanese involvement, these were primarily Western civil wars acted out on a global stage. Huntington’s insistence that the West shares a common Judaeo-Christian heritage not only obscures deep religious divisions between the two religious communities but also means that the Inquisition and the Holocaust must be seen not as a ‘clash of civilizations’ but as internal to the West, despite the fact that Jews were regarded as racially and culturally distinct from Europeans and forced to live apart for almost two thousand years. The Sunni-Shi’ia divide has its counterpart in the sectarianism which led to the Thirty Years’ War in which entire populations belonging to different denominations were exterminated and which, three and a half centuries on from Westphalia, continues to divide Christian communities today, most particularly in Northern Ireland.

However, the historical accuracy of Huntington’s thesis is not its principal defect; rather, its primary faults lie in the very categories he employs to divide humanity and, furthermore, in his crude and unsophisticated conception of culture. As Amartya Sen noted in an article for the *New York Times* published after the invasion of Afghanistan, the ‘basic weakness of the theory lies in its program of categorizing people of the world according to a unique, allegedly commanding system of classification’ (*New York Times*, 23 November 2001). Huntington *essentializes* culture seeing ‘civilization’ as an unchanging, territorialized, primordial attachment which defines an individual’s identity. He ignores the multiplicity of individual identities based on nationality, language, region, ethnicity, gender, age, occupation, political affiliation, class and caste and ascribes to religion an all-encompassing and overarching framework which guides social life, personal morality and political action. Huntington downplays the common heritage of many of the world’s ‘civilizations’, most notably those based on the monotheistic religions of Christianity.
and Islam, and ignores the interconnections between them. Islamic influences in Renaissance Europe and, through the Mughal Empire, in the evolution of a ‘Hindu’ civilization in India are therefore conveniently overlooked as Orientalist stereotypes of an intolerant, tyrannical Muslim ‘Other’, distinct from the modern, rational Western and traditional, spiritual Indian ‘Self’, are recycled and reproduced for contemporary audiences. It is no wonder that the late Edward Said, in an article for the Nation which appeared in the aftermath of 9/11, derided the ‘clash of civilizations’ as a ‘clash of ignorance’ (The Nation 22 October 2001).

Furthermore, as both Said and Sen note, Huntington, despite protestations, implicitly sees difference, whether religious or civilizational, as engendering conflict. In a rapidly globalizing world, this is both impractical and pernicious. It is impractical in that Huntington’s thesis does not seem to take into account the degree to which different civilizations are already intermingled and cannot be separated from one another. Muslims comprise almost 10 per cent of the population of France and are as European as their Judaeo-Christian and secular fellow citizens. As Sen points out, describing India as a ‘Hindu civilization’ misses the fact that India has more Muslims than any other country except Indonesia and Pakistan. It is pernicious in that the logical consequence of Huntington’s argument would be to endorse a form of global apartheid and to legitimize ‘ethnic cleansing’ on the grounds that people from different civilizations cannot live together. This not only is patently untrue but also disregards the experiences of many people who inhabit ‘multiple worlds’ and negotiate civilizational differences on a daily basis.

**Malleability**

Although the claim that globalization is leading to a hybridization of identities appears to resonate with the experiences of the present generation, at least those living in multi-ethnic societies, there are clear limits to the degree to which ‘thick’ identities based on ethnicity, gender, language, nationality, religion and socio-economic status can be negotiated. Returning to our example of Barack Obama, we can see that although he may epitomize the very hybridity which transformationalists and post-structuralists argue is a central feature of globalization, his role as president of the United States reproduces the power of the (patriarchal) nation-state in international relations. Far from transforming world politics, his election appears to have reinvigorated the old ‘imperial’ order by breathing new life into the ‘American Dream’ and resuscitating the world capitalist economy.

The infinite flexibility of personal identities which is seen as a hallmark of our postmodern times is certainly belied by the resurgence of ethno-national and religious collective identities which has accompanied neoliberal globalization. Why, if identity is being privatized as Bauman suggests, should people feel the need to belong to communities, even if many recognize them as ‘imagined’? Perhaps part of the reason may have something to do with the very insecurity engendered by the globalization of neoliberalism and its emphasis on informalization, dispensability and short-termism which Elliott and Lemert consider to be central to the ‘new individualism’. In The New Individualism: The Emotional Costs of Globalization (2005), Elliott and Lemert argue that globalization brings with it a ‘new individualism’ centred on a fixation with ‘instant change’, whether of the body, selfhood or society, which people are not necessarily emotionally prepared to cope with. As Elliott notes, where people ‘feel threatened or assaulted by social and technological upheavals, toleration of personal difference and cultural particularities sometimes diminishes’ (Elliott 2007: 158). In such circumstances, people may find meaning through identification with other individuals with whom they share feelings of disposability and loss. This sense of insecurity has certainly been exacerbated by the financial crisis and global economic downturn. It remains to be seen, however, whether a new, transnational communal consciousness
based on disposability will emerge in response to the economic crisis or whether any such 'global' coalition of the disposable will splinter along national, ethnic, religious or cultural lines, as suggested by the European response to the 'Greek' financial crisis.

**Future developments: digital diasporas**

One of the distinctive features of the contemporary age is that, in the words of James Clifford, 'the language of diaspora is increasingly invoked by displaced peoples who feel (maintain, revive, invent) a connection with a prior home . . . Many minority groups that have not previously identified this way are now reclaiming diasporic origins and affiliations' (Clifford 1994: 301). It is argued here that globalization, driven by a technological revolution which has made communication instantaneous over large distances, will facilitate this process by breaking down the barriers of territorial identity and by permitting the dissemination of what Paul Gilroy (1997) has termed a 'diaspora consciousness' through images of collective violence, flight and dispersion. Diaspora, like the nation before it, may be considered a form of 'imagined community'. For Anderson, the nation was imagined 'because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson 1991: 6).

Whilst for Anderson, it was the development of what he termed 'print capitalism' that facilitated the imagination of the nation, it can be argued that 'digital capitalism' has made the imagination of new deterritorialized communities possible. By digital capitalism, I mean the global restructuring of capitalism around information technology. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) 'offer new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds' (Appadurai 1996: 3). ICTs have provided the ability to communicate across the boundaries and transcend the limitations of the territorially defined national community, blurring the distinctions between inside and outside, the virtual (or 'imaginary') and the real. In the same way that nations in the New World nations imagined themselves as communities parallel and comparable to those in Europe, cyber-communities see themselves in a community parallel and comparable to the old communities of nation-states, but transcending the limitations of these communities with a new technology that seemingly makes time and space irrelevant.

ICTs not only deterritorialize existing linguistic or even national identities but also engender or strengthen alternative notions of community to that of the nation-state. Today, members of 'global' political movements divided by geography and ethnicity, ranging from the groups affiliated to the World Social Forum to Al-Qaeda can communicate with one another through global languages such as English, Spanish, Arabic or Chinese. In this sense, ICTs may be constitutive of an embryonic transnational public sphere operating alongside, and sometimes in opposition to, the Westphalian system of states.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the human 'family' is made up of many different cultural communities each with their own language, culture and history. These communities may all be imagined but as Anderson points out, the styles in which they are imagined differ and change over time. Globalization, and in particular the development of the Internet and related technologies, allows these cultural communities to be imagined in a different way. It allows people who identify with the same cultural community to communicate with each other across time and space and provides 'homelands' for diasporas and other deterritorialized migrant communities. Rather
than facilitating the development of a global consciousness, it is argued that globalization and the Internet allows a communal consciousness to develop on a global scale. This is not to deny the existence of an embryonic global consumerist culture centred around Yahoo!, MTV and Starbucks but to suggest that this culture is experienced in different ways by people who identify with different ethno-national and religious groups. Yahoo! is a case in point: rather than reinforcing cultural homogenization it allows for, and indeed encourages, the celebration of difference through Yahoo groups. Tibet, Kurdistan and Khalistan may not exist on a map but online they represent sovereign communities. Globalization, in short, has severed the link between nation and state and facilitated the articulation of post-national, diasporic identities which co-exist with older territorialized and newer hybrid identities (Shani 2007) in the human ‘family’ of ‘imagined communities’.

References


