

CHAPTER 7

The Diversity of Cultures in the Crucible of Globalisation

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What does “globalisation” mean? The term came into general use in connection with the opening of the financial markets in London some years ago. This was to be the “Big Bang” that would suddenly tie financial transactions in different parts of the world into a single large and efficient market. To some extent we have seen the economies of many nations increasingly linked to the capital markets of the Western world. This is a major element of “globalisation” which brings out the “hegemonic power” of major financial interests that dominate our lives.

The “soft” cultural aspect is only one facet of the process of globalisation. There are other key matters: apart from economic linkages (and domination) of financial markets, there is also the political and military dimension. For example, the concerns of the international arms trade – which builds weapons of ultimate persuasion and terror, controls the trade in nuclear materials, electronic command-and-control systems, satellites, missiles and other similar matters that deserve serious attention. The control of weapons is a critical element of the “globalisation” agenda. Several things revolve around the definition and management of the international “agenda” concerning these matters, through all kinds of agencies and other forums. We know only too well how deadly and important these matters are, whether in Sri Lanka, Turkey or Japan. India, for example, discovered it in the Bofors story.

Another critical area of globalisation concerns the movement of peoples. The control of immigration, emigration, the management of large groups of alien workers across major cosmopolitan markets, the concern with their human rights; all of these are all becoming major issues for the future. How can we, as anthropologists, overlook the fate of the “boat people” of Vietnam,

or the rusting boats filled with refugees from Albania that arrive at the coast of Italy? The numbers are already extraordinary in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas. This trend will continue and increase, manifesting a social aspect of globalisation. We should be mindful of the fact that large numbers are on the move, together with their cultures.

CULTURE AND DIFFUSION

Having made these general observations, let us turn to the cultural factors affected by globalisation. First of all, what is meant by culture? The term is used widely and loosely; for example, in recent times, even business schools now refer to “corporate cultures”. Anthropologists, however, have had a long and difficult time with this word. The British social anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown considered culture to be essentially irrelevant. He claimed that social structure was the key to understanding how a society works. Culture was a residual set of beliefs and customs, of art, literature, and so on. In other words, Radcliffe-Brown regarded “culture” as a residual dustbin for everything that did not fit and could not be systematically analysed. Another British social anthropologist, Edmund Leach, with his Malinowskian background, was a little more generous: he thought that structure was the necessary “form” and that “culture” was simply “content”. But, we may well ask, what was in that content?

It was the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss who developed the most creative and challenging ideas on this issue. First of all, he accepted the Marxian categories of infrastructure and superstructure. Infrastructure: everything that mattered, the hard practical facts. Superstructure: epiphenomena; the very complicated cognitive reflection of the real world. In another sense, he was returning to the ideas of the French sociologist Emile Durkheim, to the famously ambiguous “conscience collective”. He asked himself whether this difficult concept could be analysed in a manner more precise than Durkheim. We find the answer in a brilliant series of books on the mythology of the Americas. It was in mythology that the structures of collective and customary thought, that is, the “conscience collective”, would be most discernable. Hence Lévi-Strauss attempted to explore how far such analysis could be taken in terms of a theory of cultural forms. Certainly, Lévi-Strauss has given us much to think about: he has alerted us to the structured codes behind the operation of thinking patterns, conceptions and perceptions. These link up with structured forms of the five senses: so all the senses are culturally coded.¹

What all this means is that what others so superficially call “culture” is, in fact, intimately related to a myriad of deep structures which involve all the senses and all thought patterns both in an individual and a collective sense. This certainly includes intimate aspects of everyday life, those deeply ingrained

customs of cooking, of music, of art, as well as the more subtle matters of language use, family relations, definitions of male and female, how one holds one's body, uses one's hands, one's feet, how one walks, sits, sleeps and a host of other matters that anthropologists describe in their field monographs. Some are rather bizarre customs: the elongated necks of women on the Burmese–Thai border, or the female genital mutilations in parts of Africa, also known as Pharaonic circumcision in Egypt, and similar matters. There are many unusual customs that have been given up, to such as head shrinking, which might still be revived to intimidate and terrorise enemies as a cheap military option. However, many other much more understandable practices have been quietly relegated to history. For example, some unusual experiments in human family organisation, such as the remarkable polyandrous Nayar marriage systems of Kerala in South India, or structures of complex forms of cross-cousin and sisters' daughter's marriage among the people of Tamil Nadu, have faded away under the influence of foreign contact.

The reasons why very deep-seated customs that are maintained through generations are eventually discarded have preoccupied anthropologists for a very long time. Nineteenth-century anthropologists in Germany, for instance, with the *Kulturkreislehre*, were interested in trying to understand how cultural elements would spread from a radiating centre to the periphery; how people around a centre would imitate customs and material culture – artefacts, objects, canoes, and so on – that were developed by others. So the history of cultural diffusion occupied a pre-eminent place in anthropological speculation until the Polish anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown rejected these approaches. They argued that there were too many unknowns in all this speculation about cultural centres and diffusion, and that meant that all attempts at describing the history of culture were of no value.

THE PERSUASIVENESS OF POWER

The impact of various cultures on each other has been a historical process; however, in the contemporary world the speed and comprehensiveness of the interactions between cultures has increased tremendously. Hence, what we are witnessing today in terms of the cross-influence of cultures is nothing new. It has always been so; the only difference is that there are now more channels of communication, and speedier transport. These, in turn, increase the exposure to cultural elements in surprising ways. TV programmes are a good case in point: South American TV programmes originating in Brazil or Argentina become fashionable in Turkey and Iran. You can watch wonderful Japanese films every night in Istanbul. They have not yet encouraged more people to eat sushi – though this is also happening. Brian Larkin, who has been working in northern

Nigeria among Hausa-speaking Muslims, has found that Indian films are the most popular with the Hausa because they depict a sense of family values and respect which is felt to be in accord with local values.

In Turkey, where the penetration of TV into the smallest and most distant village communities has been extremely rapid, the effect has been dramatic over the past generation. Young people have decided that rural life is not sufficiently rewarding and that it is preferable to seek their fortunes in the cities. Thus, there has been an extraordinary exodus out of the rural hinterland of Turkey into the major cities. This has contributed first of all to the immense growth of urban centres such as Ankara, Adana, Izmir and Istanbul, but it has also meant a dramatic rise in demand for all social services, from housing to education and health.

In this process of rapid urbanisation, which is essentially a process of deracination, young people become more open to other influences. They are more easily persuaded by fashion as seen on TV or in the papers. This, in turn, raises the question of who determines fashion, and why some fashion is more fashionable than others.

Here, the matter comes full circle to the question of power. It is not for nothing that the youth of the entire world, from Iran to Chile, from Norway to Japan, wear a strange, somewhat uncomfortable, shapeless garment called blue jeans. Why have they not affected that practical and comfortable Japanese garment called yukata, or even better samue? Why not those Turkish shalvars, loose unisex pantaloons known in the fashion trade as "harem pants"? Were Moscovites who were paying small fortunes to get hold of the cherished objects, the blue jeans, thinking of themselves as American cowboys from Texas? Hardly so. But the attractiveness of feeling "with it" was evidently too strong to be overcome by mere scruples of price. The secret symbolism of the prestige of perceived power appears irresistible. It is combined with such all-American symbols as McDonald's and Coca-Cola. There are millions of dollars riding behind the advertisements, but it is the symbolic power of the trademarks that is the key. And, as any financial analyst will tell you, the trademarks themselves, the IBMs and the Sonys, are worth a mint.

Again, not very unusual. Bernard Lewis, a controversial if perceptive historian of the Middle East, writes that when the Mongols conquered Baghdad in 1258, their manner of dress, their garments and hairstyles became fashionable in the Middle East. Muslims, who up to that time used to wear their hair short took to long and lanky hair, just like the Mongols. When Sultan Mahmoud II decided to modernise the military of the Ottoman Empire in the 1820s, he adopted European dress, European saddles for the horses. Edward Lane describes the use of forks and knives in Cairo in 1841.

One of the effects [of the superiority of one of our branches of science] ... might be regarded by an unreflecting mind as of no importance but is considered by the philosophical Muslim as awfully portentous, and hailed by the Christians as an omen of the brightest promise. The Turks have been led to imitate us in our luxuries: several of the more wealthy began by adopting the use of the knife and fork; and the habit of openly drinking wine immediately followed, and has become common among a great number of the higher officers of the government ... the principles of the dominant class will doubtless spread (though they have not yet done so) among the inferior members of the community. The former have begun to undermine the foundations of EI-Islam: the latter as yet seem to look on with apathy ... but they will probably soon assist in the work, and the overthrow of the whole fabric may reasonably be expected to ensue at a period not very remote.²

The editor of that remarkable work, *The Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, Lane's nephew, Edward Stanley Poole, also writes in his preface to the classic work, in London in 1860, that "Twenty five years of steam communication with Egypt have more altered its inhabitants than had the preceding five centuries. They then retained the habits and manners of their remote ancestors: they now are yearly straying from old paths into the ways of European civilisation. Scholars will ever regard it as most fortunate that Mr. Lane seized his opportunity, and described so remarkable a people while yet they were unchanged." Comments which are a warning to those who detect all those changes just around the corner at this time in history.

Note, too, that all this talk of forks and knives is all the more intriguing given that we learn from Norbert Elias, the great expert on emulation up the social scale, that forks were introduced into Europe in the twelfth century by a Byzantine princess whose golden fork caused sardonic comment in Venice.³ She was considered extremely snobbish for using such a dainty object for such a mundane task as putting a morsel of food in one's mouth.

More significantly, Bernard Lewis tells us that through those long centuries when the Islamic world considered itself the very centre of civilisation, nothing was translated from the European languages into Turkish, Arabic or Persian. It was only after the serious defeat of Ottoman power in Europe, after the unsuccessful siege of Vienna in 1683 and the battle of Carlowitz in 1699, that the Ottomans became interested in what was going on in those dark places in Europe.⁴

Even so, there was a long hiatus of self-satisfaction in the eighteenth century during the Tulip Age in the Ottoman lands, which reached heights in Ottoman music and poetry that were still untouched by European forms. With the French Revolution a major change of mood came about. The Ottoman Ambassador at the French court, Tahtawi, describes the activities of the court with amusement.

However, serious matters then follow. Tahtawi translates the French constitution in 1834, and not only that, the governor of Tunisia adopts the Belgian constitution. From then on, constitutions are all the rage. Namik Kemal, the great Ottoman writer, after his sojourn in Paris escaping from the absolutism of the Sultan, declares that a constitutional monarchy is much more suitable for Turks than for the French. The French, according to Kemal, are much given to excesses and are emotional. They get carried away in crowds. Whereas the Ottomans, Kemal argues, with their innate gravity, are much more likely to benefit from a rational constitution. It also fits Islam better, according to him. The upshot of all this is that the Ottomans enact the Constitution of 1876 in order to benefit from its magical healing powers for the body politic. While initially unsuccessful, the defeat of Russia in 1905 by a Japan that was ruled by constitutional monarchy is interpreted in the Islamic world as unmistakable proof of the superiority of constitutional government over autocracy. The Constitutional Revolution of 1906 in Iran, and the coup d'état of the Committee of Union and Progress (motto derived from the work of the French philosopher Auguste Comte) in 1908 in Turkey, again demonstrates the power of received ideas that emanated from Paris.

It is not only the Islamic world that is so sensitive to unconventional ideas from the outside. The description of Russian intellectuals in the nineteenth century is also instructive. Alexander Herzen writes on the reception of Hegelian philosophy from Germany in Russia during the 1850s:

... there is no paragraph in all the three parts of the Logic, two parts of the Aesthetic, of the Encyclopedia ... which was not captured after the most desperate debates lasting several nights. People who adored each other became estranged for entire weeks because they could not agree on the definition of “transcendental spirit”, were personally offended by the opinions about “absolute personality” and “being in itself”. The most worthless tracts of German philosophy that came out of Berlin and other [German] provincial towns and villages, in which there was any mention of Hegel, were written for and read to shreds – till they came out in yellow stains, till pages dropped out after a few days ... ⁵

The Oxford philosopher Isaiah Berlin writes that the Russian government was unwilling to allow its subjects to travel to France, which they regarded “as a chronically revolutionary country, liable to perpetual upheavals, bloodletting, violence and chaos. By contrast, Germany lay peaceful under the heel of a very respectable despotism. Consequently young Russians were encouraged to go to German universities ... [to make them] faithful servants of the Russian autocracy.”⁶

Who could deny that ideas of the most dangerous sort have been traversing most carefully guarded boundaries for a long time? Even the Soviet Union was not immune. Many have observed that it was the daily experience on TV of the quality and superiority of ordinary daily life in West Germany which, in the end, made the lies of the East German and other Iron Curtain regimes untenable. It was the contrast between the life lived and the life observed on TV, and greatly magnified by the imagination, that in the end brought down the Berlin Wall and, with it, the Iron Curtain. The world has been utterly different ever since.

THE POLITICS OF CULTURAL CONTROL

Why, in the end, are some customs, ideas, and fashions accepted, and others discarded? Certainly there is a mysterious element in all this which makes cultural development highly unpredictable. The availability of information through many channels is a necessary pre-condition for cultural change, but this is not enough. There needs to be an internal process of differentiation in the society concerned that will permit the “new” forms, ideas, fashions and customs to be accepted, adopted and utilised for local and immediate purposes. The adoption of new ideologies is an ongoing process in the struggle of particular groups trying to impose their views on a complex social structure. Symbols and ideas are an integral part of the political process of persons and groups who negotiate for position, influence and power. Social forms are not static: they are always being challenged by new individuals or groups with new ideas and new directions. As groups try to define themselves, further their agendas, define their opponents, struggle to meet changing conditions, they adopt symbols, hairstyles, clothing, tattoos, drinks and culinary forms that indicate their “difference” from other such groups. Such concern with “difference” – we do this, you do that – is of the essence in social relations. It communicates status. This leads naturally to questions of social control: you may do this, and you may not do that. The entire sorry story of headscarves for women in Muslim countries, and in France, makes a good example of this matter of definition, difference and control. The scarves, and the denial of scarves, become “symbolic”. They come to represent the defiant gestures of a struggle for the domination of the high ground of moral ideology. In turn, this struggle, which may begin with “cultural” symbols, leads subtly into political action, and thus into a form of “legitimacy” by way of political domination.

The story of the Turkish Welfare party’s rise into prominence, power and subsequent fall from power (1994–7) is replete with the use of Islamic “symbols” for purposes of self-definition and legitimacy. This is a very precise example of the use of symbolic rhetoric for the purposes of “differentiation” and thus the definition of an “identity”. The symbols adopted by the Welfare party – scarves,

headgear, gestures, the entire armoury of Islamic insignia – allowed it to insist on its “difference” from other “ordinary” parliamentary parties which were, in fact, no less “Islamic” than the Welfare party. It made frontal attacks on the symbols of “secularism” in Turkey: insisting on attacking or defacing pictures and statues of the founder of the republic, Atatürk. The rhetoric used by the Welfare party insisted on these symbolic markers of “difference” and defined the “others” as “traitors” to the moral struggle for the freedom of conscience. These symbolic tactics led it to take up extreme positions against the “secular” constitution of the Turkish Republic. Support for the Welfare party rose from about 11 per cent to 21 per cent of the electorate. Anger at inflation running at 100 per cent and local corruption, fed into the sense of alienation. This trend continued for a period (1996–7) and it was, at the time, tolerated by the political establishment for entirely local and practical reasons. It seemed to serve the short-term tactics of one of their so-called “secularist” allies (the DYP–True Path Party of the former prime minister Tansu Ciller), which also enjoyed the support of about 20 per cent of the electorate. However, all these political-rhetorical manoeuvres finally exhausted the patience of their powerful opponents, the large urban middle class, major newspapers and TV channels, and more importantly the military and other bureaucratic elements of the establishment, who engineered their fall from power to the considerable relief of those (79 per cent) who had voted against the highly symbolic Welfare agenda.

The story did not end there, however. Another Islamist party with roots in Welfare was able to combine those symbols of Islamist “difference”, the headscarf in particular, with a liberal agenda by adopting the principles of the European Union. They were able to claim that their anti-secularist stance was part of the European idea of “universal human rights” for the freedoms of conscience and religious practice. The clever use of “human rights”, combined with the “headscarves” issue for women, made for a vibrant election platform which allowed them to win 47 per cent of the votes in the 2007 elections. Thus, cultural elements of symbolic “difference” became the instrument for the legitimisation of political hegemony.

An even more telling but older example of similar dynamics is the adoption of the Latin alphabet by Turkey. The Arabic script that the Turks had used in their domains in Asia, Europe and Africa for more than a thousand years was simply discarded without much struggle in 1929. The symbolic statement of the break of the vigorous new republic with the imperial past could not have been more eloquent. The profound effects of this dramatic change are still reverberating in the national consciousnesses of Turkish-speaking peoples from the Balkans to China. It cannot be denied that the effect of the change of alphabet from the Ottoman to the Latin has been to open up Turkish culture to deep Western influence. It is not without reason that the Iranians, who, with the rise

of Khomeini, have embarked on a different direction, consider the Turkish case to be one of “westoxication”, to use their colourful phrase. Cultural symbols define and differentiate social groups in specifically local contexts, even if their content is ultimately derived from international sources.

In his recent writing on this subject, the sociologist Peter Berger has suggested that the nature of globalisation has been particularly salient among certain key groups. He notes the development of a “world wide” shared style (hardly to be called “culture” as yet) among important policy makers (“the Davos group”), itinerant academics (“the Faculty Club types”), the mass media (“Peter Arnett in Baghdad again”) and Protestant Evangelical missionary activity in many parts of the world.⁷ The pace of contact and communication in such developments has certainly increased. The question of “depth” of penetration remains open.⁸

Berger also proposes to investigate the problem of “penetration” by considering local reactions in terms of replacement, synthesis, co-existence and rejection (of cultural forms).⁹ He rightly feels that cultural process could be consistently monitored in these respects. He is correct in identifying cases of synthesis and rejection to be of particular interest. As I have indicated above in connection with the problem of the internal dynamics of “group formation” and “differentiation” in the Turkish political context, these processes need to be explored in their intimate and particular socio-political details. The politics of culture, as Aldous Huxley, George Orwell and Arthur Koestler never tired of warning us, is the key to the “future societies” that we are in the process of creating. Thus, the stakes are very high indeed in the cultural control of symbolism in the media.

CULTURAL SYMBIOSIS AND REJECTION

The new globally-connected world that we are beginning to experience will include large numbers of people who will be speaking different languages, and maintaining their own distinct customs. The burning question, ever since Bosnia, Chechnya and Rwanda, is how to devise legal and constitutional forms that will enable plural societies to exist in reasonable amity. Where the legal safeguards are not in place, or not sufficiently observed, assiduously entrenched labour interests are combined with high unemployment – as in the case of much of Western Europe – and the danger of ethnic strife becomes very large. On this score there is much for Europeans to learn from the long American experience with immigration, as well as from the openness of Asian civilisations. The American case provides the complicated picture of legal and constitutional frameworks within which “cultural rights” are recognised as part of the right to freedom of expression and religion. It is in this context that bilingual education and human rights are being debated. There is much here of great importance concerning the development of institutions and legal precedents concerning

cultural survival and/or assimilation. Nonetheless, behind legal frameworks and the learned opinions of legal experts, lies the everyday experience of interpersonal relations. On this score, even with the momentous election victory of Barack Obama to the White House, there is so much more to be done for Americans to open their minds, and their hearts, to each other.

It is in this intimate respect that the Asian and Middle Eastern experiences of interpersonal relations are different. There are two important and highly sophisticated examples from which we can draw valuable lessons: India and the Ottoman Empire. First, regarding India, consider this interesting letter to *The Economist* (written in the mid-1980s but still valid today):

Sir—Despite your article on communal violence in India (November 1), the great majority of Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others live peacefully together. Here in southern India, there are many examples of different religious bodies actually sharing each other's places of worship.

In the heart of Madras city (population now around six million) there is a Muslim shrine where Hindu and Christian women (including high-caste Brahmin women) bring their babies to be blessed by the mullah. A few blocks farther on is a Catholic church crowded, especially on Fridays, by Hindus and Muslims, as well as Christians. On the holy Muslim day of Muhurram, Muslims in Madras have the hereditary right to use the sacred waters of the temple pool of the beautiful Hindu Kapaleeswara temple, in the heart of the city.

Because of a legend that a crippled Muslim boy saw a vision of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and was consequently cured, thousands of Muslims from the Middle East and Malaysia join Hindus and Christians at the annual festival of the Vailankanni Roman Catholic church, farther south. In neighbouring Karnataka state a joint Hindu-Muslim object of worship in the Baba Budan Mountains is presided over by a Muslim priest, who administers to multitudes of Hindu pilgrims as well as to Muslims. The list is endless.

It is, I know, unfashionable to write anything pleasant about contemporary India, but compare that, if you please, with the carnage Christian wreaks upon Christian in Northern Ireland. Imagine, if you can, a Baptist minister celebrating mass in St. Peters. And from the days when I was a small choirboy in Britain I have vivid recollections of low-church worshippers stalking indignantly out of church in the middle of service because a visiting high-church clergyman made the sign of the cross!"

Harry Miller (Madras, India)¹⁰

What is it that makes it possible to have these open-minded relations between the myriad ethnic and linguistic groups on this colourful subcontinent which

seems to pulsate with baroque human complexity? As is well known, India has at least 300 languages, about 10 of which are major literary languages; it also has at least 70,000 different castes and other distinguishable groups. Even the temples exemplify the desire to elaborate: more gods, more goddesses, more mysterious rituals, more abstract explanations, more categories of priests, of servants, of worshippers. Complexity is the rule. We know full well that when things go wrong, a terrible price is paid for the dark suspicions that groups may harbour towards each other even in tolerant India. Examples of riots and killings abound. Even so, considering the long history of the co-existence of myriad castes and cultures, even after the disastrous partition in 1947, the more enriching aspects of personal relations in India remain the most important hope for the future. We know that, at the individual and personal level, there is often a sense of tolerance and understanding, a sense of acceptance of diversity, that is very different from the experience of more homogeneous societies such as those of Western Europe. The personal courage of Indians in many walks of life (including important anthropologists, such as Veena Das, T. N. Madan and Ashis Nandy) during the Delhi riots to save Sikhs from maddened rioters, or Muslims during the Ayodhya and Bombay troubles, deserves mention. When Kathleen Gough wrote in 1952 about a small village in Tanjore made up of an incredible number of castes (47, to be precise, in a village of 962 persons, of whom 311 were Devendra Pallan, a single low caste), one could see that the experience of diversity, a sense of the different “other”, would come very close to the intimacy of individual experience in daily life.¹¹

We know that the unification of “nation-states” through the assimilation of diverse groups has been a long-term historical process in Europe in which persuasion, arrogance and snobbery, as well as heavy-handed bludgeoning, have played a part. The experiences of the Corsicans, the Basques and the Bretons in France, the Vallons and Flamands in Belgium, the problems of Northern Ireland – all are the residue of desperate struggles involved in the homogenisation of these nation-states. Both in France and in Britain (and many other countries) insistence on the exclusive use of national languages was official policy until recent times. In India, with the ancient and unusual legacy of the caste system, such attempts were not undertaken by the authorities (although it is true that the Emperor Akbar experimented with a super-religion (*Din-i Ilahi*) over Islam and Hinduism).¹² It is not clear how much pressure there was for conversion under Muslim rulers in the north, even though India has experienced large-scale conversions to Islam throughout its history. No doubt there were movements from one caste into another, from one category of caste into another as well, so that the social fabric was always changing. But evidently there could not have been the kind of assimilation that seems to have taken place in Western Europe. Dalrymple writes:

About 100 miles south of Delhi, where I live, lie the ruins of the Mughal capital, Fateh-pur Sikri. This was built by the Emperor Akbar at the end of the 16th century. Here Akbar would listen carefully as philosophers, mystics and holy men of different faiths debated the merits of their different beliefs in what is the earliest known experiment in formal inter-religious dialogue.

Representatives of Muslims (Sunni and Shi'ite as well as Sufi), Hindus (followers of Shiva and Vishnu as well as Hindu atheists), Christians, Jains, Jews, Buddhists and Zoroastrians came together to discuss where they differed and how they could live together.

Muslim rulers are not usually thought of in the West as standard-bearers of freedom of thought; but Akbar was obsessed with exploring the issues of religious truth, and with as open a mind as possible, declaring: "No man should be interfered with on account of religion, and anyone is to be allowed to go over to any religion that pleases him." He also argued for what he called "the pursuit of reason" rather than "reliance on the marshy land of tradition".

All this took place when in London, Jesuits were being hung, drawn and quartered outside Tyburn, in Spain and Portugal the Inquisition was torturing anyone who defied the dogmas of the Catholic church, and in Rome Giordano Bruno was being burnt at the stake in Campo de'Fiori.¹³

The familiar experience of "difference" around the individual evidently "humanised" personal relations, so that people would "naturally" speak numerous languages, and go in and out of each other's temples, and participate in each other's rituals. In some parts, such as Lucknow, there would be one language in the family, another one in the street, a different language for the lower castes, and another one for superiors. To this could be added a sacred language for those so inclined.

The problem in the Indian case is that such complexity was maintained through long centuries at the cost of caste barriers. The plight of the low castes and the outcastes remained. It dominated debates for social reform. It is a matter of considerable achievement for British rule in India during the nineteenth century to have been able to formalise these matters so that the legal systems functioned with tolerable efficiency. We are told that civil strife was fairly rare in the nineteenth century. It could be argued that it is since independence, with the struggle for power taking place among mass political parties, that the social divisions have become so salient and so difficult to manage.¹⁴

In Sri Lanka, which shares many attributes with the Indian subcontinent, cultural recognition of difference has not proven to be a sufficient guarantee of minority rights. The experience of the Tamil minority in a state dominated by Sinhalese Buddhists has not been a happy one. The Sri Lankan example indicates more clearly than other cases that even in the context of effective

parliamentary institutions, a relatively free press and a courageous judiciary, the intensity of ethnic tensions and reprisals can still overwhelm rational politics. Thus, humane personal relations are vital, but not sufficient. Liberal political institutions at every level of the state need to be very firmly established as well.

OTTOMAN ETHNICITY

Let me briefly turn now to the experience of the Middle East. The Ottoman Empire is famous for its unusual “millet” system. Here, the experience is comparable to that of India in terms of the complexity of ethnic groups, of religions and languages, except that structured forms of differentiation comparable to the castes of India were not developed. As a result, interpersonal relations have the same quality of openness between different categories of people, but without intense concern about social distance and the possibility of caste pollution. Hence, ethnic groups have mixed and mingled in the most intimate manner from the Balkans (where Bosnia is a good example) to Egypt, wherever the Ottomans ruled. Mazower, in a remarkable work of scholarship, documents the change in vivid detail, from the relatively easy-going relations between ethnic groups under the empire, to the vicious state of affairs that arose once the various nation-states took over their claimed territories in the Balkans. Here is Mazower quoting from a Bulgarian memoir of life in the 1870s:

Turks and Bulgarians got on well together. The women of a village quarter bordering on Turkish houses mixed with the Turkish women in a neighbourly way, while the children played with the little Turks as with their own playmates. The Turkish women and children spoke Bulgarian quite well and the Bulgarians, like their children, managed to get by in Turkish, the result being a sort of mixed patois. Those Turks who worked at Bulgarian houses were accepted as close friends ... We were used to the Turks ... all this we took as being in the order of things.¹⁵

Such is the state of affairs just before the independence of Bulgaria in 1877, in the aftermath of the Russian invasion, when “ethnic cleansing” gets under way. Just as in the case of India, there is a great deal of common cultural patterns between the various communities: according to Mazower again: “The blurring of the divide among the three great monotheistic faiths was a feature of one of the fastest-growing religious movements of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Balkans – the strain of Islamic mysticism known as Bektashism ...” Mazower then quotes from a pamphlet, “The Bektashi believe in the Great Lord and in the true saints Muhammad, Ali, Kadije, Fatima, and Hasan and Husain ... They also believe in all the saints, both ancient and modern, because

they believe in Good and worship it. And as they believe in these and love them, so also do they in Moses and Miriam and Jesus and their servants ...” “‘I thought you were all Moslems here,’ a British traveller asked the priests at one Bektashi tekke. ‘So we are,’ they told her, ‘but of course we keep St George’s Day.’ ...Bektashism spread throughout south-eastern Europe with the [Ottoman] empire and became popular in southern Albania, where it remains entrenched even after the fall of communism.”¹⁶

So much for the “clash of civilisations”.

The Jews, too, had been closely involved with the Muslim community.¹⁷ Bernard Lewis quotes the famous Edirne letter “written in the first half of the fifteenth century”:

I have heard of the afflictions, more bitter than death, that have befallen our brethren in Germany – of the tyrannical laws, the compulsory baptisms and the banishments, which are of daily occurrence ... on all sides I learn of anguish of soul and torment of body ... Brothers and teachers, friends and acquaintances! I, Isaac Zarfati, though I spring from a French stock, yet I was born in Germany and sat there at the feet of my esteemed teachers. I proclaim to you that Turkey is a land wherein nothing is lacking, and where, if you will, all shall be well with you. The way to the Holy Land lies open to you through Turkey ... Here every man may dwell at peace under his own vine and fig tree. Here you are allowed to wear the most precious garments. In Christendom, on the contrary, you dare not even venture to clothe your children in red or in blue, according to your taste, without exposing them to the insult of being beaten black and blue, or kicked green and red, and therefore are ye condemned to go about meanly clad in sad coloured raiment ... and now, seeing all these things, Israel, wherefore sleepest thou? Arise! And leave this accursed land forever.

Lewis goes on to quote from Samuel Usque, a Portugese Jew, a century later:

... most signal (among human consolations) is great Turkey, a broad and spacious sea which God opened with the rod of His mercy as He opened the Red Sea at the time of the exodus ... here the gates of liberty are always open for the observance of Judaism”

and adds, “this must have come as a considerable surprise to a traveller from sixteenth century Portugal”.¹⁸

It is a matter of considerable regret for Turkish intellectuals that the liberal attitudes of the Ottomans in terms of cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity appropriate in an imperial age have not been transferred to Turkey after 1924,

as a nation-state. Hence the terrible, short-sighted and narrow-minded cultural policies of recent times, especially in the period after military rule in the 1980s in the Turkish Republic, which are sadly undermining the familiar trust between Turks and Kurds built up over centuries of interaction.

CONCLUSION

We commenced the chapter with historical examples showing how cultures affect each other in interactions that are always profoundly political. Cultural features are almost never neutral. They carry a heavy load of a perceived political context. The sense of power, of domination and subjugation, of superior forms to be adopted or inferior patterns to be rejected, is often under the surface. These dynamic relations may not always be in the open, but they are likely to be sensed sometimes in an inchoate manner by the people involved. Symbolic forms of power and prestige, of honour and respect, remain critical in the interaction of cultures. The philosophies behind the politics of hegemony – how to manage virtuous and just societies – have engaged serious thinkers in all civilisations, from the ancient to the modern. The acceptance of diversity, and the just management of interrelations, are often highly controversial matters that have led – and still lead – to tragedies. They turn out to be very different in the experience of the West, and some of the others mentioned above, as compared to the East.

We are now dealing with the most immediate concerns of human rights everywhere. The challenge, as always, is to balance the needs of an orderly and just society with liberty and individual freedoms. The ideal must be to achieve open societies in which ethnic and cultural diversity may enrich the lives and experiences of the citizens.

Therefore, two conclusions follow: first, an open society must have firm political and legal institutions, the rule of law clearly promulgated, and a tradition of tolerance and inclusiveness, all of which will allow ethnic and other divergent groups to feel secure in the body politic. However, while this is necessary, it is not by itself sufficient. A culture of acceptance in interpersonal relations must also be cultivated. Differences and complexity must be allowed to flourish in order to permit the development of a more tolerant state of mind. Furthermore, at the current time, all this must exist in the context of the representative institutions, elections and a free parliament that make modern society possible. These are high hopes, but we cannot deny that the willing acceptance of diversity and the rule of law are the *sine qua non* of the open societies we must build for a more humane future.

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