



16 Identity and Development

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In the post-Cold War world flags count and so do other symbols of cultural identity, including crosses, crescents and even head coverings, because culture counts, and cultural identity is what is most meaningful to most people. People are discovering new but often old identities and marching under new but often old flags which lead to wars with new but often old enemies.

- Samuel P. Huntington, US Foreign Policy Scholar

Introduction

Identity matters for development. The very concept of 'development' is, according to some, integrally tied to having a 'Western' identity. Others argue that the concept of 'development' is part of a process of creating a positive image of 'us' in the West by creating a negative image of 'them' in the rest of the world. Changes in communication and the movement of people are, however, making 'traditional' national identities questionable. Such changes may open up the possibility for breaking down old 'us'/'them' distinctions between 'the West' and 'the rest', but there are other possible outcomes. Such globalisation may become a new form of 'imperialism', further destroying the cultures of previously colonised countries. It may also simply change the way in which the same old 'us'/'them' divisions are seen.

Who are you? What are you?

'Identity' is a central idea in the contemporary world and one that is deceptively complex. On one hand, we all have 'an identity' or a sense of who we are, a sense of how we would answer questions like "Who are you?" or "What are you?" We are all from a country, from a region, we have a sex, a job and a broader set of roles

(daughter, son, father, friend...). While this may seem simple, identity can be complex. Few of these identities have simple meanings and sometimes an identity means different things to different people. Does being English mean being descended from Anglo-Saxons and belonging to the Church of England, for example, or can Muslims whose ancestors came from the Indian sub-continent equally be English? Does one have to be black to be a Zimbabwean or can white people be Zimbabweans too? All of these issues mean identity is a complex concept that needs to be carefully considered.

Our identity may have a number of different layers. We may be Irish at the same time as being European, for example. How we identify ourselves will depend on our situation: an Irish and an English person may see themselves as having different identities if they were to meet in Ireland, but may see themselves as sharing an English-speaking identity were they to meet a French and an Italian person, whereas all four may feel that they share a European identity were they to meet each other while in Iran. Who 'we' are, in such a situation, is always defined by who we are not: being Irish means not being English (and vice versa), being



English-speaking means not being from mainland Europe, while being European or Western means not being from Asia.

Indeed, sometimes, there is a clash between the different layers of our identity or between the way in which we see ourselves and the way in which others see us. If being British means also being European, what does it mean to be a British-Asian, for example? In this way, identity can often be contested and fraught with difficulties. On a large scale, such identity clashes have been central to the growth in, sometimes violent, right-wing political groups in many countries, including the Netherlands, Australia, and Austria, as well as in rioting by the French-born children of immigrants in France in autumn 2005, and in British Muslims becoming involved in terrorist attacks on Israel, France, and in London on 7 July 2005. Apart entirely from such dramatic and terrible examples, however, identity conflicts are felt on a much smaller scale by people everywhere, everyday. Identity is, then, not a totally fixed entity. Although it is largely stable for most people most of the time, it is also something that is open to being revised over time. As the sociologist Richard Jenkins has suggested, identity should not be seen as a stable core of the self, but instead as a process of becoming”.

‘Us’ and ‘Them’

When the idea of ‘development’ began to catch fire in the aftermath of the Second World War, it was seen as meaning bringing the ‘advances’ of a western way of life to ‘underdeveloped’ (that is, non-Western) regions of the world. For many influential (Western) thinkers at that time, the reason the West had industry and democracy was because of what it meant to be a ‘Westerner’. In drawing a contrast between ‘the West’ and ‘the rest’ one prominent sociologist of the time, Talcott Parsons, argued that Western societies were characterised by a number of features:

- **delayed gratification**, which meant people were willing to invest and study today for a reward in the future
- **individualism**, which meant people were willing to look after themselves

“A sense of national identity is based on generalisations and involves a selective and simplified account of a complex history. Much that is important is ignored, disavowed or simply forgotten. Many complicated strands are reduced to a simple tale of essential and enduring national unity, with everything in past history leading inexorably up to a triumphal conclusion. Of course its effectiveness in binding society is no less real because much of it is invented or distorted. Its purpose is not to give an accurate historical account but to enable individuals to position their personal life-stories within the larger, more significant, national story. Identification, not knowledge, is its *raison d’être*. It allows people to identify with something outside, and greater than, personal experience. It binds individuals into a broader interdependence with others in the nation-building project. In consequence, groups or individuals who have no place within the dominant national story find it difficult to understand how they could ever properly belong”

“The young participants stated that they were proud to be Scottish. ‘I want to be Scottish not English. I want to be Scottish and British, but not if people assume that being British means being English’...they also ask a number of pointed questions. Why should it be a problem to be Scottish, born in England, of French nationality and part Indian? Or to be from the north-east of England, although born in Scotland?...”

- Excerpts from *The Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (The Parekh Report)*, 2000.

- **achievement-orientation**, which meant people earned their status rather than having it given to them by virtue of an accident of birth
- **universalism**, which meant that people related to each other in a professional manner

The reason non-Western societies were ‘underdeveloped’, people like Parsons argued, was because they did not share these features that together had helped to generate both industry and democracy in the West. Bringing development, then, involved more than just technical know how, it involved changing the very culture and identity of the people there.

At the heart of this theory is the idea that westerners have industrial development and democracy because their culture is fundamentally better than that of ‘the rest’. This was not a new idea at the time: during the colonial period, colonisers often justified their actions by claiming that they were bringing ‘civilisation’ to primitive or savage people. The British colonial writer Rudyard Kipling summed up this idea in a poem in which he referred to



colonialism as ‘the white man’s burden’ (in the poem he encourages colonialism as being necessary to bring civilisation to the colonised, whom he describes as “your new-caught sullen peoples/ half devil and half child”). This idea was not confined to Kipling but was widespread in colonial societies at the time.

While such ideas were common among western thinkers, those from ‘underdeveloped’ countries challenged them. At the same time as Parsons was developing his ideas, Frantz Fanon, a psychiatrist from the French colony of Martinique, described how images used by colonisers to represent what was primitive or savage were almost always black. Another writer, much influenced by Fanon was Edward Said. Writing almost three decades later, Said argued that one of the basic roles which western attitudes towards colonised countries played was to create a ‘them’ against which the ‘us’ (the West) could be understood. The West was defined by what it was not, he argued: if we depicted ‘them’ as savage, primitive, exotic, poor, helpless, half child and half devil (to use Kipling’s terms) then ‘we’ by opposition were civilised, advanced, wealthy, self-supporting, mature and angelic. Said called this idea ‘Orientalism’, as his interest was largely in the Middle and Far East (‘the Orient’), and he argued that this idea is so foundational to Western societies

that it is built into popular perceptions, into ‘scientific’ and historical studies, into literature and into the actions and beliefs which motivate Western governments and their armies. All these groups, he argues, perpetuate the myth that the Orient is primitive, tribal, exotic, savage, dangerous and therefore exciting but, ultimately, unable to help itself. He identified that this idea did not go out of vogue with colonialism, but instead could be seen in full flower in contemporary Western attitudes, particularly towards Arabs and towards Islam. In this respect, he argued, the very notion of a Western, developed world (an ‘us’) continued to be founded upon Western myths about the nature of people in the rest of the world (the ‘them’).

Said has been criticised for lumping together such huge, diverse regions as ‘the West’ and ‘the Orient’ (something for which Said himself criticises other writers), for failing to distinguish between Westerners who have engaged positively with Asia and those that have not and for seeming to suggest that those who are not Asian should not have an opinion on Asia (while not being afraid to share his own many opinions on ‘the West’). Nonetheless, Said’s ideas remain hugely influential among those who study cultures, and the relationship between different cultures.



Since the 1960s, we have seen the failure of the melting pot ideology. This ideology suggested that different historical, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds could be subordinated to a larger ideology or social amalgam which is "America." This concept obviously did not work, because paradoxically America encourages a politics of contestation.

Since the time of Homer every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric.

An old Pears Soap ad (left) contrasted with the views of Edward Said (above)



Globalisation and Identity

Some have argued, however, that in the contemporary world, old identities are breaking down and we now have the opportunity to create new, more inclusive ones. Such changes are closely linked to a process known as 'globalisation'. The processes of globalisation are political and economic, as well as cultural, however here we focus on cultural changes. These include: technological changes such as developments in computers, information technology and transport, all of which increase the capacity for movement of people (and their culture) from place to place as well as the capacity for people to communicate almost instantly with people all over the globe (See London: The World's Most Diverse City?). Arising from this, an increased capacity for people to access and use different cultural reference points, as can be seen in the growth in world music, in household products with Asian or Latin American designs, and in the growth in alternative therapies such as acupuncture being used alongside western medicine.

This increased access to other cultures means that 'national' cultures, as they are traditionally understood, break down to a certain extent. As such, chicken tikka masala replaces Yorkshire pudding and roast beef as the national dish of England, while jeans and a t-shirt becomes the

uniform of young people worldwide. The increased choices that are brought by such cultural mixing means that people may become freer to make choices about how they see themselves and how they want to be seen by others: in other words, about their identity. As such, under globalisation, people have the freedom to construct their own identities, something that creates the possibility of breaking free from 'Orientalist' ideas and creating a new sense of solidarity between Westerners and non-Westerners.

One factor that is involved in this change is commerce: in the world today, people construct their identities through the conscious purchase of goods. People make statements to themselves and to other people because they buy and use certain brands: I am the 'outdoor type' because I wear Cat boots in my office, I value diversity because I buy t-shirts with 'Benetton' written across the front and I am sporty because my running shoes have a 'swoosh'. Companies know that people do not buy on the basis of quality and value and instead of selling products sell a lifestyle. Disney and McDonalds sell a safe fantasyland for children, Nike sells athleticism, Wrangler sells the Wild West and Benetton sells political correctness. One of the first things one notices about this list of products, however, is that, despite their apparently global reach, this list is heavily reliant on British and

London: The World's Most Diverse City?

"According to the last census, in 2001, 30% of London residents had been born outside England - that's 2.2 million people, to which we can add the unknown tens of thousands who didn't complete a census form. And even this total takes no account of the contribution of the city's second and third-generation immigrants, many of whom have inherited the traditions of their parents and grandparents. Throughout the 1990s, Greater London was the fastest growing part of the UK - and yet the white population in that time actually fell.

"Altogether, more than 300 languages are spoken by the people of London, and the city has at least 50 non-indigenous communities with populations of 10,000 or more. Virtually every race, nation, culture and religion in the world can claim at least a handful of Londoners.

"...New immigrants often find that food is the first thing they miss from back home. Thus a parade of good restaurants - usually on high streets, usually with patriotic signage - is the focus around which most new communities begin to express themselves. This is true all over the world, but the British seem to have a unique affinity for foreign food of every kind - so much so that, like tea, they quickly adopt it as their own. The ersatz exoticism of a chicken tikka masala is unmistakably English, and the ubiquitous doner column, a respectable dinner in Istanbul, reduced to little more than binge fuel in London, now scarcely registers as foreign"

- From 'Every Race, Colour, Nation and Religion on Earth' in *Guardian Unlimited* Friday 21 January 2005.



American (and, to a lesser extent, European) sources. Some suggest, therefore, that we are not seeing a globalisation of culture so much as an extension of English-speaking Western cultures into other cultural realms and the consequent destruction of other cultures. As a recent writer on music suggests:

“...the same dance records as are popular in London and New York can turn up in Sahel villages and Indonesian taxis. This process threatens indigenous forms, usually replacing them with imported, often ‘international’ styles or with ‘modernised’ hybrids...”

The flow is overwhelmingly from rich to poor countries – hence the appearance of the theoretical label ‘cultural imperialism’ to describe it.

The term ‘cultural imperialism’ suggests that local or indigenous images, messages and ways of being are replaced by a more dominant culture – particularly that of the United States. This process is linked to Western domination of the world’s media. It may be that, as a result of being exposed to images and music from the west, people in non-western countries will want to copy western cultures and, as a result, will abandon their own cultures.

Development and Islamic Values

“...as an untarnishable source of values, Islam advocates unity, brotherhood, solidarity, justice, peace, tolerance, equilibrium, order and discipline.

“Moreover, Islam encourages knowledge and all efforts aimed at promoting well-being and social justice. Within Islam, the material and spiritual aspects of life are inseparable. That is how Islam considers justice to be a fundamental principle, which should encompass all aspects of human activity. Islam favours the global approach to the establishment of a society based on social justice by way of full employment (stressing the struggle against poverty), reduction of disparities through an adequate redistribution of wealth, and prohibiting the concentration of wealth and monopolies as well as illicit activities such as appropriation by extortion and usurpation, fraud, corruption, embezzlement of funds and property, hoarding (kenz), waste (tabthir), extravagant spending (israf), miserliness (bukhl) and usury (riba).”

- Source: Abdul Hamid Brahimi in Arab Human Development Report, 2002



Evidence of the internationalisation of culture in Butare, Rwanda





Through whose eyes do we see the world?

A large part of the world's information and entertainment today is controlled by a small group of Western companies. Their reach goes beyond even their direct impact since other media organisations are often dependent on them for pictures to accompany news stories and for programmes to be broadcast. Three of the biggest media companies in the world are the American giants – AOL Time Warner, News Corporation Ltd., and the Walt Disney Company.

AOL Time Warner, owns:

- AOL (America On Line), a web service provider with an estimated 107 million domestic users.
- HBO, a US television channel which broadcasts movies and sporting events and which makes programmes such as *The Sopranos* and *Sex and the City*.
- New Line Cinema, an 'independent' movie production company which made films such as the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.
- Warner Brothers, a movie and television production company which made films such as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, as well as television shows such as *ER*, *Smallville* and *The West Wing*.
- Time Inc., which publishes over 145 magazines worldwide, including *Time Magazine* and which owns IPC Media, who produces magazines read by 70% of the women and 50% of the men in the UK.
- Turner Broadcasting System, which includes CNN News stations, which claims to have two billion 'audience impressions' every day.

News Corporation Ltd., is owned by Robert Murdoch, who was born in Australia but is now a US citizen. Its operations include:

- Television and Movie Companies including 20th Century Fox and Fox Searchlight Pictures, which have made 3 of the top 5 earning movies of all time, including *Star Wars* and *Titanic*. Television programmes produced include *24*, *Prison Break* and *The Simpsons*.
- Television stations such as B SKYB and Fox

Television. These include the news channels Sky News and Fox News.

- News Corporation is the world's leading publisher of English-language Newspapers, with 175 Newspapers including *The Sun*, the *News of the World* and *The Times* in the UK, and the *New York Post* in the US.
- Harper Collins, one of the world's largest book publishers.
- News Corporation also co-owns the Australian National Rugby League (NRL).

Walt Disney Company began as a small animation studio but is now one of the world's largest media conglomerates. Its operations include:

- Movie and Television production companies, such as Miramax and Touchstone which have made movies, such as *Kill Bill*, *Pearl Harbour*, *Shakespeare in Love* and *Sweet Home Alabama*, as well as television programmes such as *Desperate Housewives*, *Lost*, and *Scrubs*.
- Music labels such as Buena Vista Music Group and Walt Disney Records.
- The company owns all or part of a range of television stations including ABC, one of the largest television channels in the US, the ESPN sports network, and Walt Disney Television.
- It also operates companies that deal in publishing, theme parks, and consumer goods.

The argument that we are living through a period of American cultural imperialism went out of vogue in the 1990s for a number of reasons. It was suggested that the impact of American media around the world might be less than people who live in Western, English-speaking countries think. Although CNN claims to have an audience of 2 billion, in reality far fewer people are likely to watch CNN frequently. Instead, local channels or regional channels broadcasting in Spanish, Chinese, Japanese and Arabic will still provide the bulk of television viewing for those that can access a television (itself a limited enough proportion of the world's population). Secondly, even if American programmes were to dominate the televisions of the world, this would not mean that such programmes only portrayed the American way of life as desirable: many American programmes, such as *ER*, portray the US as a habitually violent and drug ravaged society where



people are overworked. This hardly makes American culture seem attractive. Thirdly, television is only one form of cultural production. Other means of communication (such as telephones or the World Wide Web) can be used to communicate both to and from poorer countries. This means cultural exchange is not all one way; poorer countries can project their culture onto the wider world too. Finally but perhaps most importantly, people do not simply absorb messages from the media; they interpret them from their own perspective. For example, while it has been argued that Fox News broadcasts biased accounts of American involvement in the Middle East, this bias may offend or anger people in other parts of the world rather than 'Americanising' their attitudes.

For all these reasons, some still prefer to talk of globalisation rather than American cultural imperialism. While one can readily find American clothing and soft drinks, French wine and Dutch and Irish beers in the heart of central Africa, there is also little doubt, for example, that movies, music and books from Africa, Asia and Latin America are more widely available in the West than would previously have been the case. Some major record retailers devote substantial parts of their shops to 'world music' while western music which incorporates influences from around the world like that of Asian Dub Foundation and Manu Chao, has increased in popularity. Likewise, clothing styles, hairstyles and food from around the world are increasingly available in Western countries.

Whether or not this means that we are moving away from the Orientalist mindset that sees the non-Western world as primitive, poor and helpless remains open to question. Throughout the colonial period Westerners who could afford to do so imported 'exotic' and 'colourful' products from the colonised world (such as tapestries from Asia), without ever necessarily developing a sense of solidarity with the colonised people of Asia. It may be that what is seen as globalisation in the West is little more than big companies once more making a profit through marketing the non-Western world as exciting and exotic, just as happened during colonialism. While there is no doubt that some in the West see such purchases as drawing them closer to the non-Western world, others may simply be engaging in the Orientalist idea that the non-Western world is exciting and exotic because they still think of it as a savage and primitive place populated by people who are 'half devil and half child'.



George IV Royal Pavilion in Brighton

What does Africa mean to us today?

The following excerpt comes from a report on research in Irish schools:

"...many of the children and teachers I interviewed in the course of my research were unable to conceive of the people and countries of the South in any but eurocentric terms, in which poverty dominated their lives and only Western intervention could help them. Senior pupils, when shown photographs of scenes in Tanzania, assumed poverty and helplessness whether the photo justified it or not. So, a surgery where a woman was receiving an injection was assumed to have been the recipient of Western aid; other pupils assumed that the surgery was dirty and that the woman was 'diseased' – in fact she was receiving a

routine injection as part of her ante-natal care. The word 'proper' was used negatively in reference to roads, buildings, clothing, while people dressed in Western clothes were described as 'normal'. Buildings constructed in a traditional way were considered 'shabby' or 'dirty', and no glass meant poverty - there was no recognition of differing climatic needs or architectural practice - and the 'boma' (homestead) of a Masai chief was described as 'a depressing and deprived place'".

From Rosalind Duke 'The Discourse of Development Education', 2003.



A Clash of Civilisations?

One alternative to the 'globalisation' theory that has recently grown in popularity in the last few years is the idea that what we are currently seeing is not so much a period of globalisation as a growing clash between a number of different civilisations. The American Harvard professor, Samuel Huntington, is one of the key proponents of this view. While globalisation theorists tend to see a link between culture and commerce, writers like Huntington tend to see a closer link between culture and politics. In a book called *The Clash of Civilisations and the Remaking of World Order*, published in the mid-1990s, Huntington argued that rather than the emergence of a single global culture (a 'universal civilisation'), what we are in fact seeing is a number of distinctly different civilisations, each of which have different cultures and different sets of political allegiances. These civilisations include 'Western Christianity', Eastern Orthodox (Christianity), Islamic, Chinese, Japanese, Latin American, Hindu and (maybe) African (Huntington isn't sure about Africa). He argues that we are faced with a growing clash between these different civilisations. While those with an interest in development may argue for human rights and democracy for all people, Huntington believes that these ideas cannot be universal, but are instead intrinsic to 'Western Christianity'. He writes:

"The philosophical assumptions, underlying values, social relations, customs and overall outlooks on life differ among civilizations. The revitalization of religion throughout much of the world is reinforcing these cultural differences...[The] major differences in political and economic development among civilisations are clearly rooted in their different cultures. East Asian economic success has its source in East Asian culture, as do the difficulties East Asian societies have had in achieving stable democratic political systems. Islamic culture explains in large part the failure of democracy to emerge in much of the Muslim world."

Those who shared Huntington's worldview felt themselves completely vindicated by the events of September 11, 2001 and by subsequent attacks around the world and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. These events seemed to many to highlight a cultural and religious conflict between those that support 'Western' values and those who do not. In the US, for example, President Bush has frequently

identified that he is engaged in a war against those who 'hate freedom', a group which he has called 'Islamic Fascists'. The term 'crusade' has also been used to describe military operations in the Middle East. Yet there are also many critics of Huntington's perspective. In his worldview huge groups of people who may feel themselves separate are lumped together without any clear examination of the differences between them (Polish, Germans, French and Americans are all lumped together as if there were no differences, while the differences between Sunni and Shi'a Islam are ignored, as are the huge differences between Islamic countries in Arabia, North Africa, the Middle East, East Asia and the Indian sub-continent). Indeed, his insistence that 'the West' be seen as 'Western Christianity' seems to ignore the secularising tendency in much of the West and is, perhaps, linked to the political rise of right-wing Christian groups in the US, which have had close links to Presidents Bush and Reagan. Secondly, his assertion that ideas like justice, democracy and human rights are only associated with 'Western Christianity' is very questionable.

On a more fundamental level, Huntington seems to be harking back the 'development' theories of the 1950s without having really learned anything from the discussions that have happened over the last half a century. Perhaps the most notable thing about Huntington's book, is that its popularity in terms of sales and with Western political leaders, suggests that the Orientalist mindset is alive, well, and wreaking havoc in the world today.

George Bush on the Clash of Civilisations

"The course of this conflict is not known, yet its outcome is certain. Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them...Fellow citizens, we'll meet violence with patient justice – assured of the rightness of our cause, and confident of the victories to come. In all that lies before us, may God grant us wisdom, and may He watch over the United States of America."



Samuel Huntington on the Clash of Civilisations

“...the most violent fault lines are between Islam and its Orthodox, Hindu, African and Western Christian neighbours. At the macro level, the dominant division is between “the West and the rest”, with the most intense conflicts occurring between Muslim and Asian societies on one hand, and the West on the other.”

- *The Clash of Civilisations and the Making of the New World Order*

Edward Said on Huntington

“Huntington is an ideologist, someone who wants to make ‘civilizations’ and ‘identities’ into what they are not: shut-down, sealed-off entities that have been purged of the myriad currents and countercurrents that animate human history, and that over centuries have made it possible for that history not only to contain wars of religion and imperial conquest but also to be one of exchange, cross-fertilization and sharing. This far less visible history is ignored in the rush to highlight the ludicrously compressed and constricted warfare that ‘the clash of civilizations’ argues is the reality.”

- Edward Said, ‘The Clash of Ignorance’ from *The Nation* October 22, 2001.

Conclusion

Identity matters for development. For some in the West, the notion of development has been tied inexorably to a Western identity, and the idea that the rest is, by definition, inferior, savage or primitive, not only affects the way we think about the rest of the world, but also the way in which we think about ourselves. Globalisation may create opportunities to question old divisions between ‘us’ and ‘them’, but it also allows these old divisions to be rekindled in new and dangerous ways. For all of us, wherever we live, our struggle for human development must, therefore, be a struggle with our own identity.

Readings

- Samuel Huntington (1996) *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, Simon & Schuster
- Edward Said (1995) *Orientalism*, New York, Penguin
- Keith Jenkins (1997) *The Postmodern History Reader*, London, Routledge

Stigma and discrimination in practice

1	Giving people different cups, spoons and plates to eat from	
2	Keeping a family member who is sick hidden away because they are ashamed of what others may think	
3	Avoiding or rejecting a friend or family member	
4	Stopping an employee from going for training or getting benefits	
5	Forcing an employee to go for an HIV test	
6	Dismissing or retrenching an employee because of their HIV status	
7	Isolating a member of your community and not allowing them to use village resources like water	

Extract from: Positive Living Handbook, 2005, Lusaka, Afya Misuri.