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## Global Multiculture, Flexible Acculturation

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**ABSTRACT** *This article develops two propositions: multiculturalism has gone global and identification has become flexible. Multiculturalism is a global arena, yet most treatments still conceive of multiculturalism as a national arena. In contemporary global multiculture far-off conflicts become part of multiculturalism arenas; this is illustrated with a discussion of two multicultural conflicts, the Danish cartoon episode and the murder of Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam. Muslim women's headscarves from Istanbul and Cairo to Tehran and Lyon display a wide register of meanings, but in the French national assembly have been signified in just one. Multiculturalism means global engagement and to engage with the world is to engage with its conflicts. Multiculturalism is not no man's land. Multiculturalism is not consensus. There is no consensus in Britain about the war in Iraq and there is none among immigrants either. The securitization of cultural difference confirms the interplay between global and multicultural frictions. Multiculturalism is one of the faces of globalization and globalization, at its Sunday best, is human history conscious of itself, which by the way is not always nice. Contemporary global multiculture represents a new phase of globalization.*

### Introduction

Multiculture, said critics, is only different wallpaper and a wider choice in restaurants. But the Danish cartoon episode, the murder of Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam, 7/7 in London and the car burnings in the French *banlieues* show that more is at stake. Multiculture is a global arena. Yet most treatments still conceive of multiculturalism as a national arena. Muslim women's headscarves from Istanbul and Cairo to Tehran and Lyon display a wide register of meanings, but in the French national assembly have been signified in just one. Multiculturalism means global engagement. To engage with the world is to engage with its conflicts. Multiculturalism is not no man's land. Multiculturalism is not consensus. There is no consensus in Britain

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about the war in Iraq and there is none among immigrants either. The ‘securitization’ of cultural difference confirms the interplay between global and multicultural frictions. Multiculturalism is one of the faces of globalization and globalization, at its Sunday best, is human history conscious of itself, which by the way is not always nice.

Multiculturalism in contemporary accelerated globalization is profoundly different from the past. In the past migrants chose between two environments that were often radically different, now communication and travel back and forth is relatively ordinary. In the past migrants had to choose between two overall monocultural settings, now they navigate between two or more multicultural environments. Indians resident in the US can tune in to Indian TV news, alternate with an American show and tune back to Indian satellite programs, while in India foreign broadcasts are more widely available. Immigrant neighborhoods in Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden are fields of satellite dishes. Many Turks abroad lead multicultural lives, tuned to Turkish, German and other European broadcasts. They follow Turkish news, music and shows and choose between Hollywood, Bollywood or Cairo films. Jet travel has made vacations in the home country easier for migrant workers and their families. Retiring and buying a home in the country of origin is now more frequent. Migrant remittances are major revenue flows for the Philippines, Mexico, Pakistan, India, etc. Irish and Scottish politicians canvas expatriates overseas and Mexican politicians campaign among Mexicans living in the US. Transnational relations are no longer simply two-way between country of origin and migration but run across diasporic settlements in multiple continents. Gujarati Indians are continually in touch with family members in the UK, US, Canada, Australia and compare notes about where it is best and most advantageous to study, start a business, find a companion, or enjoy a vacation. Diasporas are linked transnationally and intercontinentally like pearls on a string. Meanwhile in the setting of neoliberal globalization, overall economic inequality is increasing and multiculturalism carries a heavier burden.

Multiculturalism has gone global over time and at a rapid pace particularly since information and communication technology (ICT) and cheaper air travel in the 1990s. Just as ICT revolutionized production (flexible accumulation, offshoring, outsourcing), finance (24/7 global reach), firms (decentralization), it revolutionizes migration and multiculturalism. Migrants can now work in one space and culturally inhabit another. A consequence is that, as Michael Storper (2001) notes, in contemporary globalization the differences *between* localities have lessened and the variety *within* localities has increased.

The nation state is no longer the ‘container’ of multiculturalism. Yet the multiculturalism literature remains overwhelmingly focused on the relationship between migrants and the host country and national policy options. This is unrealistic. It overlooks that for migrants and their offspring the conversation with the host nation is one among several, a conversation in which participation is optional and partial. The cultural ambience of the host nation is no longer encompassing; e-media tune to many worlds. Second, it underplays the dynamics of the host country—assimilation into what? The ‘nation’ is a series of vortices of change—local, regional, national, macro-regional, transnational. Asian Muslims in the UK function locally in their workplaces, neighborhoods and cities, regionally, in Yorkshire, etc., nationally, in the context of British policies and culture, move within the European Union on British passports, and relate to their country of origin’s culture and transnational Islam or Hinduism. Third, this overlooks the role of rainbow conversations and economies across cultures—such as South African Malays studying Islam in Karachi; Turks selling Belgian carpets to Moroccans in the Netherlands (Nederveen Pieterse, 2003). Fourth, it ignores the emergence of intermediary formations such as ‘Euro-Islam’ (‘a hybrid that attempts to reconcile the principles laid out in

the Koran with life in a secular, democratic Europe'; Simons, 2005a), which is neither national nor belongs to another civilization.

Multiculture is global too because several diasporas outnumber the nations. The 73 million people of Irish descent worldwide dwarf the 4 million living in the Irish republic; out of almost 15 million Jewish people worldwide about 5 million live in Israel and similar equations apply to Greeks, Lebanese and Armenians. Multiethnicity exists worldwide and multiculturalism discourse and policy is spreading widely.

Postnationalism may be exaggerated shorthand but surely the national center and space hold much less than they did in the past. Multiculturalism debates suffer from methodological and policy nationalism. Most discussions of multiculturalism are too preoccupied with questions of national policy to cope with issues of multiculturalism that spill over boundaries. The 7/7 bombings in London and the threats of August 2006 created a culture shock (the attackers grew up as British lads) that debate on multiculturalism has not been able to address adequately. It does not work to revisit the customary policy choice of integration or assimilation (Modood, 2005). Global multiculture makes for a complex field that includes engagement with global conflict.

Nations and cultures are no longer 360 degree environments. Conversely this means that Danish cartoons are also seen in Islamabad and Cairo, Illinois and Sarajevo. A joke made by a German commentator is also heard in Istanbul. A speech by President George W. Bush to veterans in Cincinnati plays the following day in Baghdad and on Al Manar TV.

Discussions of globalization and culture are dominated by shorthand such as McDonaldisation and the clash of civilizations, which are ideological shortcuts rather than analytics. Second, the approach in terms of general norms—freedom of speech, democracy, human rights—without contextual fine print risks becoming part of institutionalized hypocrisy.

### **Multiculturalist Conflicts**

Some cases may illustrate contemporary dynamics—the Danish cartoons mocking Islam and the murder of Theo van Gogh in the Netherlands. I give brief outlines because the cases have been widely covered in international media and detailed information is readily available.

The Danish cartoons originated in a contest for cartoons mocking Islam issued by one of the country's leading morning newspapers, *Jyllands-Posten*. Twelve cartoons were published on 30 September 2005 alongside this editorial note:

The modern, secular society is rejected by some Muslims. They demand a special position, insisting on special consideration of their own religious feelings. It is incompatible with contemporary democracy and freedom of speech, where you must be ready to put up with insults, mockery and ridicule. It is certainly not always attractive and nice to look at, and it does not mean that religious feelings should be made fun of at any price, but that is of minor importance in the present context. . . . we are on our way to a slippery slope where no-one can tell how the self-censorship will end. That is why *Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten* has invited members of the Danish editorial cartoonists union to draw Muhammad as they see him.<sup>1</sup>

The idea of a cartoon competition came from the newspaper's cultural editor, Flemming Rose. A year earlier he traveled to Philadelphia to visit Daniel Pipes and wrote a positive article about him (Rose, 2004; cf. Bollyn, 2006; Rose, 2006). Daniel Pipes, a fervent neoconservative Zionist who compares militant Islam with fascism (the familiar 'Islamic fascism' idea) and sees total Israeli military victory as the only path to Middle East peace (Pipes, 2001), had been involved in the Danish multiculturalism debate since 2002 when he launched a virulent attack on Muslim immigrants in a newspaper article co-authored with a rightwing Danish journalist and historian

(Pipes and Hedegaard, 2002).<sup>2</sup> The article sparked a debate on multiculturalism with Danish parliamentarians. By writing about Pipes in 2004 Flemming Rose revisited an attack on Muslims in Denmark that had been in motion for years. This suggests that from their conception the inflammatory cartoons were part of a transnational arena and reflect an elective affinity with American neoconservative agendas. The way they are framed, using free speech as an intercultural wedge issue, suggests that this is not a happy time to be Muslim in Denmark. The idea of sparking tensions with the Islamic world is not far below the surface.

In October Islamic ambassadors sought a meeting with the Danish prime minister, which he declined. In November and December imams from Denmark took the cartoons to meetings with Muslim leaders in the Middle East and the Islamic Organization Conference. Meanwhile the cartoons were being reprinted in 50 countries. What ensued was an orchestrated response of anti-Danish demonstrations and boycotts across virtually the whole Islamic world in early 2006. Thus, a multicultural tussle sparked an almost worldwide conflagration. The fine print, however, indicates that from the outset it was designed to provoke Muslims, to manufacture a 'clash of civilizations' around an artificial arena: free speech versus Muslim rage: 'the exercise was no more benign than commissioning caricatures of African-Americans would have been during the 1960's civil rights struggle' (Smith, 2006). A deliberate provocation met with an organized response. This is multiculturalism as a transnational arena. Discussing this under the heading of the dos and don'ts, pros and cons of free speech is beside the point, or rather frames the issue in the way the provocation sought to achieve. No one now claims that painting swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans is a matter of free speech. They are hate speech and gestures of ethnic cleansing. The cartoons reflect a similar outlook. As Simon Jenkins (2006) notes, 'Speech is free only on a mountain top; all else is editing'.

Until recently Denmark was an exemplary progressive and strongly pro-welfare Nordic country. In the 1990s an anti-tax party had not succeeded in winning votes. An alternative is to keep the social contract but to limit entry by appealing to what Habermas calls the 'chauvinism of prosperity'. Using this ladder, rightwing parties have climbed to power by mobilizing anti-immigrant sentiment. Similar frictions run through many European countries—slow growth and welfare states under pressure from neoliberal constituencies who frame globalization in terms of competition. Rightwing parties have used anti-immigrant sentiment in Austria, Belgium, France, the Netherlands and Italy, usually to limited or temporary effect. With the passing of communism, Europe's rightwing parties also face an 'enemy deficit'. This entails various strands of chauvinism—to advance party interests (Haider's FPÖ in Austria, the Front National in France, Vlaams Belang in Flanders, Fortuyn's Leefbaar Nederland), to advance regional interests (Lega Nord in Italy) or to bring a rightwing coalition to power and move economic agendas to the right (Berlusconi's coalition in Italy; the Democratic Liberal Party (DLP) and Japanese nationalism).

In November 2004 the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh was murdered in Amsterdam while riding his bike to work in the morning. In August his latest film was shown on national television, 'Submission Part I', an 11 minute film that featured semi-naked young women with Arabic Koran texts written on their bare bodies, seen through transparent veils, tokens of their submission to Islam. A play on words because Islam means 'submission'. On his talk show on Amsterdam TV Van Gogh referred to Muslims as 'goat f\_\_\_\_\_'. Van Gogh was stabbed to death by a 26 year old Dutch-born Muslim of Moroccan immigrant parents, Mohammed Bouyeri, who left a five page letter on the body threatening Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and was arrested within hours. A Somali-born woman, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, conceived and co-wrote the film. As a Labor Party policy adviser she had been outspoken for years, described herself

as a 'lapsed Muslim' and declared Islam a 'backward religion' and Mohammed 'a pervert and tyrant'. She advised the party policy unit to close all 41 Islamic schools, put a brake on immigration and change article 23 in the Dutch constitution that establishes the rights for setting up separate schools and institutions—a central pillar of the Dutch system and a foundation of multicultural orthodoxy since the 1960s. The party rejected these extreme recommendations. In the wake of 9/11 she published articles arguing that Islam is not capable of integrating into Dutch society. In 2002 she stood as a member of parliament for the free market Liberal Party (VVD) and was elected.

Émigrés who act as cultural mediators, conservatives and progressives, are often granted a privileged status of authenticity. Among the former is V. S. Naipaul, the source of 'Naipaulitis' as shorthand for the émigré from the global South who looks through metropolitan eyes. Among the latter is Edward Said who as a public intellectual consistently spoke up for the South without condescension (Brennan, 1989, 2006). As a character in the multiculturalism drama, Hirsi Ali is closer to Salman Rushdie, a renegade bicultural insider who is taken to speak for 'others'. Some Muslims in the Netherlands accuse her of 'pandering to the Dutch' and many Dutch people tire of her hijacking emancipation agendas for populist polarizing.

The political setting is welfare cuts, health care privatization, 'pension tension', state crack-downs on illegal immigrants and immigrant youth delinquency, restrictive drugs policies and a difficult discussion on multiculturalism that argues that it has failed, largely because of the immigrants' failure to integrate. Pim Fortuyn used anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim sentiment to garner votes: 'There is a tension between the values of modern society and the principles of Islam', 'As far as I'm concerned, no Muslim will ever come in' (Kolbert, 2002, pp. 112, 108). He also took position against Turkey becoming a member of the EU. These figures—Fortuyn ('the right to freely talk crap'), van Gogh ('the Jerry Springer of Dutch social-political discourse'), Hirsi Ali ('no ruckus, no debate')—were (are), in popular parlance, 'attention getters', loud, in your face.<sup>3</sup> Fortuyn, at a time when his political fortunes were rising rapidly, was assassinated by a young animal rights activist; van Gogh was killed by a Muslim of Moroccan descent; Hirsi Ali continued as MP under police protection and left the Netherlands in 2006 to join the neoconservative American Enterprise Institute in Washington DC. Wilders, a rightwing MP and would-be successor to Fortuyn, also known for his anti-Muslim pronouncements, is under police protection too. Ideological murders and MPs under police protection are unprecedented in the Netherlands. In 2006 Hirsi Ali's denaturalization (she lost her passport and status as MP) and then re-naturalization led to the fall of the Dutch government and early elections. Through this episode her influence was reassessed in the media (e.g. Koopmans and Vliegthart, 2006; Kuper, 2006).

There are further twists to the situation. For years Van Gogh's killer had been an exemplar of integration in Dutch society: employed in a neighborhood youth center, active in local Amsterdam politics, but then he had a falling out with his employers, became alienated and joined Muslim militants. A television documentary gave (unconfirmed) indications that he had been a Dutch intelligence service (AIVD) plant in militant Muslim youth circles, but the service lost control.<sup>4</sup> In the municipal elections of March 2006 the government coalition parties and the Fortuyn-type parties suffered a massive defeat in a landslide swing toward leftwing parties, in large measure due to immigrants voting *en masse* against the anti-immigrant bias of the governing coalition. This is a different kind of multiculturalism backlash.<sup>5</sup> The immigrant vote counts increasingly also in the US, Canada and the UK.

In both episodes in Denmark and the Netherlands, conflict was sparked by deliberate provocations: symbolic violence begat violence. In both episodes the conflicts were about the

character of the public sphere, a central arena of multiculturalism. In both cases appeals were made on behalf of ‘western values’ (free speech, modernity) and involved a politics of tension targeting Islam or Islamism, but in effect marginal immigrants. It seems inappropriate to discuss this in normative terms of free speech or blasphemy; it should be addressed first in political terms: *cui bono*, who benefits from fomenting strife between Muslims and Denmark or Europe? In both cases the target is Islam and the backdrop to these multiculturalist skirmishes is heightened tension in relation to the Middle East. It is appropriate to consider the link between Islam and global multiculturalism.

The Middle East has long been an arena of geopolitical conflict. Consider the configuration that Tim Mitchell (2002) calls ‘McJihad’ and Fatima Mernissi (2003) refers to as ‘palace fundamentalism’: the relationship between western oil companies, the US government, arms sales, the Saudi royal family, wahhabite clergy, and the transnational network of conservative Islam. The nucleus of this configuration goes back to well before World War Two. The conservative Muslim network, sustained by a steady flow of oil dollars, was mobilized in the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan and by Israel and other governments as counterweights to leftwing forces. In significant measure the conservative Islamic network is a western creation, codependent with modern capitalism, a holdover of anti-communism, and now a source of blowback (Johnson, 2000). What Samuel Huntington calls a clash of civilizations is no clash of civilizations at all but the political ramifications of political interventions in the Middle East going back for over half a century. Political tensions have escalated particularly since 9/11, the war on terror, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, pressure on Syria and Iran, American expansion in Central Asia with a view to the Caspian basin, and lasting stalemate in Palestine. Conflicts in Bosnia, Chechnya and Kashmir, while not necessarily directly related to wider fault lines, add to the general conflagration involving Islam.

Part of the Middle East stalemate is double-dealing on the part of the United States and other western powers. American support for autocracies and double standards in dealing with Israel continue to alienate and radicalize people in the region. Since political avenues other than Islam are generally closed off, Islam is a major avenue of political articulation. The US claims to seek accommodation in the region through cooperation with moderate governments and moderate Islam by promoting democracy; however its policies (unconditional support for Israel, detention without trial, Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo) alienate the very moderates it claims it wants to cultivate. Since Middle East policies are not under discussion in the US the situation is addressed through ideological repackaging and public diplomacy (Steger, 2005). This targets Islamism as part of a discourse that places Islam on the outskirts of modernity—along the lines of Bernard Lewis, Fouad Ajami, Daniel Pipes, Thomas Friedman, Bassam Tibi, usually in binarisms (tradition–modernity, conservative–progressive, pro–anti-western, etc.). It is difficult to level this diagnosis with the region’s decades of global economic integration via the oil industry and decades of political integration under American tutelage, facing Israeli expansion and on the receiving end of the largest arms sales to any part of the world.

How does this affect global multiculturalism? Recent American policies escalate tensions that reverberate in every circuit. The ongoing stalemate and frustrations felt in the region, the expanding confrontations with the Islamic world, and the diplomacy of bullying have wide ripple effects.

Consider a news item such as this: ‘The Bush administration . . . proposed Wednesday to spend \$85 million to promote political change inside Iran by subsidizing dissident groups, unions, student fellowships and television and radio broadcasts’. According to secretary of state Rice, ‘We will use this money to develop support networks for Iranian reformers, political

dissidents and human rights activists' (Weisman, 2006). The policy will probably make progressive ideas in Iran suspect and will bolster hardliners, as have past policies such as declaring Iran part of the axis of evil. If hegemonic power strides across borders and adopts regime change from within as policy, then why should migrants be required to integrate in national society rather than integrating, likewise, along cross-border lines?

### **Flexible Acculturation**

Cultural difference as a marker, frontier, vocabulary, vortex, arena of conflict is as old as the hills. Multiculturalism as a manifestation of contemporary globalization is a sequel to multiethnicity, which is as old as the Stone Age when hunter-gatherers, cultivators and pastoralists cohabited and mingled. What is now different by degree is that not just local, domestic differences matter but conflicts that originate elsewhere are also fought out in the arenas of multiculturalism. Different by degree: in the religious wars of sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe translocal differences counted locally too. Contemporary times have been characterized, from a European viewpoint, as neo-medieval in that they show a similar overlap of jurisdictions and loyalties as in the middle ages (Kobrin, 1998). In hindsight the sovereign nation-state era might well appear as an anomalous historical interlude. The idea of nations as insular containers—with a national economy, national market, national firms, national bourgeoisie, national character, national culture, national politics—may seem an interval in a much longer and now resumed experience of cross-border flows that occupy center stage. Historically the translation of cross-border conflicts into local disputes is quite ordinary. In this sense contemporary global multiculturalism is historically normal, more normal than the inward-looking nation-state epoch.

Flexible acculturation is as old as the phenomenon of subcultures that offer variable acculturation, as old as the situation imagined in the song 'By the rivers of Babylon . . . we remembered Zion'. What is new is the *scope and degree* of multi-circuit identification. During Nazism in the 1930s some emigrated from Germany while others opted for 'inner migration', taking their thoughts and hopes to imaginary realms. In the US many blacks live on the other side of the tracks in poor housing and receive substandard education and services but participate in alternative circuits—churches, music circuits of blues and hip hop, the sports world in which their stars shine, the Black Entertainment channel, circuits of drugs and crime. These circuits offer belonging, recognition and a sense of feeling at home. Globalization amplifies the sources of the self (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004a) and flexible acculturation is one of the forms this takes. It is cultural agency and picking and choosing cultural affiliation in the setting of global culture.

Asian Muslims in English cities, North African *beurs* in French banlieues and many other migrants and their offspring share experiences of social exclusion and are increasingly ghettoized. 'Asian communities living in several UK cities face social isolation as severe as that experienced in the black ghettos of divided American cities like Chicago and Miami' (Adam, 2005). UK cities are rising in the world rankings of segregation. 'The idea was that people would assimilate. The danger is that the assimilation process is so slow that for many it is just not possible' (Draper, 2005).

Exclusion in many instances is not occasional but institutionalized. In France *le crise des banlieues* is grounded in urban planning policies that privileged modern high rises à la Le Corbusier, like the high rises in south Chicago and the Bijlmer in Amsterdam Southeast, which combined gigantism and uniformity; city governments in Amsterdam and Rotterdam have razed these housing complexes (Caldwell, 2005b).<sup>6</sup> According to a different view the issue is not the architecture or the housing but the location.<sup>7</sup>



It is not occasional also because multiculturalism often combines with institutionalized amnesia and the refusal to view the country's colonial past in other than a benevolent light. This is a factor notably in France, Belgium, Japan and to a lesser extent the UK. According to article four of a law passed on 23 February 2005,

it is now compulsory in France to emphasise the positive dimension of the French colonial era in high school history courses and textbooks. When the Socialist party tried to overturn this controversial law recently, it was defeated in the National Assembly by a conservative majority that may have moved further to the right as a result of the recent violence. (Moisi, 2005)

Dominique Moisi comments,

By imposing political correctness on the teaching of the past, the National Assembly has committed more than a crime. It has made a crucial error. If one of the big challenges confronting France in the global age is that of integrating its minorities, then the imposition of a unilateral reading of history on all French people whatever their origins is not only anachronistic but offensive. Refusal to come to terms with the French imperial past and the Algerian war combines with reluctance to view Algerian immigrants as permanent residents and citizens. (Moisi, 2005)

The French law banning overt religious signs in schools, directed at the wearing of the hijab, fits the same pattern of integration of minorities in terms set by the French elite, in other words monocultural multiculturalism (Vidal, 2004, p. 4; Wieviorka, 2004a). 'France is a multicultural society par excellence still living the Jacobin dream of uniformity' (Wallerstein, 2005).

Exclusion is not occasional also because multiculturalism is under multiple pressures: competitive globalization translates into pressure on welfare states and in view of the securitization of migration (discussed below) immigrants face increasing demands to conform and decreasing resources and incentives to integrate. The welfare state is shrinking precisely when demand for welfare services is expanding. Third, rightwing forces focus on migrants as a soft target and in several countries the political center has moved to the right on multiculturalism.

Global multiculturalism provides multiple circuits of identification and integration that can make up for social exclusion at least symbolically. Alternative circuits are appealing when mainstream circuits are alienating; in social psychology this two-way traffic is termed interactive acculturation (Bourhis *et al.*, 1997). It takes two to tango: the wider the gap between multiculturalist rhetoric and actual socioeconomic integration the greater the appeal of alternative and symbolic spaces of identification; that seems to be the basic geometry of flexible acculturation. In France, 'the immigrant origin populations turn to Islam, not only out of fidelity to the values and religion of their parents but also because it gives meaning to an existence in a society which tends to despise them, to discredit them or to exclude them . . . Here, religion is part of an endeavour to participate in modernity rather than to exclude oneself from it' (Wieviorka, 2004b, p. 284). This may refer to an alternative modernity. Multi-circuit multiculturalism includes tea houses, cyberspace, mosques, 'Muslim by day, disco at night' (Nederveen Pieterse, 1997). Beur youths synchronized their riot actions across Paris quarters and other cities via websites and mobile phones. The easy media terminology of 'riots' underplays their degree of coordination and organization.

For many migrants at the bottom rungs of social experience, multiculturalism is a bogus exercise, a regime of platitudes, a tedious 'race relations industry' that mainly benefits a small elite. The reality of multiculturalism on the ground is often a furnace of discontent where grinding anger results in inner migration into imaginary worlds of cyberspace, subcultures of gangs and petty crime, or desire to strike back and affiliate with hostile forces. This is part of what looms behind the 7/7 and August 2006 episodes in the UK: a backlash against bogus

multiculturalism and alienation felt by Muslim youth in UK ghettos and a response to the belligerent policies of the US and UK in the Middle East, Palestine and Iraq. The appeal of militant Islam is a matter of pull and push. It reflects the nature of conflict in the age of accelerated globalization—conflict is discursive, unfolds through representations, is channeled via media, crosses borders with the speed of light, is no longer spatially sequestered, is subject to multiple interpretations and evokes a wide variety of agency.

A standard response before and after the crisis and a response to 7/7 and the car burnings in France was to blame the victims of social exclusion for their lack of integration. Also in response to 9/11 few bothered to mention the role of American policies in the Middle East. Collective self-reflection is in short supply. At a deeper level this indicates the degree to which power-with-impunity and hypocrisy have been institutionalized.

The structural features that underlie global multiculture and flexible acculturation match those that Robert Cooper, Blair's foreign policy adviser, calls the postmodern state, pertaining in the EU: the fuzzy boundary between domestic and foreign affairs, mutual interference in domestic affairs and mutual surveillance, security based on interdependence and mutual vulnerability (Cooper, 2000; Peters, 2005, p. 110). (In contrast, the US state is characterized by 'defensive modernism'.)

The growing role of 'intermestic' (international-domestic) affairs is a general trend. Global multiculture means engagement with conflicts worldwide. If societies are engaged globally it means that conflicts travel too. Conflicts cannot be contained locally. Multiculturalism and foreign policy cannot be treated separately. This has been part of global experience since the expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal and part of recent European experience for instance in the Kurdish presence in Germany and Sweden. Lines drawn in multiculturalism are often drawn globally, for instance the French foulard affair: 'the French debate has become "global." It has developed both locally and well beyond France, and has considerable diplomatic and geopolitical implications' (Wieviorka, 2004a, p. 72). It reverberates from Turkey to North Africa.

Conflicts in Somalia over the status of women are part of an animal husbanding society and a trading society on the coast, in the throes of change. Folk Islam mixed with patriarchy and neo-patriarchy is party to this change. Dutch society with Somali immigrants also becomes party to this change.

Multiple circuits of integration also mean multi-circuit blowback. The Danish PM not meeting with Muslim ambassadors might score domestic points but loses points in *umma* politics. Koizumi's annual visits to the Yasukuni shrine score with the Japanese right but shrink Japan's standing in the region. President George W. Bush's speeches assuring American audiences that Iraq is on the right track come across differently on Al Jazeera and in living rooms in Basra and Baghdad. The old compartmentalization of audiences and circuits is no more. Multi-circuit multiculturalism is a consequence of what Walt Anderson (1999) calls 'communities in a world of open systems'.

Globalization amplifies the sources of the self and opens multiple organizational avenues, which is not particular to multiculturalism but a general condition. The Zapatistas mobilized in Chiapas and took their cause of democracy and dignity to the nation via savvy media skills and to the world via the internet and international *encuentros* against neoliberalism. Mobile phones played a key part in 'people power' in the Philippines and Thailand, coordinating street action and bypassing mainstream media.

Migrant mobility and connectivity are variable and reflect class and migration history. The Indian diaspora is overall more prosperous and mobile than Pakistani migrants. By comparison

to Moroccans, Turks in Europe come from more urban backgrounds (many migrated to urban centers in Turkey before migrating abroad) and have more entrepreneurial experience, and the Turkish economy and diaspora provide greater economic depth.

The account of contemporary globalization as the ‘annihilation of distance’ (the death of distance, end of geography, etc.) is shallow. What matters is social distance, mediated by cultural affinity. So what is at issue is the arbitrage of distance: distance or exclusion in one circuit is compensated for by integration in another, though not in a linear fashion. Nor are the circuits comparable in the goods they provide. They refer to different sectors—economic, social, cultural, cyberspace, symbolic—and provide diverse benefits.

*Flexible accumulation* deploys flexible methods (production, product features, location, labor conditions) towards a single purpose (accumulation). *Flexible acculturation* deploys flexible methods (switching and mixing cultural vocabularies and alternating circuits of affiliation) towards the general aim of belonging and being at home in the world. A parallel notion is Aihwa Ong’s flexible citizenship.

I use the term *flexible citizenship* to refer especially to the strategies and effects of mobile managers, technocrats and professionals who seek to both circumvent *and* benefit from different nation-state regimes by selecting different sites for investments, work and family relocation . . . They readily submit to the governmentality of capital, while plotting all the while to escape state discipline. (1998, pp. 136, 156–157; and see 1999).

This perspective differs from global multiculturalism in that the focus is on the Chinese diaspora, mainly on the Pacific Rim, and on elites (many are ‘well-heeled Hong Kongers’) and their strategies of capitalist opportunism. Global multiculturalism includes elites but consists mostly of poor and less privileged migrants; it includes diasporas with long histories but also many recent migration chains; it includes economic opportunism but also a wider spectrum of interests. So while Ong’s flexible citizenship also refers to diverse cultural politics, its ambit is narrower than flexible acculturation in global multiculturalism. Another instance of flexibility—spatial, economic, cultural, legal—is Xiangming Chen’s work on de-bordering and re-bordering in East Asia’s border regions and their ‘local cosmopolitanism’ (Chen, 2005, p. 40).

Flexible acculturation is multidirectional and exercised by migrants, authorities and other actors. Politicians and governments switch and alternate discourses and policies they apply to migrants and citizens of immigrant origin. Multiculturalism is one register; security and socio-economics are others, including the political economy of the welfare state. As Ong (1998, p. 136) notes, ‘nation-states are reworking immigration law to attract capital-bearing subjects while limiting the entry of unskilled labor’. Canada, the US, UK and Australia adopt a ‘give us your best and your brightest’ brain-drain policy that operates as a tax on poor nations, or foreign aid in reverse (Kapur and McHale, 2005).

A major trend is to reframe migration in security terms. In Europe this goes back to ‘Fortress Europe’ measures that differentiate between member state and third country nationals and sought to bring migration under control: the Schengen accord, the 1992 European Union Treaty and the Treaty of Amsterdam that brought immigration, asylum and refugee matters under one heading (Waeber, 1996). By securitizing issues political elites make these issues ‘trump normal democratic processes of debate and negotiation’ and trump justice ‘since national security takes precedence over justice, and since disloyal minorities have no legitimate claims anyway’ (Kymlicka, 2004, p. 157).

The securitization of migration received a boost since 9/11. The United States applied massive security measures, curtailing civil liberties, tightening visa requirements,

eavesdropping, rendition and detentions in Guantánamo, Bagram Airbase as part of the generalized preoccupation with terrorism. According to former national security adviser Richard Clarke (2005), 7/7 shows the United States the way: 'The British experience this summer has lessons for us about finding terrorist sleeper cells'. It involves 'infiltrating undercover agents into the population from which sleepers are recruited' and seeking 'the cooperation of the American Muslim community in identifying possible problem groups and individuals'. European governments participate in the surveillance and security discourse and practices. In Europe 'minority nationalism only becomes securitized when it involves terrorism' (Kymlicka, 2004, p. 159), but the definition of terrorism has widened.

Global multiculture exemplifies how technological and political changes affect the logics of globalization and conflict. Borders are not what they used to be, the state no longer holds the monopoly of the means of violence, technological changes enable the 'democratization' of lethal weapons (warlords, crime syndicates, gangs) and arenas cross territorial boundaries (cf. Nederveen Pieterse, 2004b, ch. 6). Gangs from East LA repatriate to El Salvador and move back again to operate in Louisiana.

Multiculturalism is inherently linked to inequality in the world, as an articulation of global inequality. Most migration is labor migration. Without steep inequalities people would not move as much. Secondly, the same processes that reinforce overall global inequality make conditions in many multicultural societies harder. For the world majority neoliberal globalization creates a world that is harder to live in back home and in the metropolises. Welfare cutbacks make it harder to get by in multicultural societies while scarce jobs, rising income inequality, reduced state spending and the privatization of utilities in low-income countries make it harder to get by there as well. All-round Wal-Mart capitalism does not offer a benevolent script. This is the dark sea underneath migration and multiculturalism. Multiculturalism going global affords migrants the opportunity to compare notes on economic dynamics in motion. Global poverty is part of bogus multiculturalism backlash. But it is not appropriate to reduce the current tensions to economic deprivation. The imposition of reckless power politics astride the world unleashes pent up tensions. A further element in the mix is the democratization of the means of violence.

There is now a strange disjuncture between general abstract principles and real time applications. In March 2006 a group of writers issued a statement warning that Islamism is a form of totalitarianism which is now the world's main danger: 'After having overcome fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism, the world now faces a new global threat: Islamism . . . We, writers, journalists, intellectuals, call for resistance to religious totalitarianism and for the promotion of freedom, equal opportunity and secular values for all.'<sup>8</sup> The writers include Salman Rushdie, Christopher Hitchens, exiled Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen, Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Bernard-Henri Lévy. Ideas and ideologies have increasingly become a sphere of displaced politics (what politics does not want to solve, ideas and moral posturing should solve), so that in some real-time discursive regimes they seem to mean the opposite of what they represent.

A pertinent response is the open letter to Prime Minister Blair sent by 38 British Muslim organizations and most Muslim MPs after the airplane bomb threats of August 2006, which accused the government of adopting policies that expose the nation to terrorist attack (Cowell, 2006). The upshot is that multiculturalism and foreign policy cannot be treated separately.

A central struggle of multiculturalism concerns access to the public sphere, including public spaces, institutions, media, symbols and school curricula. The Danish cartoons and in a different way Hirsi Ali seek to marginalize Muslims in the public sphere. Consider these accounts of

European public spaces in 2006. London in August: 'Terror arrests outside my park; multiethnic peace within' (Goldfarb, 2006); 'Londonistan', according to a conservative British journalist (Philips, 2006) and 'Kasba Holland', a scene of intercultural mixing according to upbeat Dutch writers (Fauwe and van Amerongen, 2006).

Over time, arguably, multicultural sharing of the public sphere and cultural and institutional power sharing is a likely trend in the West and Japan for structural demographic reasons (Tiryakian, 2003). Europe, Japan and the US are graying and ethnic and cultural hegemony is not being reproduced demographically. In this sense multicultural Europe and the 'browning' of America (one in eight Americans is of Hispanic background) are a matter of time. In this light the current skirmishes are rearguard actions that seek to halt what is, for structural economic and demographic reasons, an unstoppable trend.

### **Global multicultural**

According to the Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (1996, p. 106) there is now a *world culture*, which he gives a supple meaning:

There is now a world culture, but we had better make sure we understand what this means: not a replication of uniformity but an organization of diversity, an increasing interconnectedness of varied local cultures, as well as a development of cultures without a clear anchorage in any one territory. And to this interconnected diversity people can relate in different ways.

Global multicultural is another way to describe this world culture.

Here multiculturalism has two meanings. Multiethnicity has been the backdrop and infrastructure of global interconnectedness and globalization since time immemorial. It has not been nations that have been globalizing agents (though history books usually present it that way) but rather groups and regions within nations and migrants straddling nations. As mentioned before, several diasporas outnumber the population in the nation of origin, which shows that these trends have been in motion for some time. Growing multiethnicity in recent centuries produces a 'declining congruence between the nation and the state' (Carment, 1994, p. 560). We could interpret this as a changing balance between stationary and roving, sedentary and mobile strands of social life. This is a source of friction and inevitable conflict according to nineteenth century notions of 'hard sovereignty', but twenty-first century trends are towards regional and transnational pooling of sovereignty and soft sovereignty in view of changing technologies, economies, culture and politics.

Contemporary multiculturalism is global because global political economy promotes cross-border traffic. New channels of communication and influence are taking shape. Many pubs in England now follow soccer matches via Al Jazeera Sports Plus, with the volume down, because the subscription charges are much lower than the commercial British sports channels (Carvajal, 2006). New codes and vocabularies come into vogue. Thus, English as a global lingua franca has given rise to 'globish', as a description of global English as a practice and as a movement under the heading 'Don't speak English, parlez Globish'.<sup>9</sup> The new wars are transnational, conflicts and conflict networks straddle boundaries, from the Democratic Republic of Congo's coltan and cassiterite mines and niche warfare on the borders of Rwanda to the CIA's 'extraordinary rendition' and Guantánamo prison as a transnational site. The saying to fight a network it takes a network, cuts two ways. Cyberspace is global too. NGOs and social movements straddle boundaries. Multiculturalism discourse and policy is spreading globally—under headings such as minority rights, human rights or ethnic coalitions. And for all the

attention bestowed on immigration, the other side of the coin is emigration. For instance, ‘there are more UK nationals living overseas than there are foreign nationals living in the UK’.<sup>10</sup>

These trends usher in a new geography of global culture and a social formation that represents a new phase of globalization marked by flexible, multi-circuit identification. The conventional discussions of ethnicity and multiculturalism from national viewpoints are incomplete and unreal if they do not take into account the overall global changes. It is as if nation states want to have globalization on their own terms, domesticated and custom fit, picturesque like theme park multiculturalism, but do not concede the many backdoor ways through which they interact with globalization and the agency this involves and evokes.

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### **Notes**

- 1 The translation is from *Wikipedia*, under ‘Muhammad cartoons controversy’.
- 2 Also *National Post*, in Danish. Quote: ‘For years, Danes lauded multiculturalism and insisted they had no problem with the Muslim customs—until one day they found that they did. Some major issues: Living on the dole: Third-world immigrants—most of them Muslims . . . —constitute 5 percent of the population but consume upwards of 40 percent of the welfare spending. Engaging in crime: Muslims are only 4 percent of Denmark’s 5.4 million people but make up a majority of the country’s convicted rapists [and] . . . practically all the female victims are non-Muslim. Self-imposed isolation: Over time, as Muslim immigrants increase in numbers, they wish less to mix with the indigenous population. A recent survey finds that only 5 percent of young Muslim immigrants would readily marry a Dane. Importing unacceptable customs: Forced marriages . . . are one problem. Another is threats to kill Muslims who convert out of Islam. . . . Fomenting anti-Semitism: Muslim violence threatens Denmark’s approximately 6,000 Jews, who increasingly depend on police protection. . . . Seeking Islamic law: Muslim leaders openly declare their goal of introducing Islamic law once Denmark’s Muslim population grows large enough—a not-that-remote prospect. If present trends persist, one sociologist estimates, every third inhabitant of Denmark in 40 years will be Muslim.’ The article sparked a debate on multiculturalism with Danish parliamentarians.
- 3 On Fortuyn, see Broertjes (2002). On van Gogh and Hirsi Ali, see Ali (2004); Bawer (2004); Majid (2004); Cécilia (2005); Simons (2005b); Caldwell (2005a); Linklater (2005).
- 4 Katja Schuurman, ‘Prettig weekend, ondanks alles’, 2005. Fauwe and van Amerongen (2006) report on Bouyeri’s background.
- 5 After five years’ residence immigrants have the right to vote and stand in municipal but not in national elections, so the left swing has been less marked in the 2006 parliamentary elections.
- 6 Cf. Hannerz (1992) on high rises and multiculturalism in Amsterdam.
- 7 ‘Their physical isolation sustains a sense of alienation, they become dormitory ghettos’ (Heathcote, 2005).
- 8 Other signatories include: Iranian writer Chahla Chafiq, who is exiled in France; French writer Caroline Fourest; Irshad Manji, a Ugandan refugee and writer living in Canada; Mehdi Mozaffari, an Iranian academic exiled in Denmark; Maryam Namazie, an Iranian writer living in Britain; Antoine Sfeir, director of a French review examining the Middle East; Charlie Hebdo director Phillippe Val; and Ibn Warraq, a US academic of Indian and Pakistani origin who wrote a book titled *Why I Am Not a Muslim*. This was widely reported (e.g. ‘Writers take aim at Islamic totalitarianism’, available at [http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set\\_id=1&click\\_id=3&art\\_id=qw1141148701500B263](http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=3&art_id=qw1141148701500B263) (accessed 28 February 2006).
- 9 See *Wikipedia* under Globish; and Nerrière (2004).
- 10 As of 2005 4.5 million British passport holders live overseas (Sriskandarajah, 2006).

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