The Inner Lives of Cultures

Edited with an introduction by

Eva Hoffman

Counterpoint carries out research and promotes debate around the most pressing issue of our time: how to live together well in an interdependent world.

This electronic version of the work does not include the glossary in chapter 10. This is included in the print version of this document (ISBN 978-0-95682-250-5), by kind permission of the publisher, Cornell University Press.

Also in chapter 10, 'Unwritten rules', draws on the author's paper, *Unwritten Rules: How Russia really works*, published by the Centre for European Reform, May 2001, http://www.cer.org.uk/pdf/e246_unwritten_rules.pdf. The chapter also draws on an article forthcoming in the journal *East European Politics and Societies*.

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Contents

Introduction

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At the beginning of the twenty-first century, what does it mean to talk about relationships between cultures? What, indeed, is meant by 'culture'? How do we conduct cross-cultural conversations which lead to mutual understanding, rather than its opposite? And – perhaps most saliently – what do we need to understand about each other in the first place in order to talk across national and cultural lines? These were some of the underlying questions which prompted a conference entitled 'The Inner Lives of Cultures', from which the essays in this collection emerged. That conference, convened in Brussels in 2010, by Counterpoint and its director, Catherine Fieschi, was part of a larger project by the British Council, to rethink its mission of cultural relations.

   This, clearly, is both a daunting, and a most worthwhile undertaking. Cultural exchanges are perhaps more central to our dealings with each other today than ever before; in a sense, they are a basic part of the realities we inhabit. For one thing, issues of cultural identity – understood in ethnic, or religious, or historical terms – are often in the forefront of contemporary political discourse, and sometimes, of conflict. But also, we live in a world in which various kinds of cross-national movement – migrations, travel, various kinds of both enforced and voluntary nomadism – are ever on the rise; and in which flows of fast communication are multidirectional and constant. If we are to meet with each other on the basis of

trust rather than tension or insidious indifference, we need to have ways of getting acquainted with each other which are more than cursory, or purely instrumental. But how can this be accomplished? What kind of knowledge is needed to feed meaningful cross-cultural contacts?

In considering such matters, we held two assumptions to be self-evident: that within our intermingled and simultaneously multicentred globe, it is no longer possible to think of cultural relations in terms of promoting 'our culture' abroad, or exporting culture from a few privileged centres to the putative peripheries; rather, we need to envision cultural exchange as a two-way – or perhaps even a multidirectional – process, which happens through dialogue and mutual participation, and which hopefully leads to reciprocal and fertile forms of engagement. And second, that our definition of culture needs to include not only the articulated and formal expressions of literature, or music, or artistic artefacts – important as these are – but that whole fabric of social forms and meanings which constitutes the lived and daily experience of culture.

At the same time, we also started from an awareness that on that broader plane, dialogue is hardly easy or straightforward; and that the kind of insight and comprehension it calls for does not come automatically or instantly. These days, we do not lack information about other societies and countries – although that information often comes in sound bites, and confines itself to the current moment. But to enter into the subjective life of another culture – its symbolic codes, its overt beliefs and implicit assumptions – requires, as any immigrant or nomad can tell you, a considerable effort of consciousness and imagination; a kind of stretching of self towards the other, and a gradual grasp of differences which are sometimes imperceptible and subtle.

Of course, cultures are neither static nor monolithic organisms – they are complex, changeable and internally diverse; indeed, the speed of change is a major fact of cultural life today. And yet we each come into a specific culture; and each culture gives us our first existential map, so to speak, and our earliest templates for the basic elements of experience: what constitutes personhood, what is beautiful or disturbing, how family relationships are structured, or how happiness is envisioned. It was the formative lesson of my own emigration (to be personal for a moment) that culture is not only something outside us, that we use or respond to; rather, culture exists within us, and it constructs our consciousness and subjectivity – our perceptions, ideas and even feelings. Different cultures may have varying predispositions towards not only moral values, or forms of group affiliation, but towards different states of self – say, the degree of self-sufficiency or interdependence which seems desirable; how much spontaneity or self-control is valued; whether it is intensity or serenity which feels good, or cognitively consonant. What is considered healthily assertive in one culture may be seen as aggressive or hostile in another; certain kinds of personal disclosure which may seem quite unproblematic in one society may be seen as embarrassing or entirely unacceptable elsewhere. Cultural attitudes can inform not only the obvious parameters of behaviour, but very particular social forms and rites – and even responses which may seem purely physiological. For example, within an admittedly minor anthropological niche of alcohol studies, it has been discovered that not only are drinking habits different in different cultures, but that people experience inebriation in quite various physical ways.

Such deep values, or literally incorporated beliefs, can be very surprising or perplexing from the outside – partly because they are often taken as given, and therefore remain unarticulated from within. But it is such deep values that I think we need to understand in order to engage in cross-cultural relations which are more than

superficial. How, then, can we talk to each other across such differences – how can we come to know each other better, or collaborate in ways which are productive and possibly creative? I think it almost goes without saying that openness and mutual respect – a recognition, on the part of each interlocutor, of the other's legitimacy and dignity – is a prerequisite for cross-cultural dialogue; without that, nothing much can happen. But it also seems to me that a full and rich engagement calls for something more risky and entangled – something closer perhaps to the process of translation. Like literal translation, cross-cultural back and forth requires a simultaneous receptivity to the other's subjective language, and a strong sense of one's own. And like literal translation, it calls for a kind of cross-checking between the two 'languages' or forms of sensibility – keeping conscious of what needs to be understood about each other, as well as alert as to what we don't understand. In order to grasp another culture's inner life, we need to develop some empathy for its tonalities and textures, its expressive palette and affective norms. At the same time, one's original language has to retain some stability as a point of reference: a place from which to speak, and to make oneself intelligible to the other. As in textual translation, we need to acknowledge both the correspondences between the two languages – and the differences. Indeed, if dialogue is to be more than a synonym for a palliative exchange of niceties, it needs to include the possibility of disagreement. Moreover, just as there are sometimes untranslatable fractures among texts, so I think it has to be recognised that some differences in the language of values may be unbridgeable, or non-negotiable. In confronting these, it seems to me it is neither salutary nor sufficient to collapse one's own cultural identity, or idiom, into 'the Other' – to delegitimise oneself, so to speak, in the name of concord or good manners. For one thing, to give up on one's own convictions or perceptions too readily, is to lose the vantage

point from which differences can be perceived in the first place. But also, a superficial accommodation to beliefs one doesn't really agree with violates the dignity of the other, as well as one's own. One wants to give one's interlocutor the respect of truthfulness – however tactfully expressed – and the possibility of an equally truthful response, whatever risk this incurs.

But more often, I believe, cross-cultural dialogue can lead to a kind of interweaving of languages – to a discovery both of difference, and of underlying similarities, or who knows, perhaps even certain human universals. After all, just as textual translation would not be possible without some shared linguistic structures, so we could not understand our cultural differences without having some commonalities from which to communicate across them – some shared language of subjectivity. In all these ways, I think, dialogue is central to our understanding of ourselves and the world. It is increasingly recognised, by thinkers in fields ranging from multicultural theory to psychoanalysis, that we become who we are by entering into and participating in webs of conversations, narratives, interpretations of our situation, or stories about our past. Cross-cultural conversations especially can change and enlarge those who are engaged in them. It can make the participants conscious of where they are coming from, so to speak – of their own unspoken assumptions and internalised values; but it can also increase our awareness of others – and the range of possible human aspirations, ways of being, visions of the good society or the good life. And what can be more exciting or interesting than that?

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To begin reflecting on such questions, and at the same time, to embark on an experiment in intercultural dialogue *in vivo*, we decided – perhaps in the British

empirical tradition – to start with specificities; and we asked a number of leading thinkers, cultural observers, commentators and interpreters from various parts of the world, to give us some guidance and insight into the inner topographies and the subjective languages of their societies and cultures. At the same time, in order to avoid a sentimental or reified view of culture, we asked our participants to reflect on the ways in which cultural values in each context intersect with the contemporary realities and political arrangements.

As the reader will see, the responses to this admittedly challenging assignment were fascinating and varied. To provide an Ariadne's thread to the themes of the conference, Tzvetan Todorov, in his opening address, gave us a wonderfully illuminating anatomy of the word 'culture' – its meanings, implications and historical derivations. The other essays collected here are in effect informed reports from within particular cultural contexts, probing and decoding different aspects of cultural experience. In their particularity, they are difficult to summarise; rather, they should be, one by one, pondered and relished. They range (to give a very rough guide to their themes) from reflections on the repressive hold of religious and political authority against the need for reform ('Goodbye Orient: Resisting Reforms in the Islamic World' by Hamed Abdel-Samad), to the tradition of tolerance, and the possibility of incorporating religious diversity into politics ('Cultural Pluralism in Indonesia: Local, National and Global Exchanges' by Azyumardi Azra); from the loss of a uniting national idea or positive self-image in Mexico ('Goodbye to All That' by Fernando Escalante Gonzalbo), to memories of personal resistance, ranging from irony to strong friendships, in Cold War Romania ('Surrealism and Survival in Romania' by Carmen Firan); from analysis of the subterranean links

between linguistic structures, spatial imagination and cultural/political attitudes in the Caucasus ('Uzbekness: From Otherness to Ideology' by Hamid Ismailov), to the opposition between theocratic fundamentalism with its foreclosures of dialogue, and the pluralistic, ethical space of civil society ('The Intercultural Imperative and Iranian Dreams' by Ramin Jahanbegloo); from a close reading of the invisible practices and hidden codes of discourse which enable an 'alternative' system of economic and social transactions in post-Soviet Russia ('Unwritten Rules, Open Secrets, Knowing Smiles' by Alena Ledeneva), to the tracking of the vicissitudes of 'identity', as well as various linkages between culture and politics, and distinctions between diversity and difference ('Culture in Modern India: The Anxiety and the Promise' by Pratap Bhanu Mehta); and from the tension between abstracting structures of modernity, and the vitality of grassroots inventiveness in Brazil ('From *Tristes Tropiques* to Tropical Treats: Savage Imaginaries in Multiple Brazils' by Nicolau Sevcenko), to the importance of Confucius, and the dialectic between imposed harmony and violent conflict in China ('China in Search of Harmony' by Shu Sunyan).

But such sound bite summaries cannot do justice to the multiple themes or the powerful insights of these essays. They are rich examples of what classical anthropologists and these days, airport advertisers, call 'local knowledge' and their interest is to be found largely in the detail. Nevertheless, part of the excitement of the conference was to see how fruitfully its participants could talk across geographical boundaries and cultural, as well as historical, differences. Amidst the distinctiveness, certain common concerns began to be evident: how to understand 'identity' without being reductive; what real tolerance might look like; or what, beyond democratic forms, constitutes responsible and accountable politics. Moreover, what such conversations strongly suggested

is that the old divisions which have governed our world – between East and West, the advanced and the Third World, or even between the coloniser and the (post)-colonised – no longer hold, or are at least losing their relevance. In the laboratory, or the microcosm of the conference, it was clear that we live in a multicentred world, and speak to each other across criss-crossing lines of affinity and mutual influence, from multiple points of reference, as well as sites of legitimacy, importance, and even power.

As it happens, quite a few of the participants in 'Inner Lives of Cultures' are in effect bicultural – that is, they live abroad from their country of origin, or move back and forth between two countries. In one or two cases, this is because it is not possible to speak freely, or to do critical work, from within their countries of origin; but in most instances, it is a kind of overdetermined coincidence. Overdetermined, because people with hyphenated identities are often very adept at cross-cultural translation; indeed, from their position as simultaneous outsiders and insiders, such translation – whether overt or internal – is an intrinsic part of the bicultural condition. It was therefore perhaps not coincidental that one of the implicit – and sometimes explicit – thematic currents of the conference had to do with the sensitive question of what an external or an 'outsider' gaze can bring to the understanding of each society, or culture. Can such gaze ever be salubrious and heuristic, rather than cold or condescending? The possibility of allowing ourselves to be seen and sometimes even criticised by others is, of course, crucial to the possibility of dialogue. Admittedly, opening yourself to the perceptions of outsiders can be a psychologically difficult gesture to make; but what the laboratory, or the microcosm, of the conference made clear is that in the newly configured

world no one can any longer assume that they come to such exchanges from a position of putative superiority, or hegemonic centrality, or triumphalist certainty. Rather, faced with the difficult problems of our time, and the hyper-speeds of change, we all find ourselves in positions of equal uncertainty. The need is clearly to ask questions of each other, and to try to grasp the shape of our fast-metamorphosing world in common. It is in such intermingling that sources of creativity, solidarity – and perhaps even peace – can be found.

Eva Hoffman is a writer and academic who emigrated to Canada from Cracow aged 13. The experience influenced her greatly: 'Every immigrant,' she has said, 'becomes a kind of amateur anthropologist.' Now living in London, she has received the Guggenheim Fellowship, the Whiting Award and an award from the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters.

1

Barbarism, Civilisation, Cultures

Tzvetan Todorov

I would like to approach the subject of cultural relations by specifying, at the start, the meaning of some key words that I would like to use. To start with, the pair formed by the terms 'barbarism' and 'civilisation'. It is well known that the first of these words, barbarism, has a long past in European history, and that it has been used in two distinct ways. One of these meanings is purely relative, and it is adopted both by some Christian authors who have commented on the subject, and by some important secular authors, such as Montaigne. The barbarian in this case is simply the person who is different from us, or who does not speak our language, or who speaks it badly; in a word, the barbarian is the foreigner. I would, however, prefer to keep the other meaning of the word, which is moral and absolute. This second concept of barbarity is equally legitimate and we must be able to draw on it to designate, at all times and in all places, the acts and attitudes of those who, to a greater or lesser degree, place outside of humanity those who are perceived as different, or judge them to be radically unlike themselves, or inflict shocking treatment on them. Treating others as inhuman, as monsters or savages is one form of this barbarity. A different form of it is institutional discrimination towards others because they do not belong to my linguistic community, or my social group, or my psychological type.

If we have one term with an absolute content, 'barbarian', the same will be true of its opposite. A civilised person is one who is able, at all times and in all places, to recognise the humanity of others fully. So two stages have to be crossed before anyone can become civilised: in the first stage, you discover that others live in a way different from you; in the second, you agree to see them as bearers of the same humanity as yourself. The moral demand comes with an intellectual dimension: getting those with whom you live to understand a foreign identity, whether individual or collective, is an act of civilisation, since in this way you are enlarging the circle of humanity. In this sense – but in this sense only – scholars, philosophers and artists all contribute to driving back barbarity. In actual fact, no individual, let alone any people, can be entirely 'civilised': they can merely be more or less civilised; and the same goes for 'barbarian'. Civilisation is a horizon which we can approach, barbarity is a background from which we seek to move away; neither condition can be entirely identified with particular beings. It is acts and attitudes which are barbarian or civilised, not individuals or peoples.

People have often pointed out with relish that there is a paradox revealed by the twentieth century: barbarity, they exclaim, sprang from the very heart of European civilisation. But there is not really anything all that paradoxical here, once it is admitted that civilisation cannot be reduced to the production and enjoyment of works of art (with which European civilisation was so closely identified); and that the relationship between these two notions is indeed far from direct. Mankind's existential, ethical and aesthetic achievements do not depend mechanically on one another, and yet they are all perfectly real. We need to think them in their plurality and not deduce them

from each other, nor transform the one into a means for attaining the other, nor indeed consider them as opposites that we need to choose between in an 'either/ or' way dictated by an exclusivist logic. A first warning – but a powerful one – against the illusions entertained by certain supporters of the Enlightenment is found in their most lucid French-speaking representative, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In his first work, the *Discourse on the Sciences and the Arts*, he was already breaking away from the *philosophes* and Encyclopaedists who were his friends, and abandoning their belief that the spread of works of art and technological advances will make mankind morally better. Far from contributing to the progress of moral life and an increased benevolence towards others, he declared, the growth of the sciences and arts may become detrimental to moral progress. The vocation of human beings is to live (well) with others, and for that there is no need to accumulate a great pile of knowledge, nor to be what is called 'a cultivated person'.

Civilisation is the opposite of barbarism. However, the meaning of the first word changes considerably if we put it into the plural. Civilisations no longer correspond to an atemporal moral and intellectual category, but to historical formations that appear and disappear, characterised by the presence of several traits linked both to material life and to the life of the mind. It is in this sense that we speak of Chinese or Indian, Persian or Byzantine civilisation. The two senses of 'civilisation', illustrated by the singular and the plural, are independent of each other. To avoid any ambiguity, I am thus choosing to use the word 'civilisation' here only in the singular, and to designate the sense of its plural by one of its quasi-synonyms, which in any case bears the same double meaning: this is the word 'cultures', in the plural.

For over two centuries now, 'culture' has assumed a broader meaning than its usual association with the

arts. Anthropologists have largely been responsible for this change. They realised that the societies studied by them, often lacking writing, monuments and works of art, nonetheless possessed practices and artefacts that played an analogous role within them; they called these, in turn, 'cultures'. This 'ethnological' meaning has now gained ascendancy; therefore, ethnology is also called 'cultural anthropology'. If the word is taken in this broad sense (as descriptive and no longer evaluative), every human group has a culture: this is the name given to the set of characteristics of its social life, to collective modes of living and thinking, to the forms and styles of organisation of time and space, which include language, religion, family structures, ways of building houses, tools, ways of eating and dressing. 'Culture' is thus necessarily particular, not universal. In addition, the members of the group – and we should bear in mind that there may be just a few dozen of them, or several million – interiorise these characteristics in the form of mental representations. So culture exists on two closely related levels, that of social practices and that of the images left by the latter in the minds of the members of the community.

It is not their content that determines the identity of 'cultures', but their diffusion: culture is necessarily collective. It thus presupposes communication, of which it is one of the results. As a representation, culture also provides us with an interpretation of the world, a miniature model, a map, so to speak, which enables us to find our way around in it; possessing a culture means having at one's disposal a pre-organisation of lived experience. Culture rests simultaneously on a common memory (we learn the same language, the same history, the same traditions) and on common rules of life (we speak in such a way as to make ourselves understood, we take into account the codes at work in our society);

it is, at the same time, turned towards the past and towards the present.

It is no accident if these two concepts of 'civilisation' and 'cultures', whatever the words used to designate them, entered European thought at the same time – the second half of the eighteenth century – in the wake of the Enlightenment. Several authors were to contrast 'barbarism' with 'civilisation' and conceive the history of humanity as a one-way process, leading from the former to the latter. At the same time, there was a growing interest in 'cultures'. This was grafted onto an old tradition, which in France went back to Montaigne, with his insistence on the power of 'custom'. Pascal said of custom that it was a second nature; he thus prefigured the formulas of later anthropologists. The travels of Europeans to the East, South and West became increasingly frequent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and their protagonists would bring back detailed, sometimes admiring descriptions of the customs and manners observed in the countries they visited, even though these customs were far removed from collective European practices. At the same period, there was a new interest in history, and thus in ancient social forms, no longer perceived as arising from a now inaccessible golden age, nor as a mere, imperfect preparation for the present; henceforth, it was deemed that every period had its own ideal and its own coherence.

For a long time, Enlightenment thought served as a source of inspiration for a reformist, liberal current, which fought against conservatism in the name of universality and equal respect for all. As we know, things have changed these days, and the conservative defenders of a higher Western culture have arrogated this idea to themselves, believing themselves to be engaged in a struggle against 'relativism' that – they say – emerged

from the romantic reaction at the start of the nineteenth century. They cannot do so, obviously, unless they amputate the real tradition of the Enlightenment, which was able to combine the universality of values with the plurality of cultures. This doctrine should be confused neither with dogmatism ('my culture must impose itself on everyone') nor with nihilism ('all cultures are pretty much the same'); placing the Enlightenment at the service of a denigration of others, which gives one the right to subject or destroy them, represents a wholesale kidnapping of the whole Enlightenment project.

The human being is born not only within nature but also, always and necessarily, within a culture. How shall we describe its distinctive features? The first characteristic of one's initial cultural identity is that it is imposed during childhood rather than being chosen. On coming into the world, the human child is plunged into the culture of its group, which precedes it. The most salient, but also probably the most determining fact, is that we are necessarily born within *one* language, the language spoken by our parents or the people who look after us. Now language is not a neutral instrument, it is impregnated with thoughts, actions and judgments that are handed down to us; it divides reality up in a particular way, and imperceptibly transmits to us a vision of the world. The child cannot avoid absorbing it, and this way of conceiving reality is transmitted from generation to generation.

Another trait of the cultural affiliation of every individual is immediately obvious: we possess not one but several cultural identities, which may either overlap or else present themselves as intersecting sets. For example, a French person always comes from a particular region – Burgundy, for instance – but from another angle this person also shares several characteristics with all Europeans, and thus participates in Burgundian, French and European culture. On the other hand, within one single geographical entity, there are many different cultural stratifications: there is the culture of teenagers and the culture of retired people, the culture of doctors and the culture of street sweepers, the culture of women and that of men, of rich and of poor. A particular individual may recognise herself as belonging simultaneously to Mediterranean, Christian and European cultures.

Now – and this point is essential – these different cultural identities do not coincide with one another, nor do they form clearly separated territories in which different ingredients are superimposed without remainder. Every individual is multicultural; within each, cultures interact as criss-crossed alluvial plains. Individual identity stems from the encounter of multiple collective identities within one and the same person; each of our various affiliations contributes to the formation of the unique creature that we are. Human beings are not all similar, nor entirely different; they are all plural within themselves, and share their constitutive traits with varied groups, combining them in an individual way. The cohabitation of different types of belonging within each one of us does not in general cause any problems – and this ought, in turn, to arouse admiration: like a juggler, we keep all the balls of our identity in the air at once, with the greatest of ease! We should overcome the habit that links culture primarily to a specific territory.

Another characteristic of cultures, no less easy to identify, is the fact that they are in perpetual transformation. All cultures change, even if it is certain that the so-called 'traditional' ones do so less willingly and less quickly than those that are called 'modern'. There are several different reasons for these changes. Since each culture includes others within itself, or

intersects with them, its different ingredients form an unstable equilibrium. For example, granting women the right to vote in France in 1944 enabled them to participate actively in the country's public life: as a result, French cultural identity was transformed. We also need to take into account the pressures brought to bear by the evolution of other elements that are constitutive of the social order: the economic, the political, even the physical. The most eloquent image of the variability of cultures I can find is that of the mythical ship of the Argonauts, the *Argo*: each plank, each rope, each nail had to be replaced, since the voyage took so long; the ship that returned to port, years later, was materially completely different from the one which set off, and yet it was still the same ship *Argo* since it assumed the same function for the sailors, and at the same time allowed each of them to keep the same representation of their ship. Only dead cultures don't change any more.

If we keep these two characteristics of culture in mind, its plurality and its variability, we see how disconcerting are the metaphors most commonly used to evoke it. We say of a human being, for instance, that she is 'uprooted' and we pity her for it; but it is not legitimate to equate human beings with plants, since a human is never the product of just one culture, and in any case the animal world is distinguished from the vegetable world precisely by its mobility. Cultures have no essence or 'soul', in spite of the fine works that have been written about these things. Or else people talk of the 'survival' of a culture (this time humanising the representations instead of dehumanising mankind); by this they mean its conservation in identical form. Now, a culture that has stopped changing is by definition a dead culture. The expression 'dead language' is much more judicious: Latin died on the day it could no longer change. Nothing is more normal, more common than

the disappearance of a previous state of culture and its replacement by a new state.

However, for reasons that are easy to understand, members of a group often find this obvious fact difficult to accept. The difference between individual and collective identities is illuminating here. Even if we dream of discovering one day within us a 'deep' and 'authentic' self, as if it awaited us patiently lurking somewhere in the depths of our being, we are conscious of the changes, wished for or not, that our being undergoes: they are perceived as normal. Everyone remembers the decisive events from his past. We can also make decisions that send our identities off in a new direction, when we change jobs, or partners, or countries. A person is nothing other than the result of innumerable interactions that mark out the stages of a life.

Collective identity works in a completely different way: it is already fully formed by the time the young child discovers it, and it becomes the invisible foundation on which her identity is built. Even if, seen from outside, every culture is mixed and changing, for the members of the community that it characterises, it is a stable and distinct entity, the foundation of their personal identity. For this reason, all change which affects culture can be experienced as an attack on my integrity. One need merely compare the facility with which I agree, if I am capable of it, to speak a new language while on a visit to a foreign country (an individual event); and the disagreeable feeling I have when, in the street where I have always lived, only incomprehensible words and accents can now be heard (a collective event). What we have initially found in the original culture is not shocking even if this in itself is the product of many changes, since this has helped actually to shape the person. On the other hand, what changes by force of circumstances

over which the individual has no power is perceived as a kind of degradation, for it makes our very sense of being feel fragile. The contemporary period, during which collective identities are called on to transform themselves more and more quickly, is thus also the period in which groups are adopting an increasingly defensive attitude, and fiercely guarding their original identities.

Cultural identity has to be distinguished both from civic status and from our attachment to specific moral and political values. No one can change his or her childhood, whereas it is perfectly possible to change our civic loyalties without any damage. The state is not a 'culture' like others, it is an administrative and political entity with well-established frontiers, and it obviously includes individuals who are the bearers of several different cultures, since in it we find men and women, young people and old, of every profession and every condition, from various regions, indeed origins, and speaking different languages, practising several religions, and respecting different customs. This does not mean that belonging to one specific state is insignificant. It is within the nation that the great social solidarities find a place. It is the taxes paid by all citizens, at least in democratic states that make medical care available to those who cannot afford it. It is the work of the active citizens which enables retired senior citizens to pick up their pensions. It is their contributions, too, which help to supply a fund for the unemployed. It is thanks to national solidarity that all children in the country benefit from a free education. Now, health, work and education all form an essential part of everyone's existence. However, a democratic state cannot require from its citizens that they love it, only that they remain loyal to it. It is for every individual to look after his or her own affective choices; neither the government nor Parliament have any reason to meddle with them. It is

in this respect that our democracy is liberal: the state does not entirely control civil society, and within certain limits each individual remains free. That's why national cultural identity is independent of the laws, and is made and unmade on a daily basis by the actions of millions of individuals living in this or that country.

The moral and political principles to which we are attached are, on the other hand, both fragile and irreplaceable. It is in the name of these principles, that can be shared by all peoples but which are practised by just a few, and independent of our particular culture as well as of the state whose citizens we are, that – to take a few current examples – we are ready, today, to defend intransigently: the freedom of women to organise their personal lives the way they see fit; or secularism, understood as the separation of the theological and the political, which confines the exercise of faith to the personal sphere alone, the corollary of which is the freedom to criticise religions; or else the banning of physical violence, whether it be domestic or practised illegally in the name of *raison d'état*, such as torture.

These principles happen to be integrated into the Constitution or the laws and institutions of several countries, but they do not belong to them intrinsically. The dissociation between this set of values and the national frameworks is all the more obvious these days in Europe since the majority of the inhabitants of the European Union demonstrate that they are attached to them, whereas the states themselves preserve their borders and their sovereignty. We can go even further: many of these ideals today feature in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and inspire the legislative systems of other cultural or national traditions; conversely, we must remember that the European heritage contains many elements other than the defence of human rights.

If certain persons living in a European country these days refuse the state of law, oppress women or systematically resort to physical violence, they are to be condemned not because such types of behaviour are foreign to European cultural identity (they are not), but because they transgress the current laws, which in turn are inspired by a core of moral and political values.

How can we distinguish between what is acceptable insofar as it forms part of a tradition, and what is not acceptable insofar as it contradicts the constitutive values of democracy? The answer is in principle not difficult, even if its application in particular cases poses problems: in a democracy, law is higher than custom. This precedence does not affect Western, or European, or even French culture, but constitutes the basis of the values to which each country is faithful. The values of a society find their expression in the Constitution, the laws or indeed the structure of the State; if custom transgresses them, it must be abandoned. The Universal Declaration of UNESCO, adopted in 2001 and confirmed by the UN in 2002, says in article 4: 'None may invoke cultural diversity in order to attack the human rights guaranteed by international law, nor to limit their effectiveness.' We could add: 'nor to attack any of the rights guaranteed by the legal code of a democratic country'. If the law is not broken, this means that the custom in question can be tolerated: it can be criticised publicly, but it should not be forbidden. For example, marriages in which the choice of partner is imposed by the family become a crime only if they are imposed by force; if they are accompanied by the consent of the bride, they may be regrettable, but they cannot be treated as being against the law.

The members of a multicultural society would do well to draw a very clear line between cultural identity and political choices, between forms of spirituality and civic values as embodied in law. It is thanks to distinctions of this kind that other non-Western countries have managed to adopt the principles of democratic government without having to renounce their traditions and customs. The separation between laws and values on the one side, and culture and spirituality on the other, can become (in the West, too) the point of departure for a politics adapted to contemporary society.

On the other hand, in order to submit to the law, we need first to know it. 'Ignorance of the law is no excuse' – true, but in practice, there are many adults who are ignorant of the law, and who transgress it unknowingly – something that is especially easy if they are acting in agreement with an ancestral custom. In the contemporary world, it is for the state to ensure that the inhabitants of the country, whatever their origin, have some idea of the great principles on which the laws rest. Basic education should be free and obligatory for all, as it is for the native-born children. And this, in turn, requires a basic knowledge of the country's language. Pondering how best to respond to these demands, and what might be asked in exchange, could well be the task of a modern liberal state, which is necessarily a multicultural one.

Are we threatened today by a 'clash of civilisations'? I am personally unable to see in what sense cultural differences are the source of contemporary international conflicts. Thus I don't believe that the remedy for these tensions will come from a debate on culture. Western countries can help ease these tensions in other ways. Present interactions do not occur in a vacuum, and the centuries of history that have preceded them cannot be erased – centuries in which Western countries have dominated the rest of the world. So we can see what demands can be addressed to the political and

intellectual elites in the West, if they desire sincerely to take part. The first requirement here would be that they cease to consider themselves an incarnation of the law, virtue and universality, of which their technological superiority would seem to be the proof; so they should stop setting themselves a priori above the laws and judgments of others even if those seem to violate some of their habits. Moreover, the right to military intervention that certain Western powers have arrogated to themselves is not only without any basis other than force; it risks suggesting that the ideals defended by Westerners – liberty, equality, secularism, human rights – are merely a convenient camouflage for their will to power, and thus are not worthy of any respect. Freedom cannot be promoted by constraint, nor equality by subjection. If our political leaders wish these Western ideals to remain active, for example in the Middle East, they must begin by withdrawing their troops from the countries in which they are intervening (Iraq and Afghanistan), close down illegal prisons and torture camps, and help set up a viable Palestinian state.

Every society is multicultural. The fact remains that, nowadays, the contacts between populations of different origins (especially in the cities), migrations and travels, and the international exchange of information, are all more intense than ever before; and there is no reason why this tendency should be reversed. Good management of this growing pluralism would imply not that we assimilate others to the culture of the majority, but that we respect minorities and integrate them into a framework of laws and civic values common to all. That objective is simultaneously important, since it has to do with the life of the whole collective, and accessible, insofar as it does not affect customs adopted in earliest childhood,

and constitutive of a basic identity, but concerns rather rules of life that can easily be accepted as varying from one country to another. The clash of civilisations is definitely not our unavoidable destiny.

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2

From 'Tristes Tropiques' to Tropical Treats: Savage Imaginaries in Multiple Brazils

Nicolau Sevcenko

Claude Levi-Strauss was 26 when he arrived in Brazil, in 1935, as a member of a group of distinguished French scientists and intellectuals, the so-called Mission Française, coming straight from La Sorbonne, University of Paris, to be the founding fathers of its tropical branch at the University of São Paulo. He rented a nice house that he could share with his wife and his father, both as eager as he was to flee the European chaos, where the rise of Nazi-Fascism pointed to dark times, intolerance and war looming close on the horizon. That house was peculiar in many senses. It was a nice, spacious house, recently built by an Italian *capomastro* in a Roman geometric style, which was a regular occurrence in a city whose population was mostly comprised of European immigrants, the majority of them Italians.

The house also had a wide backyard, displaying an orchard full of tropical plants and trees. There were palm trees, ferns, mango and papaya trees, to which Levi-Strauss himself added many other tropical species, found, selected and planted by him, among them a magnificent group of banana trees. In time, he would populate that backyard with a multitude of birds and animals that he would bring from his escapades to the rural outskirts of the city: macaws, parrots, parakeets, monkeys.

Even more interesting than that was the location of the house. The city of São Paulo is crossed by a ridge, dividing the urban area into two wide slopes, one to

the southwest the other to the northeast. The dividing line at the very top of the hill was paved, becoming the most scenographic urban feature, Avenida Paulista, with rows of stately houses on both sides. The southwest slope comprised the posh area, planned by an English company engaged in selling overseas picturesque commercial versions of the original Garden City project of Ebenezer Howard. The houses were exotic models of colonial English bungalows mixed up with Spanish-Californian *estancias* architecture. Directly opposed to it, the northeast slope comprised the poor side of town, the so-called Liberdade District, reminiscent of the colonial area where slaves and cattle were kept, where the prisons, the pillory, the gallows, the humble chapels and the cemetery exclusive to Black people as well as the stables and the slaughterhouses were concentrated. The most fascinating thing about the house chosen by Levi-Strauss was that its façade was facing Avenida Paulista while the backyard was turned to Liberdade. Needless to say which side was Levi-Strauss's favourite.

Levi-Strauss's father was trained in the visual arts and was a professional photographer, keen on being supplied with excellent photographic equipment, which he shared with his son, whom he had instructed in his métier. Levi-Strauss therefore soon became a brilliant and accomplished photographer. Whenever his duties at the University of São Paulo permitted, he would venture with his cameras to the streets, always attracted towards the northeast slope, walking his way towards the historic centre of the city, with his interest concentrated particularly in the Liberdade District and the black communities. That's how he registered scenes of Carnival, street dances, funerary ceremonies and rituals of spirit possession being performed in the public areas of Liberdade. During holidays he would travel away from the city limits, looking for ancestral ceremonies

of *Mestiço* populations (Caipiras, people with mixed White and Native blood) in old colonial towns in the backlands of the State of São Paulo. After two years of teaching, he decided to take his greatest gamble: the expeditions to meet Native communities in the most remote lands of central Brazil, in the unknown, unmapped areas known as *o sertão* (uncharted backlands). Once he set off with his little expedition, anthropology in particular and the human sciences in general would never be the same again.

The incompatibility between Levi-Strauss and his Brazilian academic and intellectual colleagues couldn't have been greater. Brazilian intelligentsia, especially those involved with the creation of the University of São Paulo, were mesmerised by the lure of modernisation. The main ambition of São Paulo's elite was to become the Chicago of South America, the capital of industry, market, finance, science, new technologies and industrial arts. After the First World War, their cultural reference was still Europe, particularly France (not for too long though), but their business ideal was the USA. Within the very small ruling elite of the State of São Paulo, there was a tacit pride at having extinguished the last Native communities almost to oblivion in the State, as well as having alienated completely the former Black slaves and their descendents from the process of economic growth, giving preference to new masses of European and Asian immigrants. The richest state of the Brazilian Federation, the most powerful, the one with enough voting power to choose the next president on its own, the most advanced in terms of technologies, finance, education and culture, wanted to be seen as virtually Native-free, Black-free and Caipira-free.

It wouldn't be a surprise then, how shocked and outraged this *Paulista* elite felt when, after the Second World War, in 1955, Levi-Strauss (who had left Brazil in 1939) published his seminal book, *Tristes Tropiques*.

It soon became one of the key books of the twentieth century. It was entirely based on the experiences lived in São Paulo and the expeditions led by Levi-Strauss in the backlands of central Brazil. It changed not just the way anthropology was written and thought about, but more than anything else redefined the way Western society and culture were conceived. In his classic *Race and History* (1952), part of his works commissioned by the United Nations to denounce the legacy of racism and eugenics, he had already stated his beliefs in cultural diversity, stressing the riches, the wisdom and the beauty of many non-Western traditions. But it was in *Tristes Tropiques* that he dived deep into mythological thinking, ritual and rhythmic performances, and symbolic figurations as sources of alternative thinking and intuition, articulated in a kind of *bricolage* process, which deserved as much respect and appreciation as Western science and philosophy.

Coincidentally, by that same time in the 1950s and 1960s, a new generation of Brazilian artists and intellectuals came to the fore, who were decidedly suspicious of modernity and modernisation, denouncing its deleterious effect upon popular traditions, especially those preserved by the Native, the Black and the Caipira communities. Brazilian history was marked from its very origins by a sort of strong insularity. The Portuguese, always terrified by the danger of strong foreign powers threatening to invade and steal their richest colony, were resolutely averse to any form of contact with foreigners of any kind, who were forbidden to enter into the colony's territory. Both the Portuguese Crown and the Church were also afraid of the 'dangerous ideas', be they those of the Reformation or later on those of the Enlightenment and liberalism, infiltrating Brazilian minds, so the authorities did whatever was possible to prevent the spread of literacy within the colony. As a consequence,

free from foreign influences as well as from literary sources, different levels of cultural configurations took shape, some based on Native mythologies and rituals, some on Sub-Saharan African religion and rhythms, some on Caipira conflations of the many sides of *mestiçagem*. Adding to that, the kind of poor Portuguese peasants who came to be settlers in Brazil, mostly coming from the poorest areas of Trás-os-Montes in the north of Portugal, were adepts and survivors of the heresy of the Holy Spirit (the same group as the Alumbrados in Spain, the Albingensis in Provence and the Fraticelli in northern Italy, decimated by the Crusaders under the orders of the Papacy). The basic element in common between these different groups (Natives, Africans, Caipiras, Trasmontinos) was the fact that they believed in rituals by which they could incorporate and be possessed by Divine entities in their multiple manifestations, dispensing absolutely with the tutelage of the Catholic Church or any kind of permission from the Crown authorities.

That new generation of intellectuals and artists of the 1950s and 1960s just mentioned above was living and acting in the aftermath of the Second World War, under a wave of new technologies that invaded the daily life of the urban populations, defining new routines – mechanised, automatised, standardised – and moved by the dynamics of publicity and consumerism. However, they rejected the pressures to conform to this new planned and robotic world, looking forward to an alternative future. What then became the object of their deeper desires was that legacy of free-floating imaginaries, spontaneous, independent, rebellious, oriented towards the flows of the cycles of nature on the one hand and to the instinctual demands of the pulsating body on the other. That turned out to them to be the real treasure of Brazilian culture, a precious and fleeting heritage to be redeemed, to

be cherished as much as to be translated and updated according to the demands of an alternative culture in the growing metropolis. That was the living raw material which could give symbolic as much as corporeal, sensorial and communitarian substance to social and cultural projects oriented towards a more balanced, equalitarian, caring, playful and pleasurable post-affluent society.

The main target of the cultural criticism articulated by these new artists and intellectuals was the new rationality applied to urban planning models, based on the American concept of the sprawling suburbs, grid-like functional zoning, and the mainstream architectural trend of high towers and huge car parks called the International Style. Many of the most important Brazilian capital cities were reconfigured according to these new paradigms: São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Belo Horizonte. But its most iconic manifestation was the brand new capital of the federation, prodigiously built up entirely within five years, from 1956 to 1960 in the middle of the *sertão*, at the heart of uncharted central Brazil, the city of Brasília. That futuristic city, dubbed 'the capital of hope' and 'the most modern city in the world' by the proud authorities who built it, was actually the nemesis of those artists and intellectuals who got in tune with the popular imaginaries representing the liberating legacies of the *pensée sauvage*.

Brasília was therefore presented, not only to Brazilians but to the entire world, as the colossal display window of post-Second World War advanced capitalism, putting a definitive end to the last *terra ignota* and its respective barbarian populations and cultures. The new capital was connected to a plethora of express highways and airports penetrating deep in all directions of the territory as well as establishing international communications. Nothing else was supposed to escape

the overpowering spread of the new rationality of planning, economic exploitation of all available natural resources and the submission of all peoples, mostly the younger ones, to massive campaigns for the eradication of illiteracy and mandatory education according to a standardised national curriculum devised by the Ministry of Education and Culture in Brasília.

Since then there had been strong resistance from many rather isolated groups to this federal imperative to reduce many popular imaginaries to one single national culture. But historical change as it took its course, especially from the middle of the 1970s onwards, unleashed a dynamic that rendered this process virtually irreversible. A new wave of technological innovations evicted huge multitudes from the *sertão* and the rural areas, forcing them to internal migrations, which would inevitably end up by their settling into sub-human slums in the outskirts of the main capital cities. In fact Levi-Strauss in *Tristes Tropiques* saw it coming, the whole book sounding as a kind of bittersweet swan song. Communities dissolved, families broke up and were separated, social bonds disappeared, cultural traditions were lost. People alienated from their native backgrounds and deprived of their emotional ties turned to the new ascending media personalities, trusting their best hopes to populist politicians. When Levi-Strauss returned to Brazil for a very brief visit in the company of President Mitterand, in 1985, he couldn't even visit his beloved Liberdade, because the cab got stuck in a gigantic traffic jam. By leaving the country for the last time he declared, 'the Brazil that I knew doesn't exist anymore'.

The advantage of trying to figure out these complex historical changes from the perspective of the new generation of artists and intellectuals of the 1950s and 1960s is particularly interesting because they not only could understand quite well what was

going on, but they were also in a privileged position to consider what other historical alternatives were still available, conceivable or desirable. According to their view, the main source of the processes of cultural impoverishment was the institutionalisation of the Nation-State, with its ensuing pressure for educational reform and cultural homogenisation. In a sense, Europe underwent a similar process during the Renaissance, when the national languages were formalised according to fixed grammatical rules. This set the stage for the canonical ordering of cultural values from which national cultures were composed. Therefore, European Baroque was accordingly a period of centrifugal absorption of cultural production under the tutelage of Church and Crown.

In Brazil, however, moving in the opposite direction during a rather extended Baroque period that lasted from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, the presence of the Portuguese Catholic Church and the Crown authorities was so limited and concentrated in a few port cities, that all over the territory a centripetal effect occurred, a multiplicity of local cultural formations sprung up all over the territory and even across the borders, feeding themselves on Baroque symbols, images and motifs, but in fact switching them into something totally other. There was, for instance, a Guarany rebellious proto-republic to the south; a large Tupinambá community to the southeast; a Sertanejo-Caipira (by the way, the only variation of the Portuguese language that Levi-Strauss learned in Brazil) culture by the central plateau; a vast Congo-Kimbundo nation spreading from Rio de Janeiro to the adjoining areas; a Yorubá-Nagô-Hussuá nation on the northeast coast; a Tapuia-influenced culture in the pastoral backlands of the northeast; a huge Nheengatú federation in the Amazonian area, to mention but a few.

To no one's surprise, as soon as Brazilian independence was declared in 1822, one of the first measures taken by the brand new Nation-State was to make it illegal for anyone to speak any languages other than official Portuguese or other recognised European languages, under the penalty for transgressors of being brutally flogged and imprisoned. As a follow-up in the same direction a national Instituto Histórico e Geográfico was created, designed to rearrange all facts related to the social and cultural experiences lived in the former colony in direct connection to the new Nation-State. Whatever by any means concurred or was interpreted as concurring with the achievement of the independent Nation-State was deemed relevant, the rest inconsequential; whatever concurred with the unified Brazilian national culture was significant, the rest discarded as meaningless. In parallel a new Academia de Belas Artes (obviously based on the Academie des Beaux Arts of France) was inaugurated, declaring all versions of popular Baroque or Native arts as barbarian, despicable and shameful to the cultivated nation.

The artistic generation of the 1950s and 1960s on the other hand was the first to abandon the centrality of the Nation-State and Western civilisation as historical or cultural parameters according to which everything would have to be weighed and measured. Their aim was to dive deep into whatever remained of the legacies of the many popular imaginaries which thrived in colonial times. For them, therefore, there was no such thing as Brazil or to put it another way, there were many Brazils, within and without the actual Brazilian territory. These artists were keen on learning to think in mythological terms, to speak with gesture and body movement, to express feelings and emotions through colours, flavours and smells, to establish social and affective bonds through rhythm and sound, to put

play, pleasure and happiness at the centre of the social experience of daily life and to live in harmony with nature, natural cycles and all creatures.

There were many artists that could be mentioned as comprising this new 1950s and 1960s generation, representing different forms of artistic expression, from music to architecture, from sculpture to dance. For reasons of brevity in this paper, however, I will limit my references to four, certainly the four more prominent of them all: writers Guimarães Rosa and Clarice Lispector, as well as visual artists Hélio Oiticica and Arthur Bispo do Rosário. To be sure, there were very few things in common between these artists, each one of them living a life totally separated from the others. What they shared then, making them utterly relevant to the culture of the second half of the twentieth century, was an acute awareness of the intrinsically anti-human, anti-social and anti-environmental values which became the dominant credo of post-war culture. The prevalent obsession with consumerism, entertainment, geometric precision, planning, automation, fast cars and planes, domestic cleanliness and efficacy, and above all the idea that the American way of life was superior and therefore the only model destined to shape the future of the entire humanity and of the planet, was to them senseless and offensive.

Guimarães Rosa's fictional works are completely immersed into the oral narratives of the illiterate people of the *sertão* of north-central Brazil. His refined and very sophisticated prose tries to recreate oral traditions composed of mythic-poetic material coming from medieval and ancient Europe and Asia, as well as from Indigenous and African traditional sources. His stories refer to the Arthurian and Charlemagne legends, as well as to German, Slavic, Mongol, Indian and Trans-Himalayan mythologies. Certain mythological themes,

for instance that of the 'magic peacock' (*pavão misterioso*) or the 'enchanted bull' (*boi encantado*), exist today only in Siberia and in the *sertão* of Brazil. On the other hand, we have mythic-poetic elements coming from Congo and Yorubá sources, mixed with Tupi-Guaraní, Tamoio, Tapuia and Gê cultural legacies. All of these Guimarães Rosa would elaborate in a richly complex experimental prose that tries to conglomerate into writing the subtle and multifarious memories and linguistic layers of millenarian oral traditions.

Clarice Lispector, on the other hand, mixes these elements of Brazilian popular oral tradition with the legacy of linguistic wonder of the Hassidic and Kabala culture she brought from her inheritance of the Russian and Ukrainian *shtetls*. So fond of allegories and parables, like her spiritual brother Franz Kafka, she nonetheless transcends the basic Hassidic fundament of her fascination with the powers of the spoken and body language by the way that she engages the syncretic and ritualistic elements of Brazilian popular culture. Her treatment, for instance, of the quintessential theme of the relationship between the woman and the sea, that is to say the relationship between women and the source of life, refers as much to the Hebrew myth of Lilith, as to the Semitic representation of Ashtarté, as well as to the classical figure of Aphrodite and, of course, to the all-powerful Afro-Brazilian godly figure of Yemanjá. Her compassion for the rural population that was being crushed into massive eviction, followed by a life lived under sub-human conditions in urban slums, was represented by images of insects and wild animals being systematically exterminated by a social policy of prophylactic paranoia. It was hygiene turned into ethics, in the same sense as in the 1930s and 1940s eugenics was enforced as State policy.

Arthur Bispo do Rosário was a very poor Black and barely literate man, born in the backlands of the northeast area. Being detached from his family since his childhood, he would live mostly as a beggar until he was the age to enrol in the Brazilian navy. But he would soon be discharged from the navy on account of what was considered his mental instability. He tried for a while to have a career as a boxing fighter, but with very little success. So eventually he returned to begging in the streets of Rio de Janeiro, until at the age of 30 he was sent to a mental institution, where he would remain until the end of his life in 1989. There, solitary in his cell, he would start unpicking the old uniforms of other inmates, in order to make a series of astounding pieces of embroidery. He would translate into works of textile and embroidery all the wondrous mythic-poetic imaginary of the popular woodcuts prevalent all over the backlands of the northeast, as a visual support to its oral culture. It came all of a sudden from inside Bispo do Rosário, as a volcanic overflow of prodigious artistic expression that became incessant and ever surprising to his very last days. Bewildered by his talents, the medics of the institution would permit him, from time to time, to roam the streets of Rio collecting pieces of garbage, discarded objects, industrial waste, junk and rags, which he would meticulously elaborate into deeply symbolic objects, discriminating panels (which significantly he would call 'display windows' or 'archives'), banners, streamers, drapes, garments, cloaks, mantles and the most subtle and delicate compositions of textiles: colours, shapes, textures, knots, cords, fringes, studs, pendants and embroideries. Bispo do Rosário combined the uniforms of the mad and the garbage of the streets of Rio into one of the most sublime artistic treasures Brazil has ever had.

Although Hélio Oiticica was born into a middle-class family, he never had any kind of formal schooling or training in his entire life. That was because his family belonged to a long tradition of committed anarchists. He was therefore educated by members of his own family. But what a family that was! His mother was an accomplished musician, singer and piano player. His many aunts were choreographers, dancers, musicians and actresses. His older brother was an architect, his grandfather was a poet and playwright and his father was internationally acclaimed as both a biologist and an artistic photographer. Hélio Oiticica was therefore a man of many talents, so that when he decided to dedicate himself to the visual arts, he started by working with the abstractionist/concretist group of artists who counted as the avant-garde in Rio de Janeiro. The big surprise though came quite soon, when he decided to shape his art in accordance with the daily life and oral culture of the poorest layers of the population of Rio, living in the *favela* slums and in the dire settlements spread across the outskirts of the city.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, as you may remember, the city was being modernised in line with the new standards of American urban planning and International Style architecture. For the same reasons, huge multitudes of people from the rural areas were being evicted from their native regions, having no alternative but to look for jobs in metropolitan areas. To face this massive invasion, the authorities of Rio were relying on the police and repressive forces to keep these undesirable people from spoiling their beautifully refashioned scenario. Hélio Oiticica knew exactly what he was doing. By living and getting integrated with people in the *favelas*, to the point of becoming one of the most acclaimed samba dancers of Rio, as a member of the legendary Mangueira School of Samba, he started shaping a brand new situational art. His aim was to learn and express the ingenious manners by

which these segregated people were re-inventing, every day and in every way, a relentless praxis of resilience, capable of circumventing the repressive apparatus of the authorities, at the same time that they would be celebrating their own cultural values of vitality, sensuality and spirituality. That was the source of the *parangolés* of Hélio: a kind of elaborate fancy dress, each person could make their own, full of different textiles, plastics, meshes, nets, embroideries, stamps and written messages, destined at the same time for the public and collective dance of samba and for the display of messages of protest against the authorities, as well as pleas for civil rights and for the enfranchisement of people. Thus art would entail a ludic interplay between daily life, politics and popular festival. When Hélio tried to show the *parangolé* at the Museum of Modern Art, he was confronted and expelled by the Director along with his samba dancing friends. Nonchalantly, Hélio took his entire group to the external gardens of the Museum, at the very heart of the newly beautified Flamengo Park and danced the *parangolé* all night long under the lights of torches brought by his friends. That was one of the most legendary and unforgettable parties that Rio has ever had. After that, Hélio had to flee, living a political exile that would last almost to his death in 1980.

So Levi-Strauss's basic aim in *Tristes Tropiques* – to affirm the originality, richness and rather generous character of the diverse Brazilian indigenous and popular culture – was taken to a sublime dimension, as well as to a very articulated expression, by the artists of the 1950s and 1960s generation. Apart from the disjointed heyday of the baroque period, since the inception of the Nation-State, never before had indigenous and popular culture played such a seminal role in the highest artistic output in the country. Although these artists were generally reviewed in Brazil in cold or lukewarm terms by critics trained

according to American academic criticism, they were becoming highly praised by some of the most decisive critical voices in North and Latin America, as well as in Europe. The stream of critical debate seemed at long last to be turning to their favour. Paradoxically, therefore, they couldn't predict it, but from the last decades of the twentieth century onwards, history took a surprising turn, undermining the role and powers of Nation-States at the same time that global and local interactions were reinforced. Perhaps then, their best hopes and dreams are not lost at all. Perhaps now, more than ever, we could learn with them that the moment has come when we shall say good-bye Brazil, hello Brazils.

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3

China in Search of Harmony

Shu Sunyan

'The idea of a Harmonious Society will be China's biggest contribution to humanity.'

So said a senior Chinese minister, addressing a Cambridge University audience recently. He seemed to place it above our four great inventions – paper, gunpowder, printing and the compass. And right now China is gripped by Harmonious Society mania. It is on the lips of every Party official, in every single government document and on the billboards of every Chinese city, town and village. It is in the air we breathe, in the water we drink, in the food we eat, and in the dreams we dream.

Apparently the Communist utopia is no more, and a Harmonious Society is now China's ultimate goal. Besides, a harmonious China would pose no threat to the world.

This idea seems nothing but extraordinary at first sight, coming from the country with the world's longest history of authoritarian rule. And it comes at a time when many people – in China and overseas – believe that this is the dawn of a new China, and the Chinese themselves should be joyful and ready to take part. After all, the Chinese characters for 'democracy' (民主) mean 'putting the people in charge', just like the Greek original.

So the big question is, what is meant by a Harmonious Society? Has China come up with something even better than Fukuyama's End of History?

The Chinese government thinks so, and there is no shortage of scholars desperately trying to prove that harmony has long been at the heart of Chinese philosophy and political thought. *The Book of Changes*, one of our earliest written books, dating back 2500 years, is all about harmony between man and nature. It centres on the concept of *yin* and *yang*, the balance of opposites – moon and sun, night and day, heaven and earth, men and women. '*Yin* and *yang* are the way of the world,' says *The Book of Changes*. With harmony between men, politics will be unnecessary – everyone will have the same goals; with harmony in the family, society will be prosperous; with harmony between states, there will be peace on earth.

Two and half millennia on, *The Book of Changes* is still the work mostly frequently consulted when the Chinese want their fortunes told. And the concept of harmony is deeply rooted in popular Chinese culture, commonly finding expression in our idioms. 'Harmony brings money', or 'we might both prosper if we live in harmony' – that is enough to stop anyone fighting. Even, after a long winter, 'a spring breeze brings the air of harmony'. To describe an amicable person, we would say, 'He is all harmony'. And when we describe a successful person, we say he has three harmonies: heaven is on his side, i.e. he has the right timing; earth is on his side, i.e. he is in the right place; and he has the support of his fellow men. Being in the right place at the right time is important, but nowhere near as important as the harmony of people. For every Chinese who wants to get somewhere in the world, this is the first precept to learn.

Harmony between heaven, earth and men is most clearly and eloquently expressed by Laozi in his *Daode Jing, The Book of the Way*. The Way is the law of nature, the balance of *yin* and *yang*, which gives rise to everything. Understanding this law of nature is called

virtue. Once we understand it, we are at one with nature; and the relationship between men should be no different. Therefore Laozi advocates a Utopia where men should also follow his vaguely defined law of nature, which he calls 'the Way'. 'Returning to nature is the Way. Ignorance of it will lead to wanton action and disaster. But knowledge of this eternity will enable one to be tolerant, fair and unselfish. A man with these qualities will be the leader who understands the law of heaven and earth, and who rules as just and fair-minded as heaven is all encompassing of everything under the sun. This is close to the Way. With the guidance of the Way, peace and stability, longevity and eternity will prevail.'

Laozi's idea of harmony was too daring for the Chinese rulers, although it is always somewhere to retreat for the Chinese – personal refinement, detachment and consolation for those who perhaps are not so successful. Confucius, a contemporary of Laozi, was more influential. Born in 551 BC, when China was a collection of rival and unruly warring states, Confucius was horrified by the violence and chaos he saw. He roamed the warring states to preach moderation and restraint. *The Middle Way*, one of the Confucian classics, gives especial importance to achieving harmony through balance and moderation. 'With this harmony, heaven and earth will do what they are supposed to do, and everything will prosper.' Dong Zhongshu, the man who revived Confucianism, put it unambiguously: 'Not too tough, not too soft, this is the best government. If this is not the Middle Way, what is? Those who can govern by the Middle Way, their virtues will spread. Those who can look after themselves this way will enjoy extreme longevity.'

But even if it could be argued that harmony was this strong in the Confucian tradition, it had all but vanished 700 years after his death, when he was elevated to be

the supreme teacher of the nation. His thoughts were made the only ideology of the day, and remained so for the next two thousand years. If there was one book that any educated Chinese read, it was *The Analects*, the sayings of Confucius compiled by his students. But in truth it was not harmony, but order that was the catchword for Confucius. And the essence of this Confucianism is *li*, ritual. If society can be organised according to *li* so that everyone knows their place and behaves appropriately, there will be order, which is the Confucian term for 'harmony'. The emperor should be benevolent, the officials loyal, the children filial, the father kind, and women chaste. So benevolence, loyalty, filial duty and chastity were deemed to be the essential Confucian, and therefore Chinese, qualities for two thousand years, providing an ethical basis for a strong and stable government.

In this hierarchical ordering of society, the emperor had a special role, as the fulcrum connecting heaven and earth; as such his position was central to underpinning Chinese society. It was in the emperor's interest to make sure that Confucianism was not just a set of philosophical thoughts but social, moral and political obligations, permeating every single aspect of Chinese culture and society. It became the highest principle of imperial China and could not be broken, like a law of nature. If anyone stepped out of line, they could expect condemnation or ostracism; infringing the moral code incurred heavier punishment than breaking the law. With everything laid out so clearly, no wonder the Chinese used to say, 'With half a copy of *The Analects*, the emperor could rule the world.'

This hierarchical order is not what Confucius meant by harmony, some scholars argue. They have drawn attention to the original meaning of the Chinese characters for harmony. They refer to the vibrations of an instrument used as a tuning fork. The implication

was that music is composed of different voices, each sounding its correct note. If everyone sings the same note, that is unison, not harmony. Of course they found support for this liberal interpretation in *The Analects*: 'Gentlemen can maintain harmony even if they disagree; unrefined souls cannot, whatever they may say.'

Sadly unison, not harmony, has been the rule throughout China's long history. The first emperor who unified China in the second century AD decreed that all roads should have the same width and that all coins, weights and measures should be the same everywhere. And everyone had to have the same thoughts. Most books from previous times were burnt; scholars who dared to express different opinions were buried alive. Fast forward to the twentieth century: the last emperor abdicated in 1911, but in a few decades Mao became a new emperor in all but name. He even boasted that the first emperor buried only 460 scholars, while he sent over one million intellectuals to labour camp. They were encouraged to speak their minds in 1957, but when they did, he could not bear the criticism. His *Little Red Book* was all you could have on your shelf in the decade of the Cultural Revolution – a decade during which the Red Guards burnt nearly all the existing copies of the classics, including Confucius's.

In between the first and the last emperor, unison rather than harmony was made possible by another unique Chinese invention, the Imperial Exam. Seeing how effective Confucianism was in providing an ethical basis for a strong and stable government, the imperial rulers decided to use it as the essential criteria for selecting officials to run the country. Such is the origin of the Imperial Exam. Every three years the exam took place at district, provincial and national level in the Confucian Hall in every town and city in the country. Successful candidates went up to the next level, and the final winners

were rewarded by the emperor to become the elite who ran the country at every level. Although the content of the exams varied throughout the ages, just Four Books and Five Classics, all attributed to Confucius and his disciples, were the core of the exams, and, in the last 700 years, their only content. Winning the Imperial Exam and holding office became the goal of almost every Chinese scholar, and rote learning of the Confucian classics was fundamental to success in the exams. Texts of over 400,000 characters had to be thoroughly memorised if a candidate was to have any hope of success, even at the district level. This meant that the local elites and ambitious would-be members of those elites across the whole of China were taught with the same values to be dedicated believers in Confucianism.

No other country in the world allowed itself to be ruled by bureaucrats selected on such a strict and restrictive basis. Not only that, for 400 years, these works had to be interpreted according to a single source, a commentary by the fifteenth-century Zhu Xi, whose most famous remark was 'Preserve the heavenly order and annihilate all human desires'. Even that was not enough. Each answer had to have the same number of paragraphs (eight), the same length – 700 characters – and the same prescribed form for the beginning, middle and end. The Imperial Exam may have kept China as the world's longest lasting continuous civilisation – but how stifling, and at what a cost.

The Confucian grip on Chinese art, literature, music and culture was no less complete. Calligraphy, literature, music and painting had always been regarded as the required qualities of the educated elites, rather than separate disciplines. They were partly what made them *junzi*, men of integrity, which is the Confucian ideal of a morally correct person. In them Confucianism found its most eloquent and powerful advocates throughout history, for they contributed

the core of China's literary and artistic outpouring. Some of the most accomplished calligraphers, poets, painters, novelists and musicians were also high officials and prime ministers who had come top in the Imperial Exam. Even today, we can admire their writings carved on stone steles in temples, monasteries and imperial burial grounds. But they normally created their best works of literary and artistic merit after they were sent into exile for taking initiatives, speaking their minds or criticising certain government policies – the Confucian taboos. It was no coincidence that the peaks of artistic creativity in Chinese history were in the fifth, the tenth and the fourteenth centuries when China was in total chaos from uprisings or changes of dynasty, or when China was ruled by the nomadic people from the north, as during Chinggis Khan's conquest of China. During those times, the Confucian grip was broken and the educated elites were freer to think beyond their Imperial Exams and the Confucian orthodoxy. But these times were few and far between in Chinese history. For most of the time, Confucianism reigned supreme.

Yet it is this very Confucianism that the Communist Party has made the core of its harmonious society. A Confucius mania is stalking the land. Confucian classics are prominently displayed in bookshops; Confucian MBA courses for the new rich are mushrooming; a blockbuster film on Confucius's life and teaching, starring the famous actor Fat Chow from *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, is guaranteed a massive audience. *Confucius from the Heart* by Yu Dan, a professor of Media Studies in Beijing, has had a record ten million sales in China. She tells us how Confucianism is relevant to the modern world and can make us happy. 'The higher state requires that a person must not only accept poverty peaceably... they must also be possessed of a calm, clear inner happiness, the kind

of happiness that cannot be taken away by a life of poverty.' Or 'true peace and stability come from within, from an acceptance of those that govern us' – surely this is music to the government's ears.

It is not enough that China relearns the Confucian lessons. The world has to do so too. To that end the government is opening Confucius Institutes around the globe, like the branches of the Alliance Française, the Goethe Institutes or the British Council. Of course it helped when a Nobel physics laureate announced that 'If humanity wants to survive in the twenty-first century, it must draw from the wisdom of Confucius 25 centuries ago'.

This is not the Confucius I grew up to know. In 1974, as a Red Pioneer in primary school, I joined a nation-wide campaign against Confucius. I never knew of his existence until then and it puzzled me why he had suddenly become the enemy of the people two and half thousand years after his death. The headmaster told us that Confucius had wanted to bring back slavery and his *Analects* were the manifesto of his reactionary scheme, 'full of poison, complete nonsense, and totally unreasonable'. 'Restrain yourself and comply with rituals – that is benevolence,' Confucius told his disciples. How ridiculous. This was during the Cultural Revolution when Mao called on the Red Guards to rebel and turn everything upside down. To prove their loyalty to Mao, the Red Guards from Beijing Teachers' University ransacked the cemetery where Confucius, all his 72 direct descendants and over 100,000 blood relatives have been buried for the past two and half millennia. They smashed the stone steles bearing the inscriptions of successive emperors who came to pay their homage. They blew up the tombs and stole all the valuables to fund their revolutionary activities, leaving the skeletons hanging on poles. To

desecrate an ancestor's tomb is the most heinous of crimes for the Chinese, and that was just what was done to Confucius.

We did nothing so daring in our school. The Confucian temple in our city – there used to be one in every Chinese city and town – had already been ransacked at the height of the Cultural Revolution. But we had to join in – it was simply not good enough to sit there and listen to the teachers listing Confucius's crimes. So I wrote a paragraph every week to put on wall posters, finding fault with a saying of Confucius, mostly from the *Analects*. The trouble was the *Analects* were in classical Chinese and we had no idea what the words meant (classical Chinese is like English before Chaucer). So the teacher had to tell us what to say. One criticism is still clear in my head to this day. An important thought of Confucius was that 'everyone should be educated'. But the teacher told us that he charged the students ten slices of dried beef for teaching them. How could the poor afford it? Under Communism, children of peasants and workers could all go to school. Down with Confucius! I ended every essay with this declaration.

This was not the first attack on Confucius in our history. In 1919 at the end of the First World War, the May 4th Movement completely rejected China's Confucian tradition. The movement was an angry response to the Versailles Treaty, which gave the German concession zones on Chinese territory to another imperialist power, Japan, despite China's having fought alongside the Allies during the war. This seemed the final insult after the British gunboats which forced their way into China, the Opium War, the unequal treaties, and the division of China into interest zones run by warlords bankrolled by all the Western powers. How had China fallen so far, become so weak?

The Emperor could not be blamed; he had abdicated in 1911. It must have been Confucianism which had dominated China for so long.

A key figure in the May 4th Movement was Lu Xun, the most famous writer in modern China and the most uncompromising critic of Confucianism. He was a trainee doctor but decided to give it up. 'Medical science was not so important after all... The most important thing was to change their spirit, and since at that time I felt that literature was the best means to this end, I decided to promote a literary movement.' He tried to prescribe what he thought would be the cure for the ills of society and the lethargic mentality of the people.

Diary of a Madman is Lu Xun's most well-known story. It tells of an unnamed man slipping into madness. He came to believe that his fellow-Chinese were all cannibals. 'It has only just dawned on me that all these years I have been living in a place where for four thousand years human flesh has been eaten.' He looks up the history of cannibalism in history books, but all he finds are the two phrases, 'Confucian virtue and morality' and 'cannibalism'. This is reminiscent of another fierce critic of the Confucian tradition, Danzhen of the Qing Dynasty: 'The so-called moralists are no different from brutal legalists. While the latter kill by law, Confucianism kills by morality.' In Chinese history, cannibalism implies a society whose values have lost all morality, and for Lu Xun to assault the entire basis of Chinese tradition using this metaphor was a powerful indictment indeed.

Lu Xun and the May 4th Movement also directed a scathing attack on the treatment of women in the Confucian tradition. Women had their feet bound so they could find a husband, but it also made them unable to escape from arranged marriages. Later on a woman's position became so extreme that if she so much as

glanced at another man, she was considered to have shamed the family and should blind herself or even commit suicide. Then her clan would erect a chastity arch for her, many of which still stand in towns and villages across China. In one county alone in Anhui Province along the Yangtze River, over 65,000 women were commemorated this way.

The Movement uncompromisingly rejected China's Confucian tradition. In its place they called for science and democracy. Only Dr Science and Dr Democracy could cure the ills of China so that it could be rejuvenated and take on the Western powers on their own terms. They were unwilling to accept the norms and assumptions of Confucian culture. So instead of the veneration of old age and wisdom, they praised youth and individualism. The May 4th Movement also campaigned to change the language that had always been the preserve of the elite, and use 'plain language', colloquial Chinese as it was spoken by ordinary people. On the central Confucian virtue of moderation, Lu Xun had this withering verdict: 'Moderation was merely a codeword for tolerance of abuse and turning a blind eye to corruption.' Other values, such as freedom, liberty and the rule of law, were also hotly debated. 'Human rights and science are the two pillars of modernity,' declared Chen Duxiu, the founding father of the Chinese Communist Party. It is worth noting that the May 4th Movement was a crucial catalyst in the birth of the Chinese Communist Party, and science and democracy were very much part of the vocabulary of the early Communists, including Mao.

China's search for modernity in the twentieth century has been long and arduous, full of struggle and bloodshed, from 4 May 1919 to the students' movement in 1989 when the government opened fire on its own people. We have learned how difficult and painful

reform can be – republicanism, nationalism, Fascism and Communism each seem to have brought more suffering to the Chinese. Now we are at a crucial juncture again. Chinese economic reform has been with us for 30 years. Great gains have come, but we also see corruption at every level, cut-throat competition, extreme concentration of power in the Communist Party, huge unemployment, absent social services, environmental decay, a mounting gap between the rich and the poor, the hinterland and the coastal provinces, and the city and the countryside, and glaring limitations of the rule of law – an intervention by the Communist Party secretary can easily overturn a court's verdict. People feel uncared for and no one gives a damn. They are puzzled, confused and angered. When they look for solace they find the much discussed 'spiritual vacuum'. Chinese society is on the brink of major upheaval. It is in desperate need of harmony.

The Harmonious Society is a commendable ideal not only for China, but for any society. It could even be the ultimate goal for mankind. The question is: how is China going to get there? Surely Confucianism, with its skewed emphasis on hierarchical order and stability based on obedience, is unlikely to lead us away from the rule of men to the rule of law, and ultimately the harmonious society we all seek. As we say in Chinese, it is a bit like 'looking for fish on the roof'.

Perhaps we could start by looking again at the Chinese characters for harmony (和谐) – they may mean 'tuning instrument' but the first character actually signifies 'rice' and 'mouth', the second 'speak' and 'each'. This can be simply construed as saying everyone must have enough to eat and everyone must be able to speak their mind – just like Roosevelt's freedom from want and freedom from fear, the basic human rights. We seem

to have had the right idea long ago. As China is leaving want behind, is freedom from fear too much to hope for, to ask for?

What if Chinese people begin to take the concepts of the Harmonious Society seriously, as they surely will? If they are genuinely allowed to speak their minds and make their voices heard, as our ancestors told us to do when they devised the characters for harmony more than three thousand years ago, we are already a step closer to the harmonious society.

Sun Shuyun is a writer and filmmaker who has directed and worked on numerous BBC and Channel 4 programmes such as *The Great Wall*, *People's Century* and *The First Emperor*. Hoping to promote a better understanding of China in the West through her films and writing, her five-part documentary series *A Year in Tibet* and book have appeared in more than 40 countries.

4

Goodbye Orient: Resisting Reforms in the Islamic World

Hamed Abdel-Samad

When a man does not know what harbour he is making for, no wind is the right wind.

Francis Bacon

Talking about the future of the Islamic World is just like talking about climate change or the expansion of the universe: no matter how much reliable research we have about them, we cannot be free from speculation, belief or even superstition. No matter how much we know about the history of Islam and the demographic statistics of the Islamic World today, we still cannot anticipate which developments to expect from this part of the world in the coming decades. The only thing we can assume to know is this: there are considerable processes of dissolve and even decay within the traditional structures in large parts of the Muslim World. Rigid traditional authorities are losing both power and legitimacy, leaving behind them a huge vacuum, which has not been replaced or filled yet by alternative structures. Iran is one example; Egypt is another where we notice growing individualisation processes, with millions of young people losing trust in older structures and searching for individual solutions for themselves. Walking along the streets of Cairo, everyone can feel a strong youth energy searching for new structures. Yet this energy is seldom invested in or canalised. From the laws of physics we learn that

non-canalised energy ends up in uncontrollable chaos. The law of entropy, though, does not exclude a system's capacity for spontaneous change.

If you are a pessimist, you could compare larger parts of the Islamic world today to the *Titanic* a short time before its legendary sinking, and you might discover several parallels between the two. You will see the overcrowded ship standing lonely and broken in the middle of the cold ocean of modernity and wondering where rescue will come from. The third-class passengers are still asleep downstairs and know nothing about the coming catastrophe. Rich people try to save themselves in the few rescue boats available on board. Religious leaders do not get tired of repeating the same hope-giving mantras. Disorientation, anarchy and self-justification are dominating. The so-called Islam-Reformers might remind you of the three musicians who kept playing until the ship went down, to communicate the illusion of normality.

You might discover one single difference between the *Titanic* and the Islamic world. You will see that the Islamic ship was old and full of holes from the moment it entered the ocean, even though many Muslims believed it was unsinkable. The heavy ship drifted many centuries with no compass and no harbour of destination. No heavy clash, but a slight friction with an iceberg called modernity was enough to throw it off its balance. Since then, large parts of the Islamic World seem to have fallen into a deep lethargy that they cannot overcome.

If you are a pessimist, you might re-read Oswald Spengler's book about the decline of the West and apply his thesis to the Islamic World. During World War I, Spengler saw European culture declining in favour of a cold, overurbanized civilization. He saw all areas of life becoming artificial and materialistic. The European soul was losing its fire, fleeing to classicism. The German

anthropologist looks at the world as history not as nature, and sees cultures governed by the cycle of time (youth, growth, maturity, decay) – a view that he might have copied from the Tunisian historian of the 14th century, Ibn Khaldun. You might agree with the Syrian poet, Adonis, who sees Arab culture already in the final stage of decay, predicting its irreversible downfall soon. He argues that Arab culture has already passed its zenith and has ceased to offer any civilizational contribution to humanity and therefore does not deserve to exist anymore. Considering the marginal Arab modern contributions in technology, science and art to the world heritage, one might not find it difficult to agree with Adonis.

You might agree with Dan Diner's *Lost in the Sacred. Why the Muslim World Stood Still*. After leading in the fields of science, philosophy and medicine, the Muslim World lost its momentum because of the nature of the sacred which penetrates all aspects of the life of a Muslim. The sacred in Islam, according to Diner, suspends the acceleration of social time, hinders change, and circumvents secularisation and modernity. Diner sees the time-suspending impact of Arabic as a sacred language as one of the key reasons for stagnation in the Arab World.

If you are an optimist, you will prefer to believe in the estimations of Immanuel Todd and Youssef Courbage who reach the conclusion that Islam will go through an accelerated process of modernisation very soon. In their book, *Le rendez-vous des civilisations*, Todd and Courbage study the demography of the Muslim world and figure out that the increase in literacy among women leads to a decline in the number of children, which will lead to new dynamics and social mobility. They see fundamentalism not as a sign of the omnipotence of religion, but as a nervous reaction towards the increasing secularisation of the societies.

In this paper, I will not accumulate empirical facts and statistics, but will try to offer an intuitive, semi-sociological estimation of the situation in Egypt as a trendsetter in the Islamic World when it comes to both modernisation and radicalisation. I will discuss elements in Egyptian society that resist reforms and lead to stagnation. The Islamic image of God, the understanding of hierarchy and political authority, as well as the position of women and the concept of honour, will be related to the objectives of education in Egypt to get a larger picture of how change is vehemently resisted.

Disarming history

One of my favourite places in the city of Munich, where I live, is the Park of the Olympic Village where the Olympic Games took place in the summer of 1972. Especially, the so-called 'Olympia-Berg' has a strong symbolic character for me. It is not a real mountain, but a small hill less than 100 metres high over an area of about 1,000 metres. It is a beautiful green hill with many roads leading to the top, where visitors to the Park can enjoy a beautiful panoramic view over the whole city. But the special thing about this hill is not only the nice panorama, but also the story behind the construction of the hill. It is an artificial hill built from the rubble of the houses of Munich destroyed during World War II.

I have been reading many definitions of 'Civilisation' recently, none of which really satisfied me, as most of those definitions connect civilisation to urbanism, developed systems of transportation, writing and standards of measurement. Most of those definitions refer to the material achievement of a group of people, but neglect their state of mind, their self-image and image of the other, which for me are the core of any civilisation.

Standing on the top of the Olympia-Berg, I was able to construct my own understanding of civilisation as 'the ability to transform something ugly into something aesthetic, and the ability to disarm history'. The German people could have spent years crying over the ruins of Berlin, Munich, Dresden and Hamburg, complaining about the atrocities of the Allies. Instead, they were clever enough to recognise that crying over spilled milk does not help. They decided to rebuild their country with the help of their former enemies. Germans did not lack pride or patriotism, but they recognised that a part of their misery was self-made; therefore they saw that the culture of resistance was not the right answer. Large parts of the Islamic World, in contrast, are still feeling the bitterness of defeat and humiliation towards the West. When asked about the reasons for the backwardness of Islamic culture and lack of reform, many Muslims still identify colonialism and the influence of the West as the main reasons.

Going down the hill I saw many people, young and old, men and women, jogging, Nordic-walking, biking or simply taking a walk. Of course some inactive, likely jobless people, that the welfare society can still afford, were also hanging around enjoying their beer. As I came down to the park I saw a young, likely Gulf-Arab family coming towards me. The husband and his wife, in their mid-thirties, were walking slowly, their East Asian maid behind them, pushing a baby carriage. The husband was watching the hips of a young German lady passing him, the wife, in the traditional black gown and veil, was looking with resentment at the object of pleasure of her husband. She said nothing to him, but turned to her maid and started shouting at her without a clear reason.

No doubt such a situation could happen with any other family whether Muslim or not, but still it tells us a lot about the dynamics of a Muslim family and its triple

attitude towards the West (fascination, scepticism and bitterness). It tells us much about the concept of modesty and the limits of Islamic morality.

The Olympia-Berg is, in general, a nice metaphor for cultural transformation – a process that the Islamic World is missing when it deals its own history. Reading school History textbooks in Egypt, for instance, we discover a clear split between a glorified history of Egypt and the Arab World on the one hand and an insistence on the role of the victim on the other. Muslims are depicted as the creators of a great culture that led the world for centuries before it lost influence because of Western aggression. History is looked at as a continuity of linear development: Islamic dominance and progress, then the Crusades, colonialism and Israel, which came to stop this glory through a global conspiracy against Islam. These textbooks are not telling students anything about the homemade problems and mistakes that led the Islamic culture to decline. Students are injected with mistrust and subliminal hostility towards everything Western. This state of mind determines the attitude of many Muslim countries towards modernity and science. Instead, a culture of honour and resistance is implanted into the minds of the students – a culture which I hold responsible for the backwardness of many Arab countries today.

A genuine feeling of helplessness and humiliation determines the relation of the Islamic World to the West. This sense of material inferiority is being compensated for by a sense of moral supremacy and dreams of omnipotence. This strange mixture leads to a real paranoia that dominates the educational systems in many Arab countries.

For generations, the Islamic World has been nourishing a feeling of bitterness and powerlessness towards the West. As Napoleon landed with his fleet in

Alexandria in the year 1798, an asymmetric struggle started between a technically superior West and a culture caught in traditional Islamic thinking. The emergence of the 'Other' made Egyptians aware of their weaknesses. Traumatic experiences of colonialism and exploitation were engraved in the collective memory of Egypt and increased this gap between Islam and the West. The Syrian philosopher Georg Tarabishi calls this asymmetric meeting 'an anthropological injury' of the Islamic World – a chronic feeling of humiliation that still persists. A psychological distance towards the West and its thoughts has been the result of that.

But it would be a naïve simplification to believe that reforms in the Islamic World were not pushed forward only because of colonialism and hostility of the West. The Islamic understanding of innovation and the rigid authorities could also be considered responsible for the failure of modernisation. The Arab word for modernity is *hadatha*. It is semantically related to the word *muhdatha*, or 'something new', which has very bad connotations in Islamic religious discourse. The prophet Mohamed once said: 'The worst among things is the *muhdatha*, for every *muhdatha* is an invention, and every invention leads to confusion, and every confusion ends up in hell.' Even though the word *muhdatha*, as mentioned by the prophet, is meant in the first place as 'renewal of religious rituals', it is still building a psychological barrier towards any kind of renewal. If we compare the Arabic expression for modernity with the Japanese one, we might recognise the difference in attitude towards innovation. The Japanese word for modernity is *bunmei kaaika* (文明開化), which reads as 'to open up towards civilisation'. The process of modernisation in Japan was called 'Leaving Asia and going to Europe'. Fukuzawa Yukichi, a prominent political theorist of the Meiji period wrote an essay called 'Datsu a ron' (Goodbye Asia) in 1885, to explain to Japanese

people that the wind of Westernisation was blowing, carrying a chance for Japanese people to taste the fruits of civilisation or make the choice to be left behind in their destiny. Rationality, and accepting the spirit of the time, helped Japan to become a major player in the twentieth century, without being necessarily separated from its own tradition.

Insisting on the past and adhering to the tribal culture of honour was the choice of major parts of the Arab World. Almost all attempts at modernising religious thinking ended up losing against an irreconcilable religious orthodoxy. Even in the so-called golden time of Islamic civilisation (eighth to twelfth centuries), when science and philosophy flourished, a bitter fight between rational and religious thinking was taking place which ended with the victory of orthodox thinking. Since then, no more processes took place that we might call comprehensive reform. Of course, there have been now and then some brilliant thinkers and single attempts to refresh Arab thinking, but they were like small rivers in the desert that dried up in the sand, and could never come together to be a strong stream grabbing everything in its way in an irreversible process called enlightenment.

No doubt the aggressive power-politics of the West during and after the colonial time led to a huge gap between the West and the Islamic World, but I see another decisive reason for the chronic feeling of humiliation perceived by Muslims. The core for me is the Muslim self-image. Muslims still look at themselves as carriers of a high culture with a mission for humanity. They cannot come to terms with the fact that they lost power a long time ago and that they themselves are to blame for that. 'Islam could not bear losing power'; this is how the French writer Abdelwahab Meddeb puts it in his book *La Maladie d'Islam*. This leads to a tense reading of history as an explosive continuum that witnesses the

glory of Islamic culture and the continuous aggression of the West through the Crusades, colonialism, war in Afghanistan and Iraq. This might explain why many Muslims react nervously and angrily when criticism of Islam comes from the West. The reactions to the Mohamed cartoons, the speech of Pope Benedict XIV in Regensburg about Islam and violence, and the ban of minarets in Switzerland are some examples of that. Even slight incidents, like that of a British teacher in Sudan who called her teddy bear Mohamed, or a German soccer team which says in its song 'Mohamed was a prophet who knew nothing about soccer', were enough to inflame the rage of many Muslims and occupy Arab media for days. All of these events are often put in one line with the Crusades and colonialism to prove that the West is nothing but one mass that is determined to destroy Islam.

Under this resentment, many Muslims isolate themselves from the world and barricade themselves behind an exclusive, inflexible identity. Their technological and material inferiority towards the West is often compensated for by a sense of religious arrogance that looks down at Westerners as dehumanised unbelievers.

Besides, the majority of young people in many Muslim countries are unsatisfied with the economic and political situation in their countries. The rulers, who are in most cases despotic monarchs or military generals, feel the anger of the frustrated masses and distract them from time to time with an outside enemy. Controlled demonstrations and tirades of hatred against the West help the masses in Egypt and elsewhere to get rid of their energy, so that they refrain from protesting against the ruler.

Wrong canalisation of energy is one of the key reasons for stagnation in Egypt. More than 70 per cent of Egyptians are under the age of 30. Many of them do

not have a permanent job and cannot afford to run an independent household until the age of 30. According to Islamic morality no sexual relations are permitted outside marriage. That means that the majority of Egyptians are living in a state of sexual emergency. This sexual suppression is a part of a code which is pre-Islamic. The whole concept of hierarchy and honour is based on the idea of continuity and therefore resists any changes or questioning. 'Support your brother, no matter if he is right or wrong' is the core principle in Arab tribal culture. Honour means keeping the genealogical family line and being able to recite the names of one's ancestors and their great deeds. Only the woman can guarantee that no 'strange blood' comes into the tribe; therefore she should be watched and controlled by strict moral laws, by the veil and by FGM (female genital mutilation). No surprise that the Arabic word for 'civil war' and the one for 'seduction by a woman' are one and the same (*fitna*). In the Qur'an it is written down, '*Fitna* is worse than killing'.

Therefore everything new is often seen as a potential for *fitna*, a danger for continuity and for saving honour. Any questioning from inside could be understood as treason; any criticism from outside is often seen as a declaration of war. But there can be no progress without self-criticism and no enlightenment without breaking taboos.

Even in the twenty-first century the majority of young people, male and female, are still caught in the trap of strict moral codes which are against the nature of human beings. Sexual frustration might be seen as one of the key reasons for the radicalisation of young Muslims in Egypt. While their society gives them the impression that they are not needed, radical Islamic groups give young people the feeling of being grown-ups and members of the army of Allah. They restore for

them the old Islamic utopia with the dreams of milk and honey. Hatred against the West, against the unbelievers and against religious minorities in Egypt is a main part of the discourses of these religious groups.

The Islamic image of God and the unquestionable authority

Since its birth, Islam has tried to dissolve the old Arab understanding of belonging based on blood. The prophet Mohamed dreamed of a community based on belief, not on ethnic belonging and he was proud of having all skin colours and ethnic backgrounds among his first followers. But he recognised very soon that he could not unify Arabia without appealing to Arab honour and pride. To spread his message, he had to reconcile monotheistic thoughts inspired by Judaism and Christianity with old Arab pagan traditions, such as the rituals of pilgrimage to Mecca. He also relied on his tribe and made alliances based on ethnic backgrounds to defeat his enemies. The Islamic image of God therefore does not deviate much from the concept of the tribe leader. God in Islam is a strong patriarch elevated above the community. He never negotiates, only dictates. He watches human beings like big brother, punishes them for their mistakes, but cannot be questioned or criticised. He is frequently angry and jealous and does not allow any Gods beside himself. Taking a closer look at the history of authority in Islam, one can easily recognise that most Islamic rulers throughout history acted the same way as that God. Therefore it would not be exaggerated to claim that the history of tyranny and dictatorship in the Islamic world is deeply rooted in the basic understanding of Muslims of their relation to God.

Soon after the sudden death of the prophet, a severe civil war led to a split in the Islamic *Uma*. The supporters of Mohamed's cousin Ali separated themselves and

founded the Shia faith, while the tribe of *Umayyad* took the power and founded the first Islamic dynasty. Under the trauma of these of these events, Sunni theologians called on the faithful to follow *Umayad* leaders who took power over Muslims and to never revolt against them, in order to avoid any *fitna*, or civil war. Since then, there is a close relation between the authority of God and the authority of a Muslim monarch. This authority is felt everywhere today in the Islamic World – not only between the monarch and the people, but also between the father and his children, between the teacher and his students, and the boss and his employees. A culture of negotiation and questioning, which is the basis for every democracy, is missing. What everyone expects from his subordinates is not efficiency in the first place, but loyalty. Women especially have a tough time trying to cope with this unquenchable need for loyalty.

A girl called Wafaa

Wafaa is a young woman from a village near Cairo. She has not celebrated her sixteenth birthday yet, but she is already a mother of a young boy, divorced and remarried. You must have read or heard one of those horrible reports about child marriage, but what I am telling you is not a story I read, but a story I was directly involved in. Wafaa is my niece. Five years ago I was fighting to save her from FGM, but I failed. Her father who is a high school teacher and her mother, my sister, who has a basic education, said that Wafaa could not marry in the future if she was not circumcised. Although FGM has been forbidden in Egypt for some years, Wafaa's clitoris was cut away as one of the many sacrifices a woman has to offer for a childish culture of honour. Two years ago, a 32-year-old man from the village asked to marry Wafaa. I intervened again to stop this marriage, because she

was still a child of 14 years, and she was a very smart and promising student at school. I failed again and could not convince her parents, as Wafaa's marriage was nothing more than a repetition of her parents' own story, a repetition of millions of stories that happen every day in Egypt. Almost everyone believes that the early marriage of a girl guarantees her protection. Most men prefer to marry an inexperienced woman to guarantee her obedience and loyalty. Marriage under the age of 16 is forbidden by law in Egypt too, but this was also no problem: the marriage procedure was held without official papers. Wafaa married, but could not stand the sexual violence of her husband and left his house after one month. She was already pregnant. She had a child named Mohamed at the age of 15. Her husband tried to take her back home with the child, but she refused. The husband decided not to recognise the child, as there are no official marriage papers; therefore, Wafaa could not get a birth certificate for her baby because the moral government of Egypt does not recognise children of unregulated relationships.

A few months ago Wafaa called me and told me that she wished to go back to school, but her father did not agree to this. He was afraid that everyone would know that Wafaa's marriage failed, which is considered to be a great shame for a young lady. Wafaa asked me if I could help her. I called her father immediately and told him in an undiplomatic way, 'Listen, you committed two crimes already against your daughter: FGM and child-marriage, and I will not allow a third one. How come that you care about what people might say more than caring about your daughter's feelings and future?' I tried to convince him that going back to school would save Wafaa from a second marriage with an old man, which is the natural fate of every divorced woman in Egypt, especially if she has a child. I wanted Wafaa to go back to school to be a

role model for every girl who is divorced, to show them that being divorced does not mean the end of the world. Her father was not convinced; therefore I decided to use heavy munitions. I told him, 'I am not going to negotiate with you anymore. I will give you a couple of weeks, and if you will not send your daughter back to school I will sue you for agreeing to the child-marriage of your daughter and I will publish the story in the newspaper that I write for in Cairo so that not only the people of the village but all Egypt will talk about Wafaa's case.' Less than four days later, Wafaa's school papers were in order and the fees were fully paid. She went back to school and was very happy for that. Less than 40 days later, Wafaa's mother had a sixth child. The father could not afford the costs of Wafaa and her child and took her again from school and sent her to her 'husband' after he agreed to recognise the child as his own.

This story shows that liberal laws are not enough to modernise a society if its mentality is resisting change. Wafaa had to seek the help of tribal and family ties to find a way out of her misery, but even that did not help her much.

Teaching loyalty: the crises of Egyptian education
Even education has become a tool to sustain authority. Despite technical modernisation in many schools in Egypt, the educational system does not seem to have any vision for those millions of students. Nobody seems to know what the educational planners want to get out of the masses they teach and what to teach them. They teach them theories about citizenship and democracy, but show them something else in practice. The main objective of the curriculum seems to be to inject the students with loyalty towards their country and the 'leader'. Learning by heart and accumulation

of unneeded information make many students use the school just as a bridge. The school cannot afford to teach students independent thinking and the skill of making judgments, as this will endanger their authority. If this is what the school wanted or the fathers wanted, Wafaa might have been able to defend herself and resist. Who should change this if the teachers themselves are a product of the same vicious cycle? Most of them are more influenced by what they hear in the mosques than what they read in the books.

A little story of a teacher in the city of Alexandria shows how education and authority are tightly related. In a regular exam, the teacher introduced a short text about the 'blessed river Nile' to his high school students. He posted the following multiple choice question: 'What is the opposite of blessed: dirty, hated or cursed?' He was punished because of this question by being degraded from a high school to a preparatory school teacher. What was his crime? The word 'blessed' in Arabic happens to be the name of the president of Egypt, Mubarak, a very common adjective indeed in a society relying on blessings. This was not the end of the joke. The way this teacher was sued is even funnier. To make the punishment seem democratic, the educational authorities said that a student of this teacher suffered from deep depression after taking this exam, because she felt that the teacher was offending the president who is a symbol of the nation. Maybe the president himself would not act like this or would not pass such a judgment, but the educational authority sensed the atmosphere and internalised this understanding of hierarchy so that they became more royal than the king himself.

The new Egyptian minister of education said in a speech in front of members of the senate at the beginning of February 2010 that he is unsatisfied with the performance at Egyptian schools; therefore he was

thinking of allowing teachers to beat students again, which was forbidden just a few years ago. He said that by doing so he wants to restore the authority of the teacher in the classroom. The minister concluded his argument by saying proudly that he himself was beaten as a child at school, and that this did not harm him. But his way of arguing alone shows how much he was harmed. Only after the opposition media criticised his plan heavily, did he take it back.

What went wrong?

More than 1,000 years ago Cairo was one of the biggest educational centres in the world. In the mosque of Al-Azhar students not only learnt the Qur'an and Hadith, but also chemistry, mathematics, medicine and philosophy. In all the schools of Cairo there was a peaceful and fruitful coexistence between religious and natural sciences. Today, Egypt has distanced itself from science in a dramatic way. Young people consume technological products as far as they can afford them, but they do not know how they function or how to manufacture them. They buy satellite dishes to watch religious Sat-preachers who are very sceptical about science. Some of them even feel malicious joy when modern science fails, for instance when a space shuttle falls down or when an expert on genetic engineering dies because of having cancer. Religious preachers offer their advice also as experts on religious medicine.

So, what happened? What has changed in the last 1,000 years that has led to this distance between Egyptians and science? To answer this question we need to go back to the early time of Islam.

One can say that the Islamic culture had an easy birth, a turbulent childhood, a short, fruitful youth and a long, lethargic aging period. Unlike Christianity, Islam

took power soon after it was founded and carried the responsibility of passing legislation and rules for daily life. The multiple functions of the prophet as a religious and political leader and lawmaker made a separation between state and religion almost impossible. He could never say, 'give Caesar what belongs to Caesar and give God what belongs to God', as he was both Caesar and the messenger of God at the same time. One more argument, which is used by conservative scholars in Egypt today against secularism, is that Christianity needed to go through the process of secularisation because the church was against science, but Islam was never against science. Such scholars say that Arabs used to be barbaric tribes who were fighting against each other until the prophet came and reconciled them with civilisation and knowledge. Because of Islam, they say, Arabs became leaders in the fields of science and philosophy.

In fact, it was not Islam that was responsible for the scientific renaissance in the Middle Ages, otherwise Mecca and Medina would have been the centres of the sciences at that time. Instead, Baghdad, Cairo, Damascus and Cordoba were the centres of knowledge – cities that had experience with former cultures. Most of the first Arab scientists and philosophers were in fact not Arabs, but Persians, Syrians and Jews who built on the knowledge they inherited from their own cultures. The Islamic culture was capable of producing knowledge in the Middle Ages as it accepted diversity and translated the knowledge of other cultures. Averroes, the great Arab philosopher of the thirteenth century, translated the works of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle as a basis for his own philosophy. He used to call Greek philosophers 'the ancestors'. Averroes invented the formula of 'double truth' to separate religion from science. He said there are two different truths independent of each other: the truth of the revelation of

the holy text which is responsible for metaphysics, and the scientific truth which is based on intellect and observation. Neither of these truths can prove or exclude the other; therefore they should remain separated. Today many Muslims look at the 'Other' only as an enemy outside (the West) or a religious minority inside (Copts, Bahaii, Jews, etc.) that should be controlled and intimidated to show more loyalty. Modernity, science and secularism are seen by many as products of the infidels. The weaker the Islamic World gets, the more power the text of the Qur'an acquires.

Even in the eighth century in Baghdad, a theological school called *mutazilite* could discuss the nature of the Qur'an as a created book with a human side that could be analysed or even criticised. For a similar approach, the Egyptian Professor of Literature and Arabic Studies Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid was considered an apostate, and was divorced from his wife by a court sentence and had to leave Egypt some 20 years ago. Another professor was shot dead by Islamists in front of his house in Cairo in 1991 because he said the Qur'an is not a book of law, and cannot be seen as a basis for civil legislation.

The decline of education in Egypt started in the eleventh century when the *fatimide* monarchs had no more money for their warlords. Instead they offered them large pieces of land to buy their loyalty. The warlords invented the system of *waqf*, a religious foundation with a mosque, school and other charity institutions. These schools were not interested anymore in teaching natural sciences or philosophy, but concentrated on religious sciences. Every warlord could intervene to change the contents taught at his school, in order to polish his own image and ensure the loyalty of the students. He did the same with the mosque, as well. Looking at the state-run schools and mosques in Egypt today, we will see that they are still working according to the same principle. No one

seems to be really interested in innovations, especially if these innovations might call into question the authority of the president. One of Egypt's most famous scientists is Professor Ahmed Zewail, professor of chemical physics at the California Institute of Technology and the only Nobel Prize Laureate in science from the Arab World. Zewail has been fighting with Egyptian authorities for 12 years to build a scientific Centre of Excellence in Egypt which would apply the latest scientific standards. The authorities do not accept his plan, because he wants the Centre to be independent from the Egyptian government. Last year, Zewail was chosen to be Barack Obama's senior scientific advisor.

Democracy

The famous Muslim-Brother preacher Wagdy Ghoneim was teaching his followers via a Saudi-funded satellite channel, saying that democracy means decadence. He gave the spectators an example to illustrate to them how democracy works. 'A hundred people sit in a room and discuss gay marriage. If sixty of them say, OK, then it becomes a law that a man can marry a man. How stupid!' This is how the religious discourse looks at democracy. How about secular parties? Another Egyptian Nobel Prize Laureate is Mohamed El-Baradei, former president of the International Atomic Energy Agency. He decided to go back to Egypt to serve his country and he received a warm public welcome. In an independent TV show, El-Baradei said that Egypt lacks real democracy and needs an educational system with a clear vision. Since then, he has never appeared on TV again. After his name was suggested as a possible candidate for the next presidential elections in 2011, a sewer campaign was launched against him by the state-run media. Even opposition parties started to distance themselves from

him. To run for president in Egypt, one needs to be a candidate for a political party or have the approval of two thirds of the members of parliament as an independent candidate. None of these options is possible, as the opposition parties themselves are run by the same patriarchal mentality relying on the one-person-cult. Many oppositional leaders have been sitting in office for as long as Mubarak has. The bestselling author Alaa Al-Aswani compared the Egyptian opposition parties to frozen chickens which melt only in the time of elections. The Parliament will never approve El-Baradei as a candidate, as it is controlled by the national party whose leader is President Mubarak and whose second man is his son, Gamal Mubarak, who is likely to be the one and only candidate for the next elections. Both the Al-Azhar religious institution and the Coptic Church showed clear support for the son to follow his father.

Heresy as a chance; or, Towards a post-Qur'anic discourse

There is no illusion like that of so-called Islamic reform. For hundreds of years Qur'an scholars have been trying to twist the verses of the holy book to make them fit our time. But none of them have achieved any success. The *mutazilites* of the eighth century, Averroes of the thirteenth century, and Abu Zaid at the end of the twentieth century, all failed. They all were only isolated rivers in the desert that lost their waters in the sand before they could come together to form a big stream capable of sweeping everything with it, to make for an irreversible process of reform. All of these reformatory waves were broken time after time on a stubborn rock called orthodoxy. They all failed, because the problem was never what is written in the Qur'an, but the attitude Muslims have towards the Qur'an. As long as the Qur'an

is seen as the unchanged word of God, as long as the words of God are part and parcel of a political authority, I see no chance for any reform.

We are all obsessed with the Qur'an. Militant Islamists search it for verses that justify violence and segregate Muslims from the 'unbelievers'. Reform-oriented Muslims search in the holy book for words of peace that make coexistence possible. Even critics of Islam search for the same verses that fundamentalists love, to prove the brutality of the Qur'an. By doing so, each is giving the Qur'an more authority as a political document. The solution, as far as I am concerned, cannot be a modern interpretation of the Qur'an, but a neutralisation of the holy book and banning it from the political discourse. We do not need to be pro or contra Qur'an. It is enough to agree on the fact that it was revealed for a pre-modern community in the seventh century with different needs than ours today. We need no holy texts to live together. In multireligious and multiethnic societies, it is impossible to consider religion as a basis for the rules of living together. If everyone insists on the visibility of his religious symbols in the society he lives in, public space will be sacralised and will turn into an arena for religious conflicts.

Reform could only be a result of an act of terror against the chain that sustains an old system – a chain that connects religion to political authority and to the concept of honour. The dynamite to blast this chain is made out of rationality and common sense. It contains no quotations from the holy scripture except one single verse from the Qur'an: 'God does not change people until they change what is inside themselves'.

The real heretic is not the one who writes polemics about the Qur'an, but the one who offers alternatives to it. The greatest heretic of our time is called Facebook. It is also the greatest democrat. Young people in Egypt,

who do not believe in the promises of the old authorities anymore and search for individualistic solutions, are addicted to Facebook. They go online and chat about religion, politics and sex. They watch porno movies, listen to Beyoncé and Bin Laden. Yes, fundamentalists have also discovered Facebook. The largest groups are those of religious preachers. 'Ahmed Ali invites you to be a fan of Sheikh Youssef Al-Qaradawi' was a Facebook message that I received recently. Muslim brothers in Egypt have their own Wikipedia.

I happened to be in Egypt on the night of 31 January 2010. Egypt had just won the soccer Africa Cup for the third time in a row. All Egyptians, men and women, young and old, went to the streets to celebrate. All societal rules seemed to be suspended for one night. Cars were honking, children were painting their faces with the Egyptian flag, and veiled women were dancing in public until the early hours of the morning. I was looking at the happy faces of young people, feeling their energy and desire to be a part of something beautiful. I was saying to myself: 'Those who built the pyramids must have been young enthusiastic Egyptians, just as these ones today, so what are they lacking?' The answer for me was: they are lacking a national project that they believe in and a responsible leadership that could help them to invest their energy in the right place. They need to remove this thick layer of mud that covers their awareness and common sense.

We are experiencing the growing up of a generation that got more education than their parents and knows more about the world than what their parents knew; therefore the young cannot accept the elders' authority so easily. The political authority has lost its legitimacy but not the tricks of controlling the masses. The traditionalists feel that the old structures are falling apart, and they panic and try to save by force a system

which has passed its zenith. Violence, re-Islamisation and disorientation are side effects of the dissolving of that old system. My intellect is on the side of Adonis's prophecy that the Orient is collapsing. My heart is following Todd and Courbage's view about the rapid modernisation of Islam. Todd was the one who predicted the downfall of the Soviet Union at a time when no one believed in that. No matter which prophecy will be right, 'Goodbye Orient' will be the motto of the next decades. But it depends who is going to say it to whom. Are Muslims going to say it to an old system as the Japanese said it to Asia on their way to modernity? Or is the world going to say it to a sinking ship that refused to recognise that it is going down?

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5

Culture in Modern India:
The Anxiety and the Promise

Pratap Bhanu Mehta

What I require is a convening of my culture's criteria, in order to confront them with my words and life as I pursue them and as I may pursue them; and at the same time to confront my words and life as I pursue them with the life my culture's words may imagine for me: to confront the culture with itself, along the lines it meets in me.

Stanley Cavell

Talking about the 'inner life of culture' in India must seem like a presumptuous enterprise indeed. At one level, the culture remains prodigiously inventive in a bewildering variety of ways, across a range of social groups. India embodies deep layers of historical depth and a capacity to deeply internalise the various cross-cultural currents that have left their deep imprint on it. But it is constantly improvising, adapting and creating new cultural forms. One paper could not even begin to describe the cultural ferment in India and I am not going to even try. What I shall do in this paper rather is something less ambitious. I am going to chart some of the anxieties that have marked discourse about culture in India, and I suspect more broadly as well. I shall offer four 'provocations'. First, that the inner life of culture is in part the association of culture with the 'inner', a particular space that is resistant to the rationalising impulses of modernity. Second, I shall argue that Indian pluralism is a

negotiated achievement, sustained through politics. In that sense the space for cultural pluralism depends upon that larger negotiation of India's political identity; a successful political negotiation allows deep forms of pluralism to be sustained. Third, I shall focus on the anxiety over language and its relationship to culture. And finally, I shall argue that globalisation, contrary to what critics had feared, might produce a less anxiety-ridden cultural discourse in India that might defuse radical cultural nationalism. These are more in the nature of ruminations than a settled argument. But I have tried to present them in a way that might lend itself to cross-regional conversation.

From the inner life of culture to culture as inner life

There is an interesting paradox associated with the concept of culture. While 'a' culture is thought of as particular, 'Indian' or 'Chinese' or whatever the appropriate qualifier may be, the concept itself seems to have acquired a universality, roughly at the same historical moment. The genealogy of the concept is complex, and would require a long detour into intellectual history. But elements of that history are necessary for understanding the inner life of culture in India. As Raymond Williams has perceptively noted, the concept of culture itself was a response to a dramatic crisis; we become aware of culture only when culture begins to come into question. Before the nineteenth century culture was associated with a teleology: the idea of natural growth, and by analogy, a process of human training. This use usually referred to a culture *of* something. But in the nineteenth century we began to speak of culture as such. We began to speak of culture associated in two registers. The first was the register of value. Culture came to be associated

with references to conceptions of human perfection. Relatedly, it came to acquire a cluster of associations to do with the general body of arts or the intellectual development of society as a whole. The second register of culture was more anthropological, where it came to refer to a whole way of life in all its historical interconnectedness, where the material, spiritual, intellectual and artistic all meshed into one seamless whole.

This history is important because this understanding of culture became part of the repertoire of the self-understanding of different cultures as well. Just to take the anthropological register first. The anthropological conception of culture generates three questions about cultural identity. First, is simply this: what does it mean to have a cultural identity? What is the quest for an identity about? There is a dizzying variety of ideas that is often condensed into the term identity: identity can operate on a political, cultural, social, psychological or even psychoanalytic plane. At one level the identity of a culture is a question about the relationship between the individual and the larger collectivity. How are the emotional and affective bonds that form the basis of identification composed? How do they motivate people to form a larger social connection in which individuality is renounced or attenuated into a larger group called the nation? How does this identification induce manifest acts of sacrifice, altruism and even violence? Without such emotional identification, the concept of identity remains an abstract idea; it does not structure or motivate political action. The production of such emotional identification is an extremely complex and ill-understood matter, but it is fair to say that the modern Indian nation has produced its fair share of identification with the idea of India. Probably the most central element in this emotional imagination

is the idea of territoriality that transcends different nationalist imaginations.

The second aspect of identity is a sense of specificity. Identity is bound to something that makes you different, makes you the being that you are and not someone else. A good deal of the challenge of cultural identity is that we seek an answer to the question: what makes a culture the thing that it is? In short what is its 'essence'? The challenge of articulating a conception of a culture that can also do the work of being an identity is that it inevitably produces anxieties over essentialism.

The third aspect of forming a cultural identity is the maintenance of boundaries in the process of creating the perilous pronoun 'we'. What are the patterns of exclusion and inclusion that the process of identity formation entails? Who is the outsider and who is the insider? What are the terms on which citizenship and political standing is defined? This is a question of both legal and political status. Legally at any rate, India has adopted a republican conception of citizenship, where citizenship rights are not tied to any substantial benchmarks of ethnicity or religion. But politically there have been occasional attempts to define the boundaries of exclusion and inclusion based on some substantial notion of what it means to be an 'authentic' Indian.

The anthropological conception of culture as essence, specificity and identity was deeply aligned to both colonialism and nationalism. Ideologies of 'culture' legitimised forms of colonial rule by simultaneously asserting the superiority of some cultures, at the same time as insisting on their irrevocable distance. Nationalism, in some ways, had to make a similar move: to insist on the specificity of a culture and its unity. This is not the occasion to go into complex arguments about the relationship between nationalism and culture, but nationalism poses two challenges for culture. On the

one hand it seeks to mobilise it in a political project, on the other hand it can colonise culture in an insidious way. The most insidious way in which nationalism colonises culture is by reversing an order of priorities. In the nationalism view of culture a compelling reason for certain practices, beliefs or ways of life is that these are *mine*. They are to be followed because they belong to a group, and make them what that group is. In this view there is an obligation to follow practices because of their origins in the fact of possession, to defend them because they are ours. But while this provides impetus for culture it also destroys it. For now culture is no longer embedded in the space of reason, it is driven by the imperatives of identity. They are defended not because they are good but because they are ours.

Almost all cultures, not just postcolonial ones, have had to combat the pressures of nationalism and its ability to colonise the question of value, and its ability to place identity over reason. The life of culture will crucially depend therefore on the political character of the nationalism in which it is embedded. There have certainly been powerful attempts in India to align culture with identity. But for the most part these have been politically defeated, and for the most part a liberal democratic space has been preserved. But in any society, genuine culture will be threatened by considerations of identity politics and the precarious politics of self-esteem that goes with it. To put it somewhat crudely, nothing jeopardises culture more than a quest for cultural identity.

While certain strains of Hindu nationalism and Muslim nationalism have on occasion threatened genuine culture in this way, the character of India's anti-colonial nationalism and its enduring legacy sought to transcend traps of identity politics. In fact, it is often forgotten that Indian nationalism, across a wide range

of thinking from Aurobindo to Gandhi, Tagore to Nehru, legitimised itself on the plane of an alternative universality. The legitimacy of the nation was to be grounded not on the fact of its identity but on its ability to remain an exemplar and repository of values. Whatever one may think of the history of modern India, the fact that a strong ideological strain in Indian nationalism resisted the temptations of a suffocating identity politics has a lot to do with the fact that India not only survives as a liberal democracy for the most part, but also creates a context where culture does not always have to bear the weight of identity.

When the claims of culture were being re-legitimised, it was on the grounds that Indian culture was offering a much richer and deeper alternative universality to the claims that were being made on behalf of European modernity. To be sure, much of this moral core had long been buried under unconscionably unjust social forms, but it did exist and can provide an alternative axis for shaping one's sense of self and society. Gandhi and Tagore were two prominent and best-known examples of this tradition. But it is striking the degree to which this ambition informed so much of the literary production of twentieth-century India. To put it simplistically, in this mode of thinking culture was to be defended not because it was mine, but because it was good. It again sought to place culture in a normative space, where cultural ideals broadly stood within the space of reason. This move had three advantages. It at least sought to reposition culture as the inheritance of all humankind, potentially accessible to all others and contributing to their well being. It provided the space for criticism. For once, culture tried to occupy the realm of the normative: it was at least open to discussion. And third, this view of culture was often an antidote to cultural nationalism. To what

extent this location of culture within a realm of reasons succeeded is an open question. But I want to dwell on the challenges this conception of culture faced.

In the register of values, the operative contrast in the nineteenth century was between culture and civilisation, where civilisation referred to the 'outward' registers of progress, like material prosperity and political life. Culture, by contrast, was that realm of animating values that often had to be tended against the forces of civilisation. What is striking about Indian reflections on culture is that, from the nineteenth century onwards, they produce roughly the same distinction in several languages. In Hindi, noted writers like Mahadevi Verma and Nirmal Verma made the contrast between *sanskriti* (culture) and *sabhyata* (civilisation) central to their reflections on culture. In nineteenth-century Bengal, for example, there is a rich vein of thinking from Bankim to Tagore that deploys a version of this contrast to explain the modern predicament. In this view, the force of civilisation, particularly modern civilisation, was an irrevocable force with two particular features. First, it produced a split. On the one hand there is the realm of 'objective' necessity that governs our material life. On the other hand there is a realm of subjective freedom, and the two are in experiential conflict. There are also two modes of experiencing agency. On the one hand we can experience agency as actors on nature or in history. Or we can experience a sense of agency by standing outside of it, as it were. The former was a part of 'materialism', the latter of 'spiritualism'. I am greatly simplifying a complex line of thought, but what is striking is a common, pervasive theme that appears in Indian reflections on culture. The location of culture was in this realm of subjective freedom; it is, if you like, located in the perfection and realisation of the

Self. But this realm of culture is very self-consciously pitted against the 'outer' realm of necessity and material determination. It is not an accident that 'spirituality' in its widest sense came to be seen as the essence of Indian culture. But the creation of this as an essence was to locate culture outside of history, or even against it. It was largely a product of an imagination that thought that the Self could be ordered, even if the world could not. What made the Gandhian project peculiar was that it was the only large ideological attempt to argue that the ordering of the Self would lead to an ordering of the World. It tried to approach the question of historical agency and social transformation through a transformation of the Self. With the historical collapse of that project, the split between the inner and outer, material and spiritual, came to be reinscribed as the essence of culture.

Second, the advance of civilisation tended to fragment human experience. The economy, politics, art, religion, morality: each had their own internal logic and integrity that could not be subsumed under the logic of any other mode of experience. The essence of politics was violence; the essence of the market, commoditisation; the essence of religion, the sacred; the essence of art, a form of non-instrumental creation and so forth. There was no underlying thread that could bring these different modes of experience into one harmonious whole. In modern conditions, we were bound to remain fragmented. Culture in this context became an interstitial concept: it occupied particular spaces. It was an attempt to order the self in a context, where the world could not be rendered into a harmonious whole. To put it somewhat provocatively, it was not so much that culture had an inner life, it was that culture could now be articulated and grasped only in an 'inner life'. This is an old anxiety about modernity. Bhudev Mukhopadhyaya, the great Bengali poet, enjoined Indians

to strenuously hold on to their toilet habits because in the long run this would be the only site at which they could assert a real sense of a different cultural identity. This was a bit indelicate, but not entirely off the mark. If the economy and politics are governed by their own logic and imperatives, and colonise more of the realm of daily existence, where exactly will culture be located?

There is a popular Hindi song, 'My shoes are Japanese, my pants are English, my red cap is Russian, but my heart is Indian'. What is interesting about this song is the location of 'Indianness' in an intangible interior space. No less real or important, but intangible and interior nonetheless. It is not an accident that the most powerful articulations of Indian culture retreat to the realm of the 'inner', or are articulated as its 'Spirit', signifying the material limitations modernity might place on culture.

Under conditions of modernity, endowing an ongoing way of life with cultural significance is an altogether more abstract gesture. As many observers have noted, cultural identities are no longer connected to participating in distinct cultural practices. In fact, cultures and nations have, for good or for ill, ceded so much space to the modern economy, the modern state, and often the egalitarian aspirations of modernity, that it is more difficult to hold on to a sense of difference that is embodied in a concrete way of life. Or to put it slightly more precisely, much of the realm of public collective action, especially the polity and the economy, is not the site for expressing culture. Rather culture is expressed more in confined spaces – private spaces or in particular spheres of activity that have their confined place: art, music, literature. It is precisely because substantive values and horizons of meaning are shrinking that greater and inordinate weight is placed on markers of difference. As Valentine Daniel put it, 'nationalism is the horripilation

of culture in insecurity and fright'. Finally, in the realm of culture, it is often argued that culture is to be valued because it is constitutive of someone's identity. This alignment of culture with identity can be misleading in a couple of ways.

First, the minute we are talking of identity we are talking of difference rather than diversity. It is possible for individuals or groups who are alike in most respects to have a profound sense of having a different identity, a different sense of who they are. Indeed, as many have argued, we see more and more identity conflicts not because of the objective diversity between people, but because of their increasing likeness. Stress on difference becomes a way of defining identity in the face of narrowing differences in other spheres of life. It is a commonplace experience of the modern world that, contrary to what Arjun Appadurai argues, culture, politics and economy get disembedded from each other. After all, it is not an accident that when defending 'culture' very few are defending the right of a society to be governed by a Hindu view of the division of labour, or for the economy to take on board to run on Islamic principles of usury or power to be allocated by Confucian conceptions of elite. While it is true that religion is not simply an add-on to material resources, it is palpably misleading to argue that culture, economy and politics cannot to some degree be disembedded from each other. This is a greater functional differentiation that modern societies produce.[1] In this context, it is quite possible that individuals and groups are sharing more and more, and are embedded in similar matrices of political and economic institutions, yet want to assert their sense of difference. In fact, as Michael Ignatieff has argued, following Freud's insight that conflicts born of the 'narcissism of small differences are most acute', identity differences do

not by themselves signal greater diversity. Rather, invocation of identity may be a sign that diversity is decreasing. We often want to put ourselves under God's Yoke the most when we feel his presence the least.

The further challenge to 'culture' comes from interrogating culture as a site of power. As egalitarian aspirations spread, a suspicion was cast on culture as the means through which the relationship of subordination and exclusion are perpetuated and maintained. Women, Dalits, and a whole range of hitherto subordinated groups began to make the argument that the very sources of culture were also sources of their subordination. Cultural forms are in part maintained by associations with structures of authority. The very act of authorising culture, of marking realms of value, of trying to assign meaning to particular roles in society, of consecrating rituals, created relationships of power. A shadow begins to be cast upon culture because it is seen as an instrument of domination. This was particularly easy in a society where access to cultural authority was so closely associated with forms of social stratification. But this critique generated several different responses. The first might be described as the detachment of culture from particular social forms. In this view, what culture afforded was a repertoire of value and meaning. It was precisely this repertoire that allowed a society to critique its own social practices. The critique of the 'injustice' of culture could come from the resources of the culture itself. While this motivation generated an astonishing burst of creativity – readings of the tradition, literary retellings of classics, and so forth – it had the paradoxical consequence of increasing precisely the distance between culture and social forms that modernity was imposing. For it was saying something like this: do not identify culture with particular social forms. Culture, rather, refers to a realm of value

that stands over and above social forms, judging them. In short, it began to turn culture from a social phenomenon into a normative ideal. But the second response is a retreat from the realm of culture into a new political vocabulary of justification. It opens up culture to serious political contestation all the way down. Rather than culture being the product of a normatively secured consensus, it comes to be formed in the context of various political struggles. In that sense, culture becomes not so much a realm of values or claims of perfection but a terrain of political conflict.

Identity and politicisation

The 'Idea of India' is the repository of an immense range of contending hopes and fears. For all its antiquity and depth, its sense of geography and territoriality, and its intricate cultural linkages, modern India had to fashion a new identity for itself. The distinctness of this new identity was that politics was going to be at the centre of this process in more than one sense. Although Indians frequently appealed to its traditions, cultures and civilisational values, these had to be interpreted in light of aspects of modernity that were shaping India in equal measure: the presence of the modern state, the rise of democratic politics, the aspirations of egalitarianism and the ambitions of industrialisation. But India's identity came to be politicised in a deeper sense. The invention of republican citizenship in India was indeed a momentous event, and a rupture with the past. While many had hoped that the new constitution would simply be encased within the supposed historical identity of India, its diverse and complex cultural sympathies, few imagined that the opportunities afforded by republican citizenship would intensely politicise all areas of

organised collective existence in India. The resources of history and culture, rather than providing comfort and continuity, would themselves be the first categories to be subject to intense political scrutiny. Whatever anyone may claim about the identity of India, what its historical essence consisted in, what the sources of its unity were, the simple fact was this: whether or not republics had existed in ancient India, whether or not democracy had cultural roots, in 1951 for the first time in Indian history all Indians were declared to be citizens. Henceforth they would themselves, within the arenas and opportunities for struggle provided for by the constitution, define their own collective identities, negotiate and renegotiate the terms of social cooperation, and as republican citizens take charge of their own destiny.

Universal adult suffrage was going to have social implications far beyond its immediate political significance. As one of the most thoughtful commentators of the time, KM Pannikar, put it, 'many social groups previously unaware of their strength, and barely touched by the political changes that had taken place, suddenly realised that they were in a position to wield power'. The right to participate in choosing one's electors was the most dramatic way of affirming the equality of all citizens. Although the right to vote is seen by many as a meagre right, whose exercise is a periodic ritual that does little to enhance the well being of those who exercise it, that right itself transforms the meaning of social existence. It is an assertion that all authority is a conditional grant; that suffrage establishes the sufferance, as George Kateb so eloquently put it. Democracy, as its earliest observers were quick to note, represents the dissolution of inherited modes of authority, indeed of the whole concept of authority itself. Democracy, once instituted, is an incitement to politicise all areas of

social life; it introduces, over time, a process of critique that questions and subverts all certainties of social life including culture.

The process of democratisation will thus always produce radical uncertainty about authority and identity alike. As the legitimacy of old ways of instituting authority and recognising identities dissolve, without being replaced by new norms and conventions, the experience of democracy will be profoundly confusing. As Tocqueville put it incomparably: 'Obedience, then, loses moral basis in the eyes of him who obeys; he no longer considers it as a divinely appointed duty; and he does not yet see its purely human aspect; in his eyes it is neither sacred nor just and he submits to it as a degrading though useful fact. There is an unspoken intestinal power between permanently suspicious rival powers. The lines between authority and tyranny, liberty and license, right and might seem so jumbled and confused that no one knows exactly what he is, what he can do and what he should do.'

The experience of democracy has opened up numerous points of dissent, new conflicts of values and identities and a permanent antagonism of meaning and interest that often leaves Indians with a sense that society is flying off in many different directions at once, and the unity of reference points seems to vanish. But it could be argued that new bonds have been created through this politicisation of all aspects of life. It is through the process of intense argument that a new shared public is being created. The important thing about the experience of modern India is not that Indians always necessarily have a shared conception of identity but that they have agreed to argue about the question. The story of modern India is the story of Indians constantly struggling to articulate, discover and debate what it means to be Indian.

The point of this possibly banal truism is that it always has been and will be very difficult to give an interpretation of Indian identity in what might be called substantialist terms. This is a conception of identity that privileges some substantial trait – religion, race, culture, ethnicity, shared history, common memory – that can be objectively identified and then configures an identity around it. Indeed threats to India often arise from trying to give its identity some substantial meaning in this sense. There is an old joke about India's identity: it does not occur to most Indians to doubt it until someone begins to give arguments to prove its existence. This joke captures something profound about the way in which Indian identity has been constituted, and also the circumstances under which this identity is put under stress. But the thorough politicisation of identity suggests that Indian identity will not be constituted necessarily through shared attributes or aspirations but through what Khilnani once called 'interconnected differences'. Does all this mean that India does not have an identity? If this demand implies that there is something we all unequivocally share, the answer is no. But it does not preclude the thought that we all have lots of different reasons and ways in which we define our relationships to each other. There is no 'unity' in diversity, rather we are diverse in our unities, and we might identify with connections to India, each in our own way.

It is for this reason that there are grounds to be suspicious of any authoritative narrative of Indian identity, including one that emphasises its pluralism. I think pluralism is the de facto reality of India, and Indian politics has a remarkable capacity to negotiate difference and plurality. Faced with exclusivist cultural nationalism, we often try and imagine other more complex identities. We try to imagine an India where, instead of singularity we emphasise plurality, instead of purity we emphasise

the essentially hybrid character of all identity, instead of exclusivism we emphasise syncretism and so on. We thus prefer a different range of adjectives to describe cultural states of being: syncretist, pluralist, hybrid, liminal, incomplete, interdependent, composite, become terms in vogue. The point of these categories is both political and conceptual. Conceptually we try and show that the binary oppositions on which exclusivist identities thrive (say, Hindu–Muslim) are subverted by the complex experience of history. It often becomes meaningless to describe some cultural artefact, like a particular form of music, as exclusively Hindu or Muslim; elements of both converge to produce a new musical form altogether. Some identities are described as liminal, inhabiting that zone where they cannot be described as either/or. We try and construct a shared history around these moments: hybrid cultural forms become more politically respectable than pure ones, and so forth.

Politically, the hope is that subverting the binary oppositions that exist between categories that demarcate people into separate groups will somehow lead people to acknowledge the webs of interdependence that bind people together. It will lead them to recognise that the cultural forms that they inhabit owe a good deal to cultures they are about to stigmatise as inferior, foreign or impure. Once it is shown that different cultures have commingled to produce new cultural forms, we will be relieved of the allure of singular identities. To recognise the many layers that constitute our own selves and our history is to find space for acknowledging all the complex contributions that have made us what we are. This acknowledgement then allows us to open up to difference: it allows us to see that those whom we stigmatise as foreign are also themselves part of our identity. Thus a good deal of weight is placed upon describing India as 'composite' or 'syncretist' for these are the only terms that can accommodate the true

complexity of Indian identity, and can resist the violent abridgement of identities that takes place in the name of more singular conceptions. The locus classicus of such sentiment is Jawaharlal Nehru's, which celebrates a cultural miscegenation, describing India as:

An ancient palimpsest on which layer upon layer of thought and reverie had been inscribed, and yet no succeeding layer had completely hidden or erased what had been written previously.

This is, in so many ways, an attractive conception of Indian identity. It allows for the possibility that the garb of modernity will continue to coexist with the many layers already inscribed on Indian civilisation. It allows Indians to transcend tradition without making it despicable. And it accurately reflects the de facto reality of modern India.

But this conception should not be taken as an authoritatively settled account of Indian identity, or a widely accepted political conception, for a number of reasons. First, de facto pluralism is not the same thing as de jure identification with that pluralism. Whether the reality is accepted as the norm depends upon concrete political choices. While most Indian cultural practice conforms to this Nehruvian vision, this claim can be and is often politically challenged by forces such as Hindu nationalism that regard this pluralism as a source of weakness and regret. It is worth emphasising that this critique of Indian identity will remain a powerful force in Indian politics. It is also part of the million mutinies, the numerous attempts to redefine India's identity, that still dot the public space.

Second, even an acceptance of pluralism can be made quite incompatible with high degrees of violence and intolerance. The constitution of India into plural groups opens up the possibility of political competition

between them that can often result in violence. Indeed, one of the paradoxes of the modern Indian experience is that cultural acceptance of difference is quite compatible with political conflict between groups. Third, this pluralism is also an 'objectifying' bird's eye view of India. It does not pay adequate attention to the fact that a society can look pluralistic, while its various constituents are not. It would be too premature to see India's conception of its own identity as settled in any way. But the process of churning is itself producing a myriad of interconnections on the basis of which it could be argued that the Indian Union is stronger even if the identity remains contested. The strength of the Union depends upon four key mechanisms. And there is every reason to think that these mechanisms have only grown stronger rather than weaker.

The sinews of union

India is one of the most astonishing political experiments in recorded human history. A billion people, a significant proportion of whom remain unlettered and unpropertied, constituting themselves into a republic; a bewildering variety of languages and religions weaving themselves into the tapestry of a single nation; a society in which political equality and universal suffrage has preceded the introduction of social equality. For the most part India has managed its diversity very well. This diversity has been facilitated by four mechanisms. The first is simply democracy. It can be confidently asserted that India has stayed together as a nation because of democracy. The threat of secessionism or regional conflict is invariably more a product of the authoritarian moments of the state, rather than its democratic tendencies. The threat of secessionism arises usually when the centre

tries to impose a single version of Indian national identity or actively subverts democracy. Challenges of regionalism have proved more tractable whenever the Indian State has gone in for democratic incorporation or accommodation. Indeed, secessionist movements have proved to be more intractable in precisely those states – Kashmir and the Northeast – where the Indian Government has found it difficult to break the cycle of authoritarianism and excessive intervention. Even the brutal insurgency in Punjab was brought to an end because the possibility of democratic incorporation always existed. Kashmir is a special case because of its peculiar history. But even here, it could be argued that it is authoritarianism from the Indian State that gave the secessionist movement its political lease of life and provided an opening for internationally backed militants. Now, when for the first time in more than 15 years there is a semblance of peace in Kashmir and a real political process underway, it is because the Indian Government finally managed to conduct free and fair elections, not just for state assemblies but for civic bodies as well. The political conflicts in Kashmir are far from over, but democratic incorporation affords the best chance of peace.

The second mechanism is simply the size and power of the Indian State. There is some truth to the proposition that it is very difficult to mount collective action against the Indian State. It makes the costs of contemplating taking on the state immensely high. India is large enough to sit on any problem long enough without a real threat of the central state itself imploding. Most nations collapse, not because of social forces, but because of the implosion of central authority. That has never been a serious possibility on India's horizon. The potential internal power of the state has given solidity to Indian identity.

The third mechanism is an imaginative construal and negotiations over rights. The manner in which linguistic differences were accommodated became a benchmark for a more imaginative conception of the nation. After independence Hindi speakers, the single largest language group in the country, began to press for the adoption of Hindi as a national language, a demand that elicited fierce opposition from states of the South. Nehru engineered a pluralist compromise where a dozen or so languages were given official status with the possibility of adding others to the list; states were demarcated on linguistic lines to give political recognition to the status of some languages; schools were asked to introduce a three-language formula, and English was retained as the language of the state, to be phased out over a long period. The important thing about this compromise was that it refused to anchor Indian identity to any single privileged trait. Indeed, the source of resistance to an Indian identity came from attempts to tie it to a single privileged trait; as soon as the threat of that vanished, so did the resistance. Indeed it is arguable that, by granting political recognition to competing demands, the Indian state defused the force of vernacular nationalism in two ways. First, it accommodated them in a spirit of democracy. Second, over time the linguistic orientation in these states began to be determined by the imperatives of the economy rather than by the requirements of cultural identity. To take an example, two states, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, which had postponed the teaching of English until grade 5 on grounds of cultural nationalism, recently reintroduced English at the primary level to make their students more competitive. India's linguistic arrangements gave expression to the idea of a layered Indian identity, an accretion of different elements. If one element was

politically privileged, or others sought to be abridged, the potential for resistance was great. If the threat of privileging one element was removed, the possibilities for accommodation were profound. Indeed, the way in which actual linguistic practices are now evolving in many parts of India, with languages and vocabularies bleeding into each other, at least at the level of mass culture, is a sign of the possibilities of cultural fusion. Salman Rushdie once described Mumbai street language as HUG ME (Hindu, Urdu, Gujarati, Marathi, English), making the point that, if culture is left free of political superintendence, if the anxieties of identity are not placed upon it, it will evolve in its own merry, impure and messy way.

The fourth mechanism is the actual practices of politics that allow for a good deal of power sharing between the provinces and the centre. While India's federalism privileges the centre, and the formal powers of the central government have been growing in a vast majority of areas, informal practices of politics allow for considerable power sharing. This is done through two mechanisms. First, the state has very rigidly adhered to an impartially applied mechanical formula in the transfer of resources from the centre to the states. The fact that an independent commission recommends these allocations has probably reduced the bargaining burden on politics between the centre and the states considerably. There is some worry that the palpably growing inequality between clusters of states might put pressure on the Indian Union. Over the last decade and a half the states of Southern and Western India have done considerably better on most measures of economic and social performance than the states of the Hindi Belt and Eastern India. While growing regional inequality is a matter of some concern there is reason to suppose that this will not

politically weaken the Indian Union for a number of reasons. The sheer economic interdependence of these states, the actuality of significant and large-scale internal migration (a great leveller) and India's slow but steady moves towards creating an integrated national market are more than likely to offset the pressures generated by this inequality. India has also made a political compromise to defuse the issue. I do not want to dwell on issues of regional inequality here. The point is simply that creating a context for cultural pluralism requires intelligent political negotiation.

The babble of Babel: identity and language

One distinctive issue in India has been the politics of language. The States Reorganisation Commission Report was a remarkable exercise in political acuity. At one stroke it defused a catastrophic politics of linguistic nationalism by recognising India's linguistic diversity and giving it some political expression. It also recognised that, to some degree, the language question cannot be resolved by insisting on singular solutions emanating from the centre, and premised on the thought that a nation has to speak a single language.

As Sheldon Pollock has pointed out in his magisterial *The Language of Gods in the World of Men*, India's linguistic history is distinctive in many respects. In India, language was historically never harnessed to a political project, religion played little part in the choice of language, there was no concept of mother tongue in pre-modern India and no sense of a language tied to a group identity or a particular ethnos. There was no sin of Babel. Linguistic diversity was considered in some sense natural, not a deviation to be corrected. The important point is that the diversity was meant to flow through individuals (or at least those who had access

to education), not just between them. Most political formations in India survived through linguistic eclecticism: the language of commerce, the language of legitimising political power, the language of the sacred, the languages of the literary and imagination and the grammar of emotions could be distinct for the same individuals. Even the much maligned colonial state, while it promoted English, had to simultaneously promote, not just 'Oriental Languages' but a whole range of indigenous literary forms as well. Despite linguistic diversity, different languages could share literary forms, a common intellectual culture and through a range of common references even develop in relation to each other.

The States Reorganisation Commission was an inspired response to the challenges posed by this alignment of language and politics. It saved India from that fate of every multilinguistic society that has tried to impose a single language on the country: civil war. To that extent it was remarkably successful. But there is a danger that we might misinterpret the true lesson of the success of 1956. That lesson is not diversity, but freedom.

We are at a new juncture in the politics of language and statehood. First, there is great pressure for so-called linguistic states like Andhra and Maharashtra to be broken down further. Many of the arguments calling for the creation of new states like Telangana and Vidarbha make sense in light of the realities of these regions. But granting them recognition will involve modifying the 1956 vision. Rather than thinking of states along linguistic lines, we will have to commit to the proposition that not even all the South Indian states will bear the hallmark of a linguistic logic. Languages often need political recognition in a state to flourish. Just think of the appalling state of Urdu simply because it fell through

the disjuncture between geography and language. But this is not a premise that should forever stand in the way of new political and administrative possibilities.

But the second challenge is more complex. The reorganisation of states along linguistic lines also gave some momentum to identifying language with ethnicity: the issue was no longer simply the preservation of Kannada, or resisting the imposition of Hindi, but the whole political fashioning of a Kannadiga identity; Maharashtra went through a similar process during the 1970s and 1980s. This process can manifest itself in the often meaningless politics of renaming. After all, when a culture begins to bother about so many names, there is a real suspicion that all that might be left to the politics of that language is names. But increasingly, this alignment is restricting the choices of citizens: many states, for instance, require university professors to be proficient in the native language to be eligible for increments, in some states there is a periodic assault on English language schools, and the possibility of Tamil–Kannada tension remains more than remote. This is where it is important that we draw the right lessons from 1956.

The moral imperative behind 1956 was not simply diversity; it was respect for the principle of non-coercion. No language would be imposed upon any state against their will. Diversity and non-coercion are different things. The principle of non-coercion suggests that people should be able to exercise their linguistic choices, logistical constraints apart, in a non-discriminatory way. Whatever diversity that emerges as a result is to be cherished, but choice should not be diminished in the name of diversity. This is a principle that states would do well to remember as the preferences of their own populations get more diverse. The creation of a Kannada state to give expression to Kannada aspirations is one thing. To turn it into a

project where other linguistic groups – Tamil or English or Konkani – are disadvantaged or deprived of their choices is quite another.

Another casualty of the 1956 settlement was a remarkable idea of Nehru's: he thought of genuinely multilingual areas like Hyderabad, Bombay [now Mumbai] and Madras, as something like cosmopolitan zones, a standing riposte to the idea that language, territory and ethnicity should coincide. These would be the zones where languages and identity would seamlessly meld into each other, creating all sorts of new languages and possibilities. The great virtue of modern India is that in some ways what Nehru thought was true of places like Bombay is increasingly coming to define more of India. The lines of different languages run through each one of us rather than between us. A time might come where the alignment of language, territory and identity will seem as ineffectual as attempts by snooty custodians of language to preserve its purity. But, as the rest of India becomes more diverse, it is precisely these cosmopolitan zones that have become hostage to the politics of identity. Perhaps there is an argument to be made, both in linguistic and economic terms, for carving out these dense concentrations of populations as administrative zones in their own right.

The politics of language in India will remain paradoxical for many years. Take Gurgaon, where most geographical markers have names like Hamilton, Regency, Ridgewood, Windsor, Princeton, etc. You cannot help feeling sympathy for those who engage in the politics of renaming. But the inhabitants of these same anglicised buildings are giving their children the most complicated Sanskrit names you can imagine. The growth in vernacular press and the burgeoning demand for English are both realities of modern India: identity and instrumentality will both have to

blend. The strongest demand for English now comes from hitherto marginalised groups, like Dalits, who see access to English as a medium of empowerment. There is no question that the demand for English has grown at a phenomenal rate and will remain a dominant cultural force. Sometimes it is all right to wonder whether we confuse the virtues of Babel with the qualities of babble. Linguistic anxiety will haunt us. But the solution is to draw the right lesson from 1956: the Indian project is not about diversity, understood as the need to confine people to their linguistic origins. It is about something deeper. It is about giving each one the freedom to be whomever they wish to be, in whichever language they choose. But one hopes this process takes place imaginatively, to allow citizens to take full advantage of the diversity India has to offer.

Why is there anxiety that there will be new stresses and strains on India's linguistic imagination? India's elites, particularly in north India, are no longer bilingual and have no capacity to navigate vernacular materials. The paradox of our times is that there is a sense in which Hindi readership is growing, because more people are becoming literate; English still continues to flourish and the demand for it is increasing. But what we had hoped to achieve in our language policy, the creation of genuinely bilingual modes of being, is now simply an illusion. Thirty years or so ago, our middle-class elite would have still related to vernacular literature, and followed it; now it is incapable of doing so. Even in the 1970s, both the *Illustrated Weekly of India* and *Dharamyug* were part of the same social universe in that middle-class homes would read both; the elite could have related to both English and vernacular literary worlds. Magazines with space for the essay format have been totally decimated in both languages. But it is also less likely that Hindi and English publications will now share the same space.

What is happening to bilingualism or trilingualism, which seemed like a genuine possibility three decades or so ago, is this. While nominally the number of bilinguals is rising (or if you count acquaintance with Bollywood Hindi, even trilinguals), the balance between languages is clearly shifting. The vernacular languages are coming to be increasingly confined to particular and narrowing spaces. For instance, while literary production in these languages remains strong, these languages are not participating in the production of 'knowledge'. One striking example of this is the fact that even vernacular papers are increasingly relying on translations from English, to fill their op-ed spaces on anything that has to do with 'knowledge' – economics, political science, international relations history, rather than literary expression.

Judging by what is happening in schools, this trend is likely to worsen. We can speculate on why this is so: the complete unimaginativeness with which Hindi is taught; the obtuseness of the Hindi establishment itself, which prevented the growth of the language by defending a very narrow literary conception of the language; the fact that, unlike in the case of Tamil Nadu, Bengal or Kerala, the self-definition of elites in north India was premised on a distance from the vernacular rather than an identification with it. But this loss of bilingualism is not an unimportant cultural fact of our times and will impact our relation to our own past.

The second disjuncture is within the world of Hindi itself. If market trends are any guide, there is a growing demand for Hindi works and newspapers. The success of the wonderfully readable Hindi translation of Harry Potter speaks of new opportunities. But Hindi had deep discontinuities between its small literary world and the larger reading public. To a certain extent, this is true of all literary traditions, but the discontinuity seems greater

in Hindi. The kind of mass readership high literature enjoys in any language is an open question, but at least literary awards seem to be considered a reflection of the possibilities of that language. The Pulitzers and the Bookers have become the object of mass news; but even within the Hindi world, the literary world seems more distant. Just the ways in which prizes in the two languages are covered suggest as much.

The third disjuncture is of course about cultural self-confidence. For all the bluster about the arrival of the postcolonial generation, we still could be said to privilege external modes of validation over our own (consider the ridiculous obsession over winning Oscars, for example). Of course it is the content of the standards that should count, not their provenance. But it is mildly disturbing that despite all the rhetoric of India having arrived, the lack of external validation in some important spheres is still seen as some kind of deficit. This is then compounded by sheer ignorance about the cultural possibilities and ground that we stand on. For instance, one distinction often mapped on to literature is the construction of the vernacular as the parochial and rooted, the English as the cosmopolitan and universal. This identification is bizarre, but widespread. But intellectually nothing could be farther from the truth. As Kunwar Narain, one of modern India's greatest poets, himself once wrote, there is a sense in which Hindi writers have had to write with an even deeper sense of self-consciousness about three traditions: what he called Hindu, Indo-Islamic and Western. In that sense, vernacular literature has carved out its freedom through appropriation of a wider world. But we will not be in a position to make those choices if we cling to an avoidable monolingualism, and a set of narrow standards to judge what is truly important. The babble of Babel will continue, producing even new linguistic forms like

Hinglish. But the ability of more than one language to become the medium of thought, the mark of genuine bilingualism, is very much in doubt.

Globalisation and a new identity

India's gradual reintegration into the world economy is a contested process. But on balance, globalisation has brought immense economic benefits to India. India has experienced an acceleration of aggregate GDP growth rates to an average of eight per cent over the last four years. Aggregate manufacturing growth has jumped to more than seven per cent, and the growth rate in the service sector has been even more phenomenal. Indian companies, rather than withering away under competition, are boldly venturing into the global market, acquiring companies all over the world. Since liberalisation in 1991, India has not been subject to a serious economic crisis; its external balance of payments situation is more robust than ever. There has been a secular decline in poverty rates, though albeit at a much slower rate than defenders of globalisation had hoped. India still has unconscionably high rates of poverty, illiteracy, malnourishment and morbidity. But there is a good deal of consensus that India's lack of achievement in these areas has little to do with globalisation. Rather, the delivery of social services is hostage to a domestic political economy that predates globalisation. If anything, globalisation provides an opportunity to address these pressing concerns. Take an example, just in the financial year 2006. Government revenues experienced a growth of almost 40 per cent, a result of high growth rates. These resources gave the state an opportunity to address these concerns, and the last three years have seen the largest outlays on social sector expenditure in India's history. However, these outlays are not effective,

because less than 20 per cent of these resources reach the intended targets. The obstacle to sharing the gains of growth is not globalisation; it is the fact that the state has not reformed itself enough to fully capitalise on the gains of growth. While India has negotiated its globalisation largely on its own terms, its capacity to translate the gains of globalisation into the well being of all, will depend on the reform of its state.

But these economic trends do not capture the vitality and dynamism globalisation has induced in India. Perhaps most importantly, globalisation has brought about a fundamental transformation in India's sense of itself. While India's economics and political aspirations have expanded, arguably the most profound effect of globalisation will be on its sense of identity and its place in the world.

Behind this transformation in identity lies a new and sophisticated understanding of the currency of power in the modern world. India's approach to the world had for decades been hostage to some fundamental misconceptions. It confused autonomy with autarky, sovereignty with power, and interdependence with a lack of independence. Its insecurities and inhibitions had created a conceptual fog around how power operates in international society. That fog has now been decisively lifted. There is more recognition of the fact that the more India engages with the global economy, the more our power will grow. This is not just because of the obvious fact that an increasing share of world trade and investment will make India important. It is also because the only sure path to peace is to create powerful constituencies in other countries that have a vested interest in supporting your cause. Trade and investment create the lobbies that transform relations between states.

But what is remarkable is a new and sophisticated thinking emerging in certain quarters about the link between foreign policy with pluralism and a new kind of multilateralism. Ask the question: what kinds of societies are, over the long haul, going to be best able to take advantage of globalisation? One element of the answer is going to be pluralism and openness. Japan's economy is suffering because it has in some senses remained a closed society incapable of accepting immigration as a solution to its demographic woes. Europe is struggling to acknowledge that it has become multicultural, and the sense of identity of some of its nations is so fragile that a headscarf can put it at risk. Even China's capacity to negotiate pluralism is still an open question. For all its warts, India has the capability of positioning itself as a negotiator between different civilisations and ways of life. Although India can be hostage to intolerance and extremism, India is one of the few societies in the world that is capable of negotiating a deep pluralism. This inheritance is also an asset in a globalising world; it ought to be the cornerstone of our foreign policy.

Finally, both economic globalisation and pluralism have to be linked to what can be described as a multicentric multilateralism. This is not the multilateralism centred on a moribund institution like the UN. It is a multilateralism that enduringly binds nations in webs of interdependence through a series of overlapping institutions. India is now seeking to join almost any multilateral arrangement that will admit it as a member, from APEC to G-8. These arrangements involve sovereignty trade-offs. But the underlying vision is that these sovereignty trade-offs are more than compensated by the real power that accrues from participation in these institutions.

The three elements of this foreign policy reinforce each other: uninhibited economic openness, pluralism and membership of multilateral institutions. Genuine economic openness is not sustainable without an open society and a

willingness to participate in regional arrangements signals a commitment to openness and dialogue.

Globalisation opens up two intriguing possibilities for Indian identity. First, by relentlessly pursuing Free Trade Agreements with the rest of Asia, including ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), India is once again striving for connections in its own natural neighbourhood. It has signalled its willingness to integrate economically with the rest of Asia and it is possible that over time this will revolutionise the way in which India conceives of the region. In utopian moments it is possible to imagine India's border regions culturally and economically relinking with their traditional trading zones: Tamil Nadu with Sri Lanka, the North East with South East Asia. It is now feasible that these regions can establish economic linkages, yet remain firmly wedded politically to India. The idea is that India will need a strong centre, but not necessarily a well-defined circumference. What is striking is the degree to which this vision is being talked about and is likely to be the cornerstone of Indian policy. There is some consensus that by letting India integrate with the rest of Asia (a free trade zone from Kabul to Manila!) India will make it easy for its neighbours to open links with it in the context of wider regional cooperation.

The second intriguing possibility it opens up for Indian identity is this. There is no doubt that greater integration into the world economy, or even the aspiration, transforms an understanding of national identity. Think of two scenarios. In the first instance there is an emerging nationalist party, with significant anti-minority sentiment. But this party has none of the following aspirations. It does not feel obliged to send signals that can attract foreign investors and depositors; its routine engagements with the outside world are

episodic rather than spread across a wide range of domains; it sees international rivalries as a zero sum game; it has little potential for learning from the rest of the world and thumbs its nose at international institutions and norms.

In the second scenario, the same nationalist party, with similar anti-minority sentiment, comes to power in a context where it has to recognise that the health of the economy and, by implication, national power, depend upon a certain level of international credibility. It recognises the need to attract investment and have a plausible face to carry in forum after forum. It learns quickly that mutual interdependence is a surer path to national power than autarky, that power is not a zero sum game and that the international system can be engaged with only in terms of reciprocity. It learns that a mere declaration of sovereignty cannot be confused with real power, and that there might be something to be learnt from how other nations got to be influential. It does not take much to figure out in which scenario the nationalist party will be forced to tame its belligerence.

It would be complacent and false to believe that integration into the world economy will tame fanatical nationalism by some overdetermined logic. Nationalism and anti-minority sentiment are products of political choices. There is no guarantee against political fanaticism. But it could be argued that globalisation is a contributing factor to that moderation.

India always cared a good deal about what the rest of the world thought of it but it now cares for a more tangible measure of its success: its ability to attract investment and jobs from overseas. It is difficult to think of this as mattering unless India had greater aspirations to integrate into the global economy. In subtle ways, the desire to present India in a certain light has forced the Government to confront questions about

India's credibility. It has nudged it to make sure that India gets the headlines for the right reasons.

Belligerent nationalism feeds on a politics of anxiety. Compared to the early 1980s, the politics of anxiety seems to have diminished in intensity. This is, in no small measure, due to two factors. India has become more confident of its ability to deal with the rest of the world, and it is difficult to imagine this confidence in the absence of the process of globalisation. Rather than producing an identity crisis, globalisation has given an opportunity to India to feel less insecure. In an autarkic world, we had no sense of how we might prove our possibilities. Globalisation, by providing opportunities for international success, has made that anxiety less pressing. If Indians feel that they are ready to take on the world, they might feel less compelled to take it out on each other. If Indians are more confident that this sort of recognition is in their grasp, it might ease their anxieties. This is still only a hope. But freedom and openness suit India's character more. That is the only identity that can sustain it in the long run.

If we are looking at the inner life of culture, this fact is of some importance. For the first time in modern Indian history, Indians are cutting across different sections of society, beginning to have the sense that the future will be better than the past, and they have the ability to shape their destiny. This aspiration has serious political and economic ramifications, but it can also be the source of a new cultural confidence. What will be the values that shape it remains an open question. But there is some reason to be optimistic that despite the deep stresses of change, a pluralisitic India will endure. When the Indian Constitution was framed, one of its drafters, BN Rau, was asked, 'This is a great constitution. But we don't see what is Indian about it. Directive Principles have been borrowed from Ireland, rights from the US,

parliamentary system from England and so on.' Rau is reported to have replied, 'Before independence we used to worry about these things. What is the point of being free if you cannot take any history and make it your own?' The inner life of culture depends upon transcending culture without making culture despicable.

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Notes

1   N Luhmann, *Observations on Modernity*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1998; PB Mehta, 'Cosmopolitanism and the circle of reason', *Political Theory*, vol. 28, no. 5, 2000, pp. 619–39.

6

Cultural Pluralism in Indonesia: Local, National and Global Exchanges

Azyumardi Azra

Cultural pluralism and diversity are striking realities in Indonesia. As the prominent American anthropologist Robert Hefner argues in *The Politics of Multiculturalism: Pluralism and Citizenship in Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia* (2001), few areas of the non-Western world illustrate the legacy and challenge of cultural pluralism in a manner more striking than in the Southeast Asian countries of Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia. In fact, JS Furnivall, a British administrator and political writer before World War II, introduced the concept of plural societies in his *Netherlands India: A Study of Plural Economy* (1939/1944), and identified the country known today as Indonesia as one of its most striking examples.

According to Furnivall, a plural society is a society that comprises two or more elements of social orders which live side by side, yet without mingling, in one political unit. He further maintained that this situation is accompanied by a caste-like division of labour, in which ethno-religious groups play different economic roles. This social segregation in turn gives rise to what Furnivall regarded as these societies' most unsettling political trait: their lack of common social will. Facing this unfortunate situation, Furnivall asserted that unless some kind of formula for pluralist federation could be devised, Indonesian pluralism seemed doomed to a nightmarish anarchy.

Furnivall's 'doomed' scenario by and large fortunately failed to materialise. In contrast, a post-war Southeast Asia saw the establishment of an independent Indonesia and other countries. But this national independence was assumed to have paradoxically stimulated the rise of ethno-religious sentiment in the struggle for control and power of the new state. Indonesia saw outbreaks of communal violence in the late 1950s and 1965; more shocking yet, Indonesia was shaken by bitter, though intermittent, ethno-religious violence from 1996 – the final years that President Soeharto was in power – up to 2005, when all communal conflicts from Ambon (Maluku province) to Poso (Central Sulawesi province) and Aceh were finally peacefully resolved.

Competing cultures

Indonesia is indeed one of the most pluralistic societies in terms of ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious diversity. Age-old local traditions survived when Indonesia proclaimed its independence on 17 August 1945. Since then the so-called 'Indonesian national culture' gained momentum, competing with and in some ways transcending local cultures and tradition. The state since the time of independence has been trying to strengthen and sometimes to impose a 'national culture' in the name of national unity and integrity through centralised political structure and leadership, legislation and education – to name a few.

But the expansion of Indonesian national culture has never been able to replace local cultures up until today. Many Indonesians today still hold fast to their local cultures and traditions. This is not surprising, since the young generation is initially brought up according to the values and decorum of their ethnicity,

culture and tradition. For instance, the idea of personhood in relation to parents, families and society is based on the 'traditional' norms considered to be most appropriate for each group; 'communalism', or rather 'collectivism', is often much more important than individualism, for instance.

Therefore, when centralised political power in Jakarta during the Soeharto regime had destroyed certain aspects of that 'traditional culture and tradition' through its monocultural policy, there was a sense of loss, and violation of pluralism; now people are increasingly longing for and talking about 'local wisdom' possessed by local cultures and tradition. They believe that each local ethnic culture has its own geniuses that are instrumental in the maintenance of socio-cultural stability and harmony.

Indonesian national and local cultural diversity in the last few decades has been enriched by a more cosmopolitan culture resulting from increased globalisation. At the same time, the introduction of various new cultural forms found their way into Indonesian society, creating cultural confusion, disorientation and dislocation among young people in particular. Global lifestyles like individualism, liberalism, materialism and even hedonism are generally considered as incompatible with local and national culture. But since those kinds of lifestyles are so intrusive through instant communication, it is now a public discourse that Indonesian and local cultures are under threat from global culture.

Language of nationhood

The Indonesian archipelago – the largest one in the world, which consists of more than 17,800 islands, isles and islets – and its history make Indonesia an

extremely pluralistic society. There are diverse ethnic groups – amounting to 656 ethnic groups, big and small – living in the country, having their respective cultures, traditions and customs. Up to the 1960s, there was little interaction among these different ethnic groups, but with the acceleration of economic development that brought about improvement in transportation and communication, greater contact, communication and exchanges were established. As a result, stereotypical perceptions and prejudices among various ethnic groups decreased significantly, strengthening the feeling of Indonesian nationhood.

Not least important, those different ethnic groups speak more than 746 different local languages and dialects, even though 726 among them are now on the edge of extinction; but still, there are now 13 languages that survive, which are spoken by more than one million speakers. Considering these languages alone, Indonesia is very fortunate that the Indonesian language was adopted as the sole national language during the 'Youth Pledge' on 28 October 1928, when nationalist movements gained momentum under Dutch colonialism. It is important to mention that the Indonesian language was originally spoken by a relatively small ethnic group, the Malay, who lived mostly in Eastern and Central Sumatra. One should appreciate the tolerance of the Javanese or Sundanese who accepted the Malay-based Indonesian language, while their languages constituted the first and second largest languages, respectively, in the archipelago.

The adoption of the Malay-based Indonesian language as the national language was a good example of socio-cultural exchanges among different ethnic groups in the area. The Malay language had much earlier been adopted as the *lingua franca*, since it was the vehicle for the spread of Islam in the archipelago

from the late twelfth century onwards. The Malay language had been considered as a more egalitarian language compared with both the Javanese and Sundanese languages. That is why it was easier for non-Malay Indonesians to adopt the Malay language as the national language.

The Indonesian language no doubt plays an instrumental role in strengthening the feeling and sentiment of nationhood. This national language continued to expand, particularly in the post-independence period when education increasingly became available for the young generation at the cost of many local languages. Many people are now worried that more and more local languages are losing their speakers. It might be interesting to note that Indonesia has two parallel systems of education: about two-thirds is 'general' or 'secular' education, under the Ministry of National Education. Another third is conducted in *madrasahs* under the supervision of the Ministry of Religious Affairs; here, the national curriculum is obligatory, but there are more Islamic religious subjects taught than in the other schools.

At the same time, English continues to gain momentum to become a third or second language of the people. The first language in many cases is an ethnic language, next is the Indonesian language, and then English. But with the increased dominance of the Indonesian language and the ever-increasing number of interethnic marriages, the national language becomes the mother tongue of many young people, and English becomes the second.

Again, perceptions of the self in each of these languages are different. In local and national languages, all people are expected to use vocabularies appropriate to the age they address; but this is not always in line with English.

Religion as an identity

Religion is also an important part of Indonesian culture, and diversity is clearly reflected in religious life as well. According to some latest estimates, the total population of Indonesia is about 220 million people of which 88.2 per cent are Muslim, 5.87 per cent Protestant, 3.05 per cent Catholic, 1.81 per cent Hindu, 0.84 per cent Buddhist and the remaining 0.20 are of other religions and spiritual groups. The Indonesian government officially recognises the six world religions of Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism.

It is important to point out that, although the population of the archipelago converted mostly to Islam, the region is known as the one of the least Arabicised areas throughout the Muslim world. Geographically, it is also the farthest from the Arabian Peninsula, or more precisely Mecca and Medina, where Islam was originally revealed and developed. Furthermore, Islam was introduced by Sufi wandering teachers who accommodated local beliefs and practices. Therefore, Islam in the archipelago was regarded by many outsiders as 'marginal' or 'peripheral' Islam, as 'impure' or 'syncretic' Islam. Moreover, Islam in the archipelago was regarded as having little to do with Islamic orthodoxy attributed to Islam in Arabia, or the region now known as the Middle East.

The most important proponent of this perception is the influential American anthropologist Clifford Geertz. Having a great reluctance to recognise the deep influence of Islam in Java in particular, he called his work *The Religion of Java* (1960) rather than, for instance, *The Religion of Islam in Java* or even *Javanese Islam*. In this seminal work, he proposed that there are three variants of Islam in Java particularly and, by extension, in the archipelago generally. The three variants were *priyayi* (aristocratic Muslims), *santri* (strict and practising Muslims), and *abangan* (nominal or ID card Muslims). According to Geertz, the *priyayi* variant was heavily influenced by Indic-Sanskrit culture, whereas the *abangan* variant was too indigenous, syncretic and even animistic. Therefore, in his judgment, it is only the *santri* variant, with its heavy orientation to Middle Eastern Islam, which is the real Islam, and members of this variant are numerically few among the population. With that, Geertz implies that the majority of Javanese or Indonesians are not real Muslims, and Islam is adhered to by only a small fraction of the population.

One of Geertz's fiercest critics is Marshall GS Hodgson, a prominent expert of Islamic civilisations from the University of Chicago. In his celebrated work *The Venture of Islam* (vol. 2, 1974) he admits the importance of Geertz's *Religion of Java*; at the same time he criticises Geertz for identifying Islam in Java with only the modernist Muslims and ascribing everything else to an aboriginal or a 'Hindu–Buddhist' background. In Hodgson's sharp criticism, Geertz made a wrong conclusion that 'Javanese Islam' has long been cut off from the centres of Islamic orthodoxy in Mecca, Medina, and even Cairo.

Recent studies have further refuted much of Geertz's assertion. As I have shown in *The Origins of Islamic Reformism in Southeast Asia* (2004), for the period of the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries and beyond, and also by Michael Laffan in *Islamic Nationhood and Colonial Indonesia: The Umma Below the Wind* (2003), Islam in the archipelago has never been cut off from Islam in the Middle East. In fact there are a great many intense connections, networks and religious–cultural exchanges among Muslims in the two regions. All these in turn have influenced the course of Islam in the archipelago, including in Java. Islam in fact forms an obvious layer of Javanese and, by extension, Indonesian cultures.

In the last two decades at least, Islam has been gaining momentum due to the increased attachment to religion; more and more of the so-called *abangan* (nominal) Muslims become practising believers. This can be seen in the steady growth of the number of Muslims attending rituals in mosques and performing pilgrimage to Mecca; and the more widespread use of *jilbab* (hijab, 'headscarf'). Islam is getting stronger to become one of the personal and collective identities beside ethnic and Indonesian national identities.

Islam thus is part and parcel of ethnic and Indonesian national cultures. In most cases there is no conflict between the three. This is due mostly to the nature of Indonesian Islam, which is very accommodating and tolerant of local cultures. At the same time Indonesian Muslims in general love to practise what I call, 'colourful Islam', or even 'flowery Islam' – that is, Islam which draws much on local cultures and particular interpretations of doctrine. So, Islam is also an integrated part of the 'inner lives' of Indonesian Muslims, reflected in many aspects of daily life.

Pancasila: politics and culture

Even though Indonesia is known as the largest Muslim nation in the world, it is not an Islamic state, nor is it a 'secular' one. Politically and ideologically, Indonesia is a state based on Pancasila (five principles): (1) Belief in One Supreme God; (2) Just and Civilised Humanism; (3) the Unity of Indonesia; (4) Democracy; and (5) Social Justice. Proposed initially by Soekarno, the First President of the Republic of Indonesia, Pancasila was (and still is) a compromise between secular nationalists who advocated a secular state and Muslim leaders who demanded an 'Islamic state'. Muslim leaders accepted Pancasila when it was adopted into the Preamble of

the 1945 Constitution and regarded it as having no incompatibility with Islamic teaching.

Therefore, Muslims' acceptance of Pancasila is one of the most important Indonesian Islamic roots of pluralism. For the majority of Indonesian Muslims, Pancasila is, in line with a verse of the Qur'an, a *kalimah sawa*, a common platform, among different religious followers. Addressing the Prophet Muhammad, the Qur'an has this to say: 'Say: O the people of the Book [*ahl al-kitab*, that is the Jews and Christians]; come to common terms between us and you; that we worship none but God, that we associate partners with him, that we erect not, from ourselves, lords and patrons, other than God...' (Q 3:64).

As the prominent Indonesian intellectual Nurcholish Madjid rightly argues in his *Islamic Roots of Modern Pluralism: Indonesian Experience* (1994), the Pancasila thus becomes a firm basis for the development of religious tolerance and pluralism in Indonesia. Madjid cited Adam Malik, once Vice President during the Soeharto period, who maintained that Pancasila, in Islamic perspective, is in a similar spirit to the *modus vivendi* that was created by the Prophet Muhammad in Medina after having migrated (*hijrah*) from Mecca. The Prophet laid down the *modus vivendi* in a famous document called the 'Constitution of Medina' (*al-mithaq al-madinah*). The document includes a provision which states that all Medinan factions, including Jews, were one nation (*ummah*) together with Muslims, and that they have the same rights and duties as Muslims. Adam Malik interprets the 'Constitution of Medina' as a formula for a state based on the idea of social and religious pluralism.

Similarly, Robert N Bellah, the American sociologist of religion maintains in his important article 'Islamic tradition and the problem of

modernization' (1970) that the Medinan state was a root of Islamic modernity and pluralism. He further argues that Islam in its seventh-century origins was for its time and place 'remarkably modern... in the high degree of commitment, involvement, and participation expected from the rank-and-file members of the community'. Despite that, the Prophet Muhammad's experiment eventually failed because of the lack of necessary socio-cultural prerequisites among the Arab Muslims. In other words, the *modus vivendi* failed because it was 'too modern' for the Medinan society. Looking to the Indonesian experience with Pancasila as a common platform, it is a part of what Bellah sees as an effort of modern Indonesian Muslims to depict the early community as the prototype 'Islamic recognition of pluralism'.

As a basis of Indonesian pluralism, Pancasila had unfortunately been used by the Soeharto regime as a tool for repression. The forced implementation in 1985 of Pancasila as the sole ideological basis of all organisations in the country was unfortunate and resented by many Indonesians. Through special training, Pancasila was forced on Indonesians through indoctrination, which in the end gave Pancasila a bad name. It is clear that for most Indonesians nothing is wrong with Pancasila as such, but when it was abused and manipulated for the maintenance of President Soeharto's political status quo, then people rapidly lost their belief in Pancasila as an integrating factor within plural Indonesia.

In my view, there is no other viable alternative to Pancasila as the common platform of a plural and multicultural Indonesia. Therefore, it is a serious challenge for Indonesia to revive and revitalise Pancasila. At the same time, there is an increasing need to bridge the gap between the ideal five pillars of Pancasila and the current daily realities of various aspects of Indonesian life. Otherwise, people will again lose their belief in Pancasila; they will simply pay lip service to Pancasila as it will have very little meaning in their lives.

Muslims and democracy

Given the fact that Muslims are the single largest group of the faithful in Indonesia, it is reasonable to expect that they should play a greater and more positive role in the development and enhancement of a democratic and multicultural Indonesia. Indonesian Islam possesses distinctive traits and characteristics that are to a large extent different from Islam in the Middle East. Indonesian Islam is essentially a tolerant, moderate and 'middle way' (*ummah wasat*) Islam, given the history of its early spread, which was generally peaceful and had been integrated into diverse ethnic, cultural and social realities of Indonesia.

The majority of Indonesian Muslims belong to moderate mainstream organisations such as the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), Muhammadiyah, and many other regional organisations throughout Indonesia. All of these Muslim organisations support modernity and democracy. They support the current form of Indonesian state and Pancasila, and at the same time oppose the establishment of an Islamic state in Indonesia as well as the implementation of shariah (Islamic law) in the current Indonesian nation-state.

All of these moderate and mainstream organisations are also religiously based civil society organisations, which play a crucial role in the development and enhancement of civic culture, civility, democracy and good governance. These organisations are very active in the dissemination of the ideas of

democracy, human rights, justice, gender equality and other ideas that are crucial in modern society. Not least, mainstream Muslim organisations have been very active in conducting religious dialogues with non-Muslim groups at local, national and international levels.

With the Muslim acceptance of democracy, Indonesia has been successful in conducting peaceful elections in 1999, 2004 and 2009. These general elections have been historic landmarks, particularly the election of 2004, which was the first direct presidential election. The success of these democratic elections in Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world, has shown a compatibility between Islam and democracy.

Conclusion

There is little doubt that a good understanding of the cultures of people within various ethnic groups and nation-states will contribute a great deal to successful dialogues across boundaries and differences. With that, healthier intercultural exchanges can also take place.

In such intercultural dialogues, it is necessary to find and strengthen commonalities among people of different cultural backgrounds. By the same token, it is also appropriate not to emphasise – let alone to exaggerate – differences among them. If we can do that, then we have some strong reasons to be optimistic for a better future for humankind.

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7

The Intercultural Imperative and Iranian Dreams

Ramin Jahanbegloo

Culture is not a source of conflict but it can be a valuable resource for peace. However, cultural identities can clash, as these identities may signify much more than ethical values to some people. Perhaps, then, it is not surprising that it is currently fashionable to decry the fact that people's particularistic attachments shape their ethics. Certainly the sense of belonging to a culture is a constituent element of our individuality that should be cherished. But this does not mean that universal human rights and the ideal of being an autonomous individual are merely Western liberal prejudices which could be put away once and for all. This suggests a bridge between a relativistic, multiculturalist liberalism based on tolerance of diversity and an Enlightenment liberalism which upholds the ideal of the rational, emancipated individual. Accepting the importance of identities does not necessarily mean that they are sole narrative models for allowing us to enhance our individuality. It is, nevertheless, true that, as Herder affirmed, 'Each nation has its centre of gravity within itself, just as every sphere has its centre of gravity.' But each culture is accompanied by the memory of what all nations have in common – and that is human civilisation. As such, every intercultural dialogue is a dialogue on and with humanity. Therefore, every culture should be exposed to the virtues of self-criticism, tolerance, dialogue, openness to change and self-control of its own destiny.

Thanks to the global reach of information in today's world, members of even the most traditional and isolated societies are daily exposed to different forms of ideas, institutions, moral and social practices, and forms of life which encourage a sense of common belonging to humanity and global citizenship. In other words, cross-cultural diversity has become an inescapable fact of life in our global century, and attempts to dismantle it are undertaken in the name of what one could call 'forcibly universalised particularisms', which is what all fundamentalisms are about. Taking one's particular religious options and preferences and trying to impose them is, indeed, nothing but particularism-with-violence, or pseudo-universalism. Only half a decade ago, fundamentalism would have been considered as 'militant opposition to modernity'. In other words, fundamentalism emerges very often as a violent rejection of modernity and as retrogression to pre-modern religious fundamentals. However, the most important feature of 'fundamentalism' in our world is the politicisation of religion and the process of ideologisation of the tradition. A common definition of fundamentalism points to religious movements that strive to reestablish socially, culturally and politically core elements within a religious tradition. Therefore, fundamentalism is reactive to and defensive towards pluralism of values, and a hermeneutical methodology applied to religious traditions. On the contrary, in fundamentalist movements, there is an affirmation of the absolute validity of the fundamentals of a tradition. This is the reason why it is easier to establish a fundamentalist movement where core principles are spelled out explicitly in a sacred text. The authoritarian and absolutist dimensions of fundamentalist movements manifest themselves, among other elements, in the ideological manipulation of a religious tradition. In the

eyes of most religious fundamentalists, societies must be constituted on the basis of religious community. There ought to be neither singular identities nor idiosyncratic quests for a personal meaning. In other words, all individuals must belong to a religious collectivity, and their everyday lives must be governed by the normative traditions of such collectivities.

From the side of the religious fundamentalists, the essential aspect of their global struggle with the world is about the primacy of religion. Secular fundamentalists, who hold that spirituality should have no place at all in political life, are often not that different from their religious cousins, whom they claim to hate so much; they alone know what is best for all, and they alone have knowledge of everything. It just so happens that the two belong to two diverse groups. In both cases, however, we have a dogmatic worldview that fails to respect democratic values, including the importance of dialogue and compromise. To be more accurate, the belief that a separation of religion and state is a core feature of democracy does not necessarily mean that religious groups should be excluded from explicit public life. There is no strict connection between being a secularist and being a democrat. In fact, spirituality and democracy are not incompatible with each other if both function in their well-defined spheres. Democracy needs a spiritual force as spirituality needs a political one without interfering with each other within politics. Most of the cultural and religious communities which feel threatened by the network of global civil society and transnational solidarities tend to become suspicious and closed-minded, and to suppress internal differences, while avoiding all but minimal contacts with other cultures. However, diversity is desirable not only for ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities, but also for the society as a whole. It adds a valuable ethical dimension to society, widens the range of

moral and cultural empathy, and encourages critical self-reflection. In short, there is no moral progress of humanity without cultural pluralism. No democratic society, then, can ignore the demands of diversity. One's self-respect is therefore closely bound up with respect for other cultures and ways of life as long as they do not violate human rights. As such, no culture or tradition is beyond criticism and moral sanction of humanity. If it were so, we would leave no secure and effective space for humanness.

This is where civil society as a sphere of citizenship which is 'always already becoming' holds a promise for the future of individual autonomy and for the protection of collective diversity beyond political and religious sectarianism. Civil society, more than any other topic, is the subject of intense debate and contention in Iran today. Looked at from the Iranian context, civil society is not a homogeneous entity. More than a 'voluntary sector' or a 'charity sector' it is an 'ethical sector'. As a matter of fact, talking about civil society in the context of a theocracy like Iran leads one to speak of a society of citizens, as opposed to a society organised on grounds of religiosity. In the Iranian context, the obvious question is: what political culture has been the most conducive to the development of civil society? It is certainly not a religious culture, nor necessarily a secular one. But it is certainly an anti-sectarian one. I think the conditions for the formation and consolidation of a civil society in a fundamentalist society like Iran have been threefold. First, there has been a great effort on the issue of 'publicity', in the domain of what citizens know about public life. The struggle of independent journalists to create journals in order to inform citizens not only about local conditions, institutions and interests but also about the government has been one of the pillars of the Iranian civil society.

Second, on the ethical side there has been the effort of Iranian intellectuals to defend the truth against lies and to promote the ethical and political capacity to pass judgment on those who are responsible for the conduct of affairs in the public domain. Finally, the third pillar has been the horizontal relationship of cooperation and mutual support, instead of tension and conflict among the Iranian citizens themselves, as actors of the Iranian civil society.

Factionalism at the top of the political hierarchy has allowed the rest of the society to find spaces to engage in politics. People who were not part of the leadership – young people, university students, intellectuals and others – could delve into politics precisely because politics at the top was so openly fractious. The tumult in the parliament, and the daily battles among those running the country, emboldened people to criticise and even resist the authorities. Had there been a solid consolidation of power and ideological coherence at the top, such spaces would not have been opened and such resistance would not have been possible.

The idea of civil society has also penetrated the day-to-day politics of the country, in the slogans of candidates for various offices. Three principal positions have emerged in the civil society debate now raging in Iran. First, there are those who regard the whole concept as antithetical to the basic values and ideals of an Islamic society and state. These are the hard-line conservatives, who occupy the most powerful positions within Iran's political establishment. They control all the means of violence in Iranian society (the Revolutionary Guards, the security services), and they hold much of the economic power as well. Second, there are those who want to Islamicise the idea of civil society, to make it compatible with the existing norms and values of the present order. They advocate an 'Islamic civil society' that would be clearly distinguishable from its secular,

Western counterparts. Third, there are those who view the concept as ideologically neutral in terms of the ultimate goals and values of society, but useful as a basis for structuring state–society relations, protecting the relative autonomy and freedom of citizens and their associations, and promoting a more tolerant, pluralistic and democratic order. Post-revolutionary Iranian civil society is undergoing today, from my point of view, a period of transition from utopian thinking and a quest for an 'ideological modernity', to a non-imitative dialogical exchange with modernity and the West. Taken as the capacity for choice among different alternatives, negative liberty has become the central framework for a plural view of Iranian history where teleological and deterministic perspectives are replaced by the adoption of a self-creative perspective through choice-making. The centrality accorded to dialogue with the outside world in the constitution of the new Iranian intellectual space reveals once again the affinities of the new generation of intellectuals with the imperatives of an intercultural dialogue.

Iranian intellectuals and the intercultural dialogue

The spectre of democracy has haunted Iranian intellectuals for more than 150 years. For over 150 years Iranian intellectuals embraced and appropriated Western political and cultural values while at the same time keeping a critical distance. Actually, in both achieving a discourse on democracy and creating a distance from it, they contributed to the creation of a dual attitude, in which a magnanimity towards modernity was coupled with a wounded sense of national pride and a resentment of the cultural and political intrusion of the West in Iran. The initial romantic 'fascination with Western liberalism', which took shape among the

Iranian intellectuals in late nineteenth century, was replaced after the Second World War with a broader romantic 'revolt against the Western values of capitalism and liberalism'. Surprisingly, the universal sameness of Iranian traditions in opposition to the supposedly universal otherness of modernity became a common denominator in both right-wing romantic nationalism and in Marxist anti-imperialist nationalism in Iran. In both cases, this romance of the authentic cultural and national body was characterised by feelings of cultural relativism and traditional anxiety. Different attempts to generate a sense of national pride, triggered by a growing awareness of Iran's backwardness vis-à-vis the West, were translated into serious calls for Europeanisation, internationalism and pan-Islamism. One must not forget that the sense of ancient nationhood, particularly in contrast with the Western form of temporality, was a useful mechanism of voicing opposition in Iran against different political status quos while being a strong argument for a discourse of 'authenticity'. As a matter of fact, because of the double structure of romancing but at the same time rejecting the West, a constant oscillation was generated between democratic universalism and Iranian particularism among Iranian intellectuals. Particularism and universalism did not form an antinomy but rather mutually reinforced each other. The building of an imaginary glorious past under the old Persian kings or the narrating of a utopian Iranian secular or religious society were different modes of particularistic thinking among Iranian intellectuals, who thought of themselves as universalistic without coming across the otherness of the other. One must not forget that all along in the twentieth century, many Iranian intellectuals joined Arab, Asian and African intellectuals around the world in extolling the virtues of Iranian traditions as a tool for purifying the non-West

from the contamination of Western domination. Such romantic resentment was often portrayed as a gesture of emancipation and liberation. For the Iranian intellectuals the 'return to roots' and the affirmation of the Perso-Islamic heritage as much as the acquisition of Western democracy was considered as the protection of one's civilisation against outside civilisation. That is to say, in the past 150 years the Iranian intellectual movement has gone through a cycle of erratic oscillations in which moments of democratic hope and promotion of democracy have alternated with times of ideologisation of politics and tradition.

Although the making of the two Revolutions of 1906 and 1979 in Iran involved a short and fragile alliance between intellectuals and social and political actors of the religious class, most of the mainstream historians of the Iranian Constitutional Revolution and the Iranian Revolution of 1978 agree that Iranian intellectuals played an important role in both events in terms of developing ideas of progress, equality, constitutionalism and reform through their encounters with the modern world. The intellectual background for such a contribution was laid down in the nineteenth-century writings of Iranian intellectuals that challenged absolutism and arbitrary political power. It was in relation to this theme that the idea of parliamentary liberalism was formulated. A shared conception of law among the leading intellectuals of this period was the direct outcome of the reading of European thinkers and writers. These included Francis Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, Voltaire, Rousseau, Bentham, Hume and John Stuart Mill. Such contact with Western ideas helped to create a fertile ground for intellectual changes and later political reforms in Iran.

In the late nineteenth century, a number of Iranian intellectuals living inside and outside Iran became advocates of political liberalisation and social

equality. Among them were the playwright Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh (1812–1878), the writer Abd-al Rahim Talebov (1834–1911), the socialist thinker Mirza Aqa Khan Kirmani (1854–1896) and the modernist Mirza Malkum Khan (1834–1908). The latter is most often credited for his nationalistic views and for his call on the struggle against government autocracy and increasing domination of Iran by imperial powers. After Naser al-Din Shah banned Malkum's Freemason society (the Faramushkhaneh) and sent him into exile, Malkum began to publish a liberal journal by the name of *Qanun* (Law) from London. In his widely circulated and read editorials, Malkum denounced openly the lawlessness and tyranny of the Qajars and demanded a popularly elected assembly. As Hamid Algar argues in his book on Malkum Khan, 'This call for parliamentary government was a new element in Malkum's political pronouncements. Earlier in his treatises, he had proposed only the establishment of law and had even defined Iran, in a kind of draft constitution, as "an absolute monarchy operating through law". But his disgrace and dismissal, coming at a time of growing discontent and rebellion in Iran, caused him to address himself to a wider audience with more radical proposals.' Malkum, however, was not among those Iranian intellectuals who rejected religion in general. Still, 'his view of Islam suggests that he did not grasp the implications of its fundamental role in Persian society, nor its inherent tension with modernity. Instead, he saw Islam simply as instrumental in bringing about a program of political action.'

Unlike Malkum Khan, many other secular intellectuals of the late Qajar period dissociated religion and politics. Akhundzadeh is the most significant representative of the Iranian secular Aufklarers. Despite being Turcophone, Akhundzadeh identified deeply with Iranian nationalism. In his *Maktubat*,

Akhundzadeh promoted free thinking and freedom from religious terror and he strongly invited Iranians to liberate themselves from despotism. However, this could only be 'achieved via knowledge and knowledge could not be acquired unless through progress, and progress could not be achieved unless by being liberal, and being liberal is not possible without getting rid of [religious] beliefs'. For Akhundzadeh, religion in general and Islam in particular were obstacles to social and intellectual progress. That is the reason why he considered as a free thinker somebody who 'is not subject to religious terror, and does not believe in what is beyond reason and outside the law of nature'. There is no doubt that Akhundzadeh was a reader of John Stuart Mill and David Hume. His purported 'Letter from David Hume to the Muslim Clergy of India' written in 1860 and his commentary of Mill's *On Liberty* are strong evidence for this argument. But one can conclude by reading Akhundzadeh's writings that he 'did not share Hume's scepticism and was instead a firm adherent of nineteenth-century positivism'. An examination of Akhundzadeh's life and writings suggests that he was an outspoken advocate of secularism and tried to curb clerical power in Iran whenever he found an opportunity.

The obsession with religion and with liberal values remained a salient character of Iranian intelligentsia at the end of the nineteenth century. Two of the most influential advocates of judicial and economic modernisation in nineteenth-century Iran were Mirza Yusef Khan Mostashar od-Dowleh and Mirza Huseyn Khan Mushir od-Dowleh. These two, in the same manner as Kirmani, Malkum Khan and Akhundzadeh, laid some of the groundwork for the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, in the decade of the 1870s. Mushir od-Dowleh was the reformist statesman of his day

who was deeply influenced by the Tanzimat reforms. His experiences in Istanbul as a Qajar ambassador to the Ottoman Empire awakened him to the need of applying modern solutions to Iran's social and economic problems. What grieved Mirza Huseyn Khan more than anything else was that the Iranian ruling class and the king himself were so alien to the idea of a parliamentary government. In a dispatch to the Iranian Foreign Ministry he expressed his distress: 'I am grieved and know that I am seeking the impossible. I know that what I wish for my country cannot be achieved overnight, and must be attained gradually. But the reason for my sadness is that, not only have we made no effort in this direction yet, but that we do not even believe there is anything wrong with our state, or that our affairs need improvement. To the contrary, we believe that we have reached the highest degree of progress, and there is nothing we have to do or to worry about.' Mirza Huseyn Khan never took the risk of challenging openly the Iranian *ulama* and that was the basic reason for his failure to accomplish his reforms during his own lifetime. His efforts, however, did create a new dynamic within Iran's political and judicial institutions. His strong belief in the advancement of European civilisation was translated into a wide range of innovations, from installing gaslights in Tehran to encouraging the Iranian aristocracy to pay more attention to the new methods of education. Mirza Huseyn Khan's reforms did not have an immediate impact on his contemporaries, but considering the considerable lack of resources for the reforms and the inadequate executive authority to enforce them, it is a miracle that Mushir od-Dowleh's principles came later to be considered as the standards of modernisation in Iran.

While Mushir od-Dowleh was trying to develop and sustain a coherent theory of judicial and political

reforms, Mirza Yusef Khan Mostashar od-Dowleh, whose major work, *Yek Kalameh* (One Word) played an important role in the process of constitutionalism in Iran, was challenging the political backwardness and economic stagnation of Qajar Iran by acknowledging the major achievements of the West. Answering the question: 'What was the secret of Europe's progress?' the author reminded his readers that the answer was only one word, *yek kalameh*, a state of law. According to Mostashar od-Dowleh the Muslim thinkers 'had failed to understand that the basis of Europe's power was not its technological and scientific achievements, but its political and administrative organisation as well as its judicial machinery'. As a French-speaking Iranian diplomat influenced by the ideals of the French Revolution, Mostashar od-Dowleh envisioned a constitutional Iranian state with laws modelled on those of France helping to create new institutions and social forms. The comparison between Islamic law and French law led him to talk about the logical, popular and immanent nature of the French law (*loi*) as a basis for the establishment of a constitutional form of government. He did not, however, talk about secularism as a required element for the modernisation of Iranian society. Indeed, it may very well be argued that Mirza Yusef was more critical towards the Iranian officials and leaders than towards the Iranian *ulama*. He truly believed that the Qajar aristocracy had failed to modernise Iran and that as long as Iran was not bound to overcome backwardness and stagnation by adopting a European model, it was in danger of being dominated by European powers. Ultimately, modernisation did not come about as Mostashar od-Dowleh had envisioned it in *Yek Kalameh*, but 'his strategy of presenting European ideas under the mask of Islam left a profound impact on some educated and religious-minded Iranians who played an important role in the constitutional revolution

of 1906. These Iranians were converted to the cause of constitutionalism after reading *Yek Kalameh*, which reassured them that borrowing from Europe did not necessarily mean the loss of their religious and cultural identity.' However, the lack of acknowledgement by Mirza Yusef Khan of the fundamental discrepancies between European and Islamic traditions did play a delaying role in the making of the secular mind in Iranian intellectual history.

It is not surprising that these 'men of the pen' referred to themselves as modernists (*mutajaddidin*). Most of these intellectuals avoided the extremes of either full identification with the West or full retreat to 'traditional' values. Instead, the majority of them found in Western culture ideas such as liberalism, rationality and nationalism. In other words, the odyssey of the Iranian intellectuals in the twentieth century began by searching for ways to best incorporate rationality and democratic values in the Iranian culture. Nowhere can this incorporation be more clearly seen than in the political life and in the intellectual work of Muhammad Ali Furughi, one of the Iranian precursors of Iranian liberalism who in his political and philosophical writings reflected the first genuine attempt by an Iranian intellectual to articulate a systematic understanding of modern political and philosophical traditions. Furughi belonged to the second generation of Iranian intellectuals, who, thanks to the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, were able to participate more actively in the political life of the country. The hope and goal of Furughi was to create suitable conditions for the implementation of modern and liberal principles in Iran, by concentrating his efforts on 'reforms from above'. In order to achieve these goals, Furughi attempted to influence not only the political actions of Reza Shah (who ruled from 1921

to 1942), by involving himself in the different branches of government, but also by introducing modern philosophical, economic and political ideas to Iranians through translations, speeches and writings.

Also, all through his career Furughi advocated liberal forms of citizenship. Actually, Furughi's general interest in the history of philosophy came about partly because he considered philosophy as a mode of 'Enlightenment from Below' helping Iranians to become more mature in their political judgment and everyday reasoning. Indeed, for him philosophy was a continuous process of thinking, which stemmed from his pragmatic view of human intervention in the world. Without philosophy, he contended, no tangible and pragmatic results could be obtained in Iran. For Furughi, as for Mirza Malkum Khan before him, freemasonry was an institution dedicated to striving to spread the ideals of modernity in Iran through universalisation and promotion of western principles of freedom, education and secularism. As a follower of the principles of the French Enlightenment and namely Montesquieu, Furughi insisted on the idea of the separation of the different branches of government. As he wrote in *Huquq-e Asasi Ya'ni Adab-e Mashrutiyat*, published in Tehran in 1907: 'The duty of government is to be the protector of the rights of the people, that is, to be keeper of justice. The government will not be able to undertake its duty unless it acts according to laws. The existence of laws will not be realised except by two means: first, through making laws, and second, through execution of laws. Therefore, the government has two powers: first, the making of laws, and second, the execution of laws. If the powers of legislation and execution remain in the hands of a single person or a single group, the conduct of government will result in despotism... Therefore, government is constitutional only when it has separated

these two powers from each other and invested them in two separate groups.' For Furughi, the raison d'être of laws is precisely to prevent misuse of power, and sovereignty belongs only to the nation. It is within the context of these ideas that Furughi introduces Montesquieu's idea of separation of different branches of power and the concept of a just and lawful government. What comes across in Furughi's writings is an absolute belief in the idea of progress, as well as a discussion of the separation of powers and the rights of the people under a liberal constitution. First and foremost in Furughi's thought is the idea of the inevitability of progress and the fact that progress in the West has been entirely responsible for a liberal re-organisation of the social, economic and political spheres. Furughi was among the first Iranian intellectuals and statesmen to deal with these ideas in a serious and systematic way. This is why one can say that Furughi's influence on the genesis and development of Iranian liberal heritage is without parallel. Of all statesmen and intellectuals involved somehow with the spirit of constitutionalism and the project of liberalism in Iran, Furughi stands out as the most prominent and also as the most relevant for a renaissance of liberalism in Iran.

In contrast to Furughi as the paradigmatic intellectual of his generation, who repeatedly endowed the individual as the beneficiary of modern subjectivity, someone like Ali Shariati considered the same human subjectivity as the privilege of the Iranian masses. Unlike Furughi and Malkum, who in their non-ideological approach to modernity were in search of creating the dialogical bridge between democratic individualism and its materialisation in the concept of law and rights of citizenship, Shariati's crucial emphasis on the role of free human volition found its ontological and anthropological grounds in an ideal

Islamic ideology. Shariati introduced rationalism and philosophy of history in Shiite Islam and succeeded in mobilising Iranian religious intellectuals in a social movement that led to the 1979 revolution.

When the revolutionary movement started in 1978 and the Shia clergy appeared as its central force, it was hard to find any intellectual who doubted the anti-intellectual, anti-modern and anti-Western attitude of the Iranian revolution. At the same time, even those who were at some point close to the Shah's regime (either as university professors or public servants) found themselves attracted by the revolutionary wave. That is the reason why the Iranian revolution was not accompanied with an intrinsically critical response among the Iranian intellectuals, which would impel them to speak truth to power. As a result of this, Iranian intellectuals entered the first period of the revolution as weak and subordinate allies of the Islamist forces.

One can distinguish in 1979 two main groups of intellectuals in revolutionary Iran: on the one side, there were those who supported the Iranian revolution, and on the other side, there were those who were victims of it. The less radical and less political intellectuals who had adopted a much more democratic and tolerant discourse in the early 1980s because of their liberal views (people such as Mostafa Rahimi and Shahrokh Meskoob) or were listed as the followers and courtesans of the Shah's regime (such as Daryush Shayegan and Jamchid Behnam) were among the first to be expelled from the political, social and cultural spheres. Most of them had to face either a cultural persecution or to leave Iran for exile in the European capitals such as Paris and London. Practically all these non-revolutionary intellectuals had to face a public sphere dominated by anti-intellectual and ideological discourses, and controlled by Islamic and Marxist-Leninist slogans.

They also had to face the emergence in the early 1990s in Iran of those who came to be known as the 'religious intellectuals,' as their cultural and political rivals. More than 15 years after the creation of the Islamic Republic, the religious intellectuals became the architects of the reform movement in the Iranian presidential elections of 1997. For eight years, after the landslide victory of Khatami in 1997, the ruling clergy continued to resist the establishment of a political platform for debate and rational discourse, and the question remained whether Khatami's presidency had been an utter failure and therefore a mere footnote in the evolution of Iran's Islamic Revolution. What is certain is that Khatami's landslide election in 1997 was a positive step in the transition to popular sovereignty. The enthusiastic participation of a new generation of voters in 1997 increased the pressures for political pluralism. Iran's youth, many previously too young to vote or alienated from the political system, made up a large part of the 20 million who gave Khatami his surprise victory. They were joined by unprecedented numbers of women. Both groups perceived Khatami to be an agent for change. That they believed they could achieve change by means of the existing political system speaks well for the actual contradictions inside the Iranian political system. As for Khatami, he used Islamic vernacular and nationalistic symbols to articulate a new discourse of governance in Iran based on popular sovereignty.

It can hardly be contested that Khatami's election and his eight years of presidency had popularised the discourse of democracy in Iran and opened once again the debate about democratisation in Iran. However, the main issue in this debate was less the transition to some kind of multiparty democracy than the consolidation of Iranian civil society and the improvement of civil liberties. The genie of democratisation was certainly out

of the bottle and could not be forced back into it. Yet the struggle of the reformists for eight years showed that the institutional configuration and the fractionalised nature of Iranian politics did not allow quick reforms. Still, the fact remained that, since Khatami's election, a new political discourse gained currency whose main themes were: the rule of law, tolerance versus violence, inclusivism versus exclusivism and the need to move towards a civil society. Also, the political opening via electoral politics increased the integrative capacity of the Islamic political system and enhanced the regime's survivability. Of course, since Khatami presented himself as a supporter of people's sovereignty (*mardomsalari*) and not necessarily an advocate of the Iranian civil society, he never spelled out clearly the development of civil society against the arbitrary political powers, such as the myriad courts that in many cases over the eight years of his presidency stifled public debate, freedom of the press and cracked down on dissident intellectuals. While the reform movement, which started with the 1997 elections that brought Mohammad Khatami to power, did not fully achieve any of its engagements, it nevertheless produced one big change in the way politics was practised in the Islamic Republic of Iran: elections became the most important place where the struggle for power had to occur. It was with the aim of stopping the expansion of the electoral process as the centre of Iran's political system and thus preventing it from becoming the primary tool for the creation of political authority, that the conservative forces opposed fiercely the reform movement and finally reached their aim of annihilating it.

Despite all the uncertainties and challenges during the Khatami years, journalists, intellectuals and artists found a greater place and presence in the Iranian public sphere. The activities of most of the influential reformist newspapers in the late 1990s (which reached circulation of more than a million), such as *Salaam, Jame'eh, Tous,*

Khordad, Sobh-e emrouz, Neshat, Mosharekat, Asr-e Azadegan and *Bahar,* depended on the role and presence of these intellectuals. In the broad sense of the term, religious intellectuals were considered as all those individuals (cleric or non-cleric) who were interested in the ideas of Iranian Muslim thinkers and politicians such as Mehdi Bazargan, Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani, Ali Shariati and Ayatollah Morteza Mottahari. No need to add that while criticising the conservative wing of the regime, most of the 'religious intellectuals' like Mojtahed Shabestari, Hamidreza Jalaeipour, Abdlkarim Soroosh, Alavi-Tabar or Mohammad Khatami and many others supported fully the Revolution and never denied clearly their past affiliations with the Islamic regime as either members of the Council of the Cultural Revolution or as members of the Revolutionary Guards and the Security Forces. Among these, Mohsen Kadivar was the only one who spent a year and a half in prison for doubting the *velayat faqih,* the rule of Islamic jurists, as it was conceived by Ayatollah Khomeini.

If we go back to the first years of the Iranian Revolution, we can say that the key question for a historian of contemporary Iran is: why did most of the Iranian intellectuals align themselves with the forces of the Revolution while others remained silent? The answer resides certainly in the absence of 'ethical responsibility' among those that we can name as the 'revolutionary intellectuals' in Iran. These intellectuals supported the revolution for two reasons. First, because of the seduction of the concept of 'revolution' and what surrounded it. This was accompanied by a sense of 'utopian idealism' and a deep attitude of 'political romanticism', which was very common in the 1960s and 1970s among the Leftist intellectuals in Iran. However, the revolutionary quest of the leftist intellectuals in Iran was characterised by a series of political, strategic

and philosophical shortcomings. In other words, their ideological preoccupations with the cultural and political dimensions of the Iranian reality was accompanied by a lack of coherent and systematic analysis of Iranian history and of the Western philosophical heritage. Many of these ideological attitudes are reflected in the Leftist intellectual literature of the late 1970s and early 1980s. These works were written mainly to convey a revolutionary message based on a process of utopian thinking, rather than to serve the cause of critical thinking as the paradigmatic element of intellectual modernity. Second, many among the pro-revolutionary intellectuals strived to defend new strategic positions in the new revolutionary society of Iran. For some of them, intellectual purges at the level of universities and government offices made room for new faces and new ways of thinking. Unfortunately, as time went by, only those who were close to the regime and presented no danger for it could find a solid place inside the institutions controlled by the government. Thousands of Leftist scholars and students were expelled from universities during Iran's Cultural Revolution in the early 1980s. As a result of this, the same revolutionary intellectuals who supported the Iranian Revolution of 1979 in the name of anti-Westernisation, anti-imperialism and struggle against Iranian capitalists were considered as the enemies of Islam and dangerous elements for the future of the Islamic regime in Iran. Many of these Leftist intellectuals had to flee for their lives, abandoning behind them the Revolution and the hope of one day seeing a socialist Iran. Others who stayed in Iran suffered imprisonment and death and found themselves not only disenchanted and disillusioned by the political defeat of the Left in Iran, but also betrayed by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. However, those among the Islamic revolutionary

intellectuals who remained faithful to the Islamic regime adopted an instrumentalist view of Islam as a mobilising political ideology and tried to bridge the gap created by the modern institutions during the Pahlavi regime between intellectuals and clergy. This philosophical–political attitude, which could be called the 'Al-Ahmad syndrome', could be considered the first anti-intellectual discourse elaborated by modern intellectuals in Iran.

While the revolutionary intellectuals had failed to present alternative narratives and alternative perspectives on politics to the dominant discourse of the Iranian revolution, because they failed to construct fields of social existence, the 'religious intellectuals' of the 1990s tried to reconsider and rethink from a new perspective the old clash between modernity and tradition. Today, the religious intellectuals are divided into two diverse groups in Iran: on one side, we find the reformists and on the other side the neo-conservatives. The reformist group is represented by figures such as Abdolkarim Soroosh, Mohsen Kadivar, Alavi-Tabar, Hasan Yousefi Eshkevari, Mojtahed Shabestari, and many others. The unifying traits of these intellectuals include their recognition of reform in Islamic thought, democracy, civil society and religious pluralism, and their opposition to the absolute supremacy of the Faqih. The rise of religious intellectuals can be followed through the writings of Soroosh. Soroosh's main idea is that there are perennial unchanging religious truths, but our understanding of them remains contingent on our knowledge in the fields of science and philosophy. Unlike Ali Shariati, who turned to Marxism to bring a historicist perspective to the Shiite thought, Soroosh debates the relation between democracy and religion and discusses the possibility of what he calls 'Islamic democracy'. According to Abdolkarim Soroosh, who is now living in England, the role of the philosopher is to try to reconcile religion

and freedom, to give an understandable new definition of religion and to link democracy and religion. What Soroosh has been trying to do during the past decade is convince his fellow citizens that it is possible to be Muslim and to believe in democracy. Soroosh stresses that there are two views of religion, a maximalist and a minimalist one. In the maximalist view, according to him, everything has to be derived from religion, and most of the current problems in Islam come from this view. But the minimalist view implies that some values cannot be derived from religion, like respect for human rights. For Soroosh, the maximalist view of religion has to be replaced by a minimalist view, otherwise the balance between Islam and democracy would not be possible. Therefore, for Soroosh a democratic Islamic society would not need any Islamic norms from above.

Mojtahed Shabestari is among the rare religious intellectuals in Iran who have challenged the monistic view of Islam. According to Shabestari, the official Islamic discourse in Iran has created a double crisis. The first crisis is due to the belief that Islam encompasses a political and economic system offering an answer relevant to all the historical periods; the second crisis is entailed by the conviction that the government has to apply Islamic law (*shariah*) as such. These two ideas have emerged, according to Shabestari, in relation to the Islamic revolution and the events that followed it. But the fact is, according to Shabestari, that Islam does not have all the answers to social, economic and political life at all times in history. Also, there is no single hermeneutics of Islam as such. Therefore, the relation between religion and ideology is simply unacceptable and leads to the desacralisation of religion.

Unlike the reformist intellectuals, the neo-conservative intellectuals in Iran are in favour of the supremacy of the Supreme Guide (the *faqih*) and

against concepts such as democracy, civil society and pluralism. This movement includes figures such as Reza Davari Ardakani, Qolam-Ali Haddad Adel and Mehdi Golshani. The famous personality among these is Reza Davari Ardakani, who as an anti-Western philosopher is very familiar with the works of Martin Heidegger. Davari Ardakani, unlike Soroosh, takes some of the features of Heidegger's thought, mainly his critique of modernity, and puts it into an Islamic wording. He rejects the Western model of democracy, which is based on the separation of politics and religion. President of the Iranian Academy of Science, Reza Davari Ardakani could be considered the philosophical spokesman of the Islamic regime. This is to say that for the past 30 years the Iranian intellectual arena has been left in between two dominant intellectual trends: on the one hand, an intellectual wave of critiques of modernity and democracy, and in favour of a pure return to the Iranian-Islamic traditions; and on the other hand a softer trend which emerged in the 1990s among the Islamic followers of the Revolution looking for an Islamic answer to the problems of modernity and democracy.

It is a fact that reformist and neo-conservative intellectuals do not dominate the entire Iranian public sphere. Next to them, one can consider a new generation of Iranian intellectuals who do not attempt to promulgate any ideologies or to struggle for the establishment of an Islamic democracy in Iran, and yet they undermine the main philosophical and intellectual concepts of the established order. This generation is mainly characterised by the secular post-revolutionary intellectuals, such as Javad Tabatabai, Babak Ahmadi, Hamid Azodanloo, Moosa Ghaninejad, Nasser Fakouhi and Fatemeh Sadeghi, who are in their forties and fifties, and who can be referred to as the 'dialogical intellectuals' (in contrast with the revolutionary intellectuals of the

1970s and early 1980s). In other words, for this new generation of Iranian intellectuals, the concept and the practice of dialogue provide an ontological umbrella for all the political and cultural meanings and understandings. The very objective of this 'culture of dialogue' is to no longer consider the other as an 'enemy' (who needs to be terminated as an individual or as a social class), but to promote a full acknowledgement of the other as a subject. In this case different intellectual attitudes are asked to coexist side by side, to find an intersubjective basis for their search for modernity and democracy.

This move away from master ideologies among this new generation of Iranian intellectuals is echoed by distrust in any metaphysically valorised form of monist thinking. Unlike previous generations of Iranian intellectuals, the critical thinking of modernity has taught the new generation to adopt a general attitude that consists of being at odds both with 'fundamentalist politics' and with 'utopian rationalities'. This philosophical wariness is not joined to any kind of dream of rearranging totally the Iranian society. The intervention here is not only a reflection upon the pluralistic mechanisms of politics, but also upon the political self. This issue of value-pluralism also raises the question of the West as the 'other' in the context of modernising projects. As an antidote to the 'monolithic' and 'one-view' formulas of previous generations, the political and intellectual urgency of Iran's encounter with globalised modernity leads to an ethos of 'dialogical and cross-cultural exchange'. This dialogue is an exposure of the Iranian consciousness to the 'Otherness' of the modern West. It requires from the Iranian intellectual a willingness to risk preconceived political and intellectual attitudes and to plunge headlong into a transformative process, instead of being in the position either of full imitation, or ideological rejection of modernity. In this cross-cultural dialogue, modernity is no longer reduced to the status of a simple technical and instrumental object or rejected as a dangerous enemy of the Iranian identity. Maybe for the first time since Iran's encounter with the West, modernity is finally considered as a process which could provide us lessons for the affirmation of our own identity without having fears of recognising the heritage of modern times as ours. In helping to maintain this dialogical exchange with modernity, the new generation of Iranian intellectuals frees itself from the intellectual blackmail of 'being for or against the West'. At a closer look, things become more complex and modernity is no longer considered as a 'package deal', but as a destiny that invites us to face up to the questions of our time. The question of globalised modernity and its debate with the concept of Iranian traditions has become the central question of Iranian intellectuals 30 years after the Iranian revolution. Also, the moral crisis due to the Islamic Revolution and the problems faced by a society confronting a theocratic state has increased the attractiveness for the idea of secular democracy among the new generation of Iranian intellectuals. It is true to say that the Islamic Republic of Iran has not achieved a relatively well-functioning transition to the process of democratisation and does not seem to be deepening or advancing whatever democratic progress exists. But there is a wide gulf today in Iran between the actions of the political elites and the will of the post-revolutionary intellectuals. Unlike Latin America, where civil society is used overwhelmingly to designate popular social movements and the organisations of the excluded and the poor, Iranian civil society bears a great resemblance to that of East and Central Europe in the 1980s, where the projects are strongly identified with the intellectual movements.

As in Eastern Europe, the new generation of Iranian intellectuals has played an important role in

the formation and the strengthening of Iranian civil society. Actually, in the case of the new generation of Iranian intellectuals, the disillusionment with the given boundaries of traditional politics and traditional religious thought and with the restrictions of ideological politics, provoked interest in civil society as a means of rejuvenating Iranian public life and preparing the democratic transition of thinking in Iran. This was mainly accompanied by the collapse of the intellectual models that dominated post-Second World War understandings of politics and modernity. This collapse gave a new currency to the idea of democracy and democratisation against ideology and ideologisation of the tradition. The very notion of 'ideology' has lost much of its coherence among the new generation of Iranian intellectuals and it has accompanied the crisis of political legitimacy in Iran. This crisis was felt in Iran as a vacuum that was left by the ontological and political failure of creeds such as Marxist-Leninism and Islamic Fundamentalism. This vacuum is filled today by the category of 'civil society', which could serve as a conceptual and practical key to the democratic transition in Iran. The concept of civil society is used today in the literature of the new generation of Iranian intellectuals not only as an institutional package, but also mainly as a particular mode of thinking and a special mode of political conduct. As a matter of fact, the category of civil society has a true significance for the new generation of Iranian intellectuals both as a critical tool and as a regulative principle for the democratisation in Iran. Taken at this level, the idea of civil society as it is discussed by Iranian intellectuals today embodies the debate on Western modernity and raises the question about the significance of the historical experience of Western politics. The point here is not about the imitation of democratic practices and institutions, but about

the possibility of identifying a set of common goals and purposes best described by Iranian intellectuals as the idea of accountability and responsibility. The two concepts of 'accountability' and 'responsibility' can introduce a new complexity and sharpness to assessments of the difficulties facing the process of democratic transition in Iran, both in establishing preconditions and dealing with its consolidation. It is true that cultural globalisation could lead to the empowerment of civil society in many countries including Iran, and the new generation of Iranian intellectuals can influence Iranian youth by helping them to understand how the world is changing. But the process of democratisation is not fully dependent upon the progress of globalisation; it depends on the idea of 'globality', which is linked to the idea of 'responsibility'. As we can see from their writings, Iranian intellectuals do not identify their role any more as that of engaging in ideological politics, but of expressing critical views concerning the anti-democratic and authoritarian aspects of Iranian political and social traditions.

Today, Iran is going through a cycle of erratic oscillations in which moments of democratic hope (the eight years of Khatami's presidency) alternate with times of great despair (the victory of Mahmood Ahmadinejad in the presidential elections of June 2005). Yet this erratic situation of uncertainty is accompanied by the absence of a romantic and dogmatic view of the Iranian intellectual as an avant-garde guardian of ideologies. The shock of the revolution and the reevaluation of political ideals have been part of a learning process that has generated a collective sense of responsibility among the post-revolutionary intellectuals in Iran, and led them to opt for cultural dissent rather than ideological politics. Thirty-eight years after the Revolution, the distinctive contribution of the new generation of Iranian

intellectuals to the Iranian democratic debate is not how to choose between morality and politics in a country where dogmatism and confusion cover the voices of common sense and decency, but how to forge a politics of responsibility in the absence of which democracy would become a void concept. In other words, for the new generation of Iranian intellectuals the revolution of yesterday has become the dissent of today.

Conclusion

Today, we are living in a very exciting moment in history. Something profound and wonderful is happening, which can be seen only if we stand back and observe the spectrum of cultures and religions that have been evolving over the centuries. If we can do this and enter into an interreligious and intercultural dialogue, something amazing begins to show itself, a deep pattern that has been centuries in the making. It appears that the different religions and cultural worlds converge in a common horizon of acting and judging ethically. Civilisation is a difficult and daunting task. It is an unending quest for excellence and exemplarity. It is the thin distance that mankind has placed between itself and barbarianism. That is the reason why the intercultural dialogue is a deep change in our being. It is not simply standing where we are in our particular worldviews and speaking out to others or listening to others from afar. It calls for a true ethical challenge and a true responsibility. It means a willingness to revise and transform our global culture in a critical and dialogical way. But it also means that this consciousness of dialogue and this essential task of mutuality and togetherness is an effort at making a global ethics across cultures and religions. As such, today there is no true ethics which does not aspire to be a universal moral principle. For our dialogue emerges

principally not only at the level of human beings, but also at the level of our responsibility for the non-humans. Our future is at risk and this risk is directly related to the nature of our responsibility towards the non-human. This understanding of the close relationship between the human and the non-human, beyond all processes of the inhuman, is the true ontological ground for all future culture of dialogue. To learn to think beyond the inhuman, as an absence of dialogue, we not only have to unsettle and shake up our well-entrenched concepts and categories; but also our task is to resist our comfortable familiar ethical and political categories which turn us away from an ethical and spiritual definition of life and sink us deeper into barbarism. We should not forget that, as Diderot said, 'From fanaticism to barbarism is only one step.' If we do not want the ultimate tendency of our civilisation to be towards barbarism, we need to manage tensions and violence in our world through a nonviolent dialogue of cultures; otherwise, we should be prepared to accept barbarism. A dialogue of cultures is humanity caring for dialogue, culture and the future of the globe. If we can really understand this challenge, the answer will come out of it, because the answer is not separate from the challenge.

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8

Goodbye to All That

Fernando Escalante Gonzalbo

The idea of a Mexican culture

I find it extremely difficult to say anything meaningful about Mexican culture – either in the traditional sense of a national culture as spiritual way of life (attitude, identity, national character), or in the more complex sociological sense of culture as a structure of meanings tied to a system of social relations. Nowadays, if one listens carefully, almost everything that is said about Mexico and the Mexicans sounds shallow, fake, sham.

It is not Mexico that is at stake, but the *idea* of Mexico: not the nation itself, whether or not it exists and how, but the nation as symbol, meaningful in everyday life. And not only because of the dazzling regional diversity that has long nurtured the idea of 'Many Mexicos'; not only because of the outrageous disparities that make Mexico one of the most unequal societies on earth – gathering several of the richest men on the planet and nearly 40 million people living under the poverty line. There is almost nothing new there – maybe some sharpened regional differences, a steeper concentration of income in the past 20 years. The real change lies elsewhere. It is the idea of the nation in itself, the image of the country as such and all its emotional connotations that seem to have lost weight and strength. The *idea* of Mexico, for the Mexicans, has lost its grip.

One easy way to grasp this loss of meaning is to look at the projects for the bicentennial anniversary of

national independence that took place in September 2010. There were memorial coins and stamps, to be sure, dozens of useless history books, parades and plenty of fireworks on 16 September. But there is no one single idea, shared and meaningful to everyone to signify these 200 years of independent life.

We are just coming out of a century of nationalism – and therein lies part of the problem. Starting in the 1920s and up to the late 1980s, the public sphere was dominated by a powerful, pervasive and ubiquitous national idea: Mexico and Mexican identity as foundation, framework and project that informed almost any field of personal experience, from consumption to etiquette, from entertainment to corruption. It was tied to the ideological project of the Mexican Revolution, to the political structure of the revolutionary regime and to the economic model derived from it, with all its turnabouts and inconsistencies. To be sure, historically Mexican nationalism was defined through a distant and mediated opposition to Spain and a more immediate opposition to the United States. And yet, that was not the core of 'Mexican identity', which indeed had more to do with an idea of a future society. That is what we have lost – a sense of Mexico.

The fate of nationalism

The manifold abuses of the ruling party for over 70 years undoubtedly explain much of the current discredit of Mexican nationalism, since nationalism was the main alibi of the many 'idiosyncrasies' of the revolutionary regime. There is nothing new in that, nothing peculiarly Mexican. National identity and the nationalist project were the basics of Mexico's Third Way in politics, economy or human rights regime. There was no possibility of tuning our institutional

arrangements according to any international standard. To suggest something like that would have amounted almost to high treason, since it would have meant letting the country be dragged into the sphere of American (or Soviet) imperialism.

As time went by and revolutionary enthusiasm withered, the Mexican Way gradually lost its original appeal. Little by little, the colloquial language gave a new meaning to expressing nationalist clichés. To do anything according to the Mexican Way came to mean to do it in an irregular, dirty or dubious way. An arranged election, a corrupt deal or a job poorly done was the Mexican way ('*a la Mexicana*'), compared with an indeterminate 'international way' – supposedly clean, efficient and modern.

The decay and final dissolution of the revolutionary regime was a long, protracted process that took more than 20 years. It implied the dismantling of many public enterprises and protectionist legislation, the gradual acceptance of multiparty elections within a new, competitive electoral framework, and the loosening of political networks linked to the ruling party. In the long run it meant the end of the nationalist economy and the nationalist 'Third Way' in politics, and carried with it not only the crisis of nationalism but of the very idea of a Mexican nation as a meaningful source of identity in everyday life.

This implied not only the watering down of the rhetoric initiated in the early 1980s, but also the stripping down of the legal, economic and political mechanisms of the Old Regime – mechanisms that for decades had sustained the hegemony of the ruling class and the plausibility of the Mexican imagined community.

To be sure, the language of nationalism persists in the Mexican public sphere up to the present. In fact, it can be argued that it has acquired a new impetus as a

consequence of the globalisation process under way. But its meaning has been substantially altered. As the language to express opposition to globalisation, it is increasingly understood as a class language. At the same time, and due to the same process, a new anti-nationalist and even anti-Mexican discourse has gained strength in the public sphere. It is a reaction against the economic and political ways of the Old Regime, against its rhetoric and institutional arrangements, but it bears quite plain and clear classist undertones: the reasons for our underdevelopment are the Mexicans, which means, of course, low-class, peasant, unionised Mexicans, not fully integrated into the global economy – and dependent upon State protection.

Mexican identity, thus, day by day appears more as the name of a cleavage within Mexican society – not anymore as a hallmark of our shared values, expectations and commitments. The idea of Mexico is increasingly a cultural battleground for a belligerent 'Mexicanism' that clings to the more obvious and stereotypical traits of Mexican identity, and a disdainful, lofty cosmopolitanism – equally Mexican and, equally insecure.

In between lies the new 'indigenous' militancy: basically an offspring of the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) rebellion and its aftermath. This is not the product of an indigenous intelligentsia, but of a handful of anthropologists and philosophers from Mexico City, cherished and propagated by international (mainly European) NGOs. In a certain sense, the assertion of indigenous identity is absolutely modern and absolutely cosmopolitan in a world defined by multiculturalism; at the same time, however, it is hard for most of the Mexican public to distinguish it from the classic Revolutionary Nationalism, which incorporated the indigenous past as a fundamental trait of Mexican character and identity, a confusion made deeper by the fact that in public appearances of the EZLN leaders there was always a much visible Mexican flag.

It must be clear by now, but maybe it is not altogether futile to stress it, that this change is not only a superficial, rhetorical phenomenon, for it has its correlates in everyday life – in material culture, in ways of production and modes of consumption. In practice, it is increasingly hard to locate and identify a national culture as such, unique and distinctive. Mexican, like any other culture, is ostensibly hybrid, more than ever transnational, global and fragmented: it can be labelled 'Mexican' in a traditional sense only in details, oddities and vestiges, and only with a degree of irony (and maybe a tinge of nostalgia or disgust).

Which way to the border?

There is nothing mysterious or surprising in all of this. Mexico is now facing the consequences of a 'modernisation' process brought by the revolutionary regime, propelled to a significant extent by a nationalist rhetoric that has been outdated by its own success, or, to be fair, by its various successes and failures. Just to name a few of these: a sweeping industrialisation crippled by a small national market at first and crucially dependent on the American market afterwards; a small but considerable middle class, unquiet, insecure about its own status in a still hierarchical society, and fundamentally detached from the revolutionary clichés of the Old Regime; a massive urbanisation process, still under way after 50 years, that has altered habits, kinship networks and ways of life without providing a new, stable environment in cities frequently lacking basic urban facilities.

Alongside the modernisation process, the United States was simultaneously model and antagonist – the cipher of a tacit aspiration and a very explicit threat used to bolster nationalist fears and alibis. The US had riches, science and technology; they were powerful and affluent

– but also *decadent*, lacking family values, a sense of tradition or any *real* culture. And, above anything else, they were greedy and dangerously close. Thus the popular wisdom, seasoned with the official discourse, rephrased in many ways the saying attributed to Dictator Porfirio Díaz: 'Poor Mexico! So far from God, so close to the United States!' This saying, by the way, has probably been reversed in the past decades on the other side: 'Poor US! So far from God, so close to Mexico!'

That symbolic opposition to the United States was to a large extent the template for the assumed Mexican character. Mexicans were supposed to be brave to the point of temerity, quixotic, selfless and solidary, as opposed to the selfish, individualistic and pragmatic Americans; Mexicans were supposed to be nostalgic, melancholic, deeply wounded by history, and always carrying the weight of centuries, as opposed to the Americans, oblivious of their past; Mexicans were supposed to be sentimental, witty, clever and secretly resentful, while the Americans were hard-headed, self-confident, practical people. Needless to say, all those attributes were at the very least overstatements filtered through the class structure of Mexican society. They were, nevertheless, widely shared – a sort of chimerical national character – for they provided a self-image, more or less flattering. (Aside, by the way: during most of the nineteenth century, Catholicism was also conceived as one of the basic traits of national identity, in opposition to the Protestantism of the United States. Nevertheless, the separation of Church and State was firmly established after the restoration of the liberal Republic in 1867 and has not been seriously challenged ever since; religion had no place whatsoever in the rhetoric of the revolutionary regime and has had only a minor and ambiguous role in popular nationalism, mainly as a devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe. To be more precise: it is not devotion

that matters, not even faith or religious practice, but the recognition of the image of Guadalupe as a shared symbol – an iconic token of 'Mexicanness').

From the 1960s onwards, the ambivalent and uncomfortable relationship with the United States crystallised in the notion of 'periphery'. It gained currency in the public sphere for several reasons: among them, because the idea of being a peripheral nation offered a clear and secure explanation of our dilemmas. It made clear who was to be blamed for our underdevelopment but it also offered the image of certain remoteness: underdevelopment was in a sense a measure of our distance with regard to the centre. Not anymore.

In the beginning of the new century the United States – the image, the model, the economic and political reality of the country – cut across Mexican society as never before, rendering distance and distinction more problematic than ever. Whether we like it or not, our economies are entangled together, as are our financial systems and our demographic flows, be it in production or consumption, labour markets or crime, the asymmetries are as evident as the linkages. As if we were living on an extended, indefinable borderland. And thus the physical fact of the border – the very line of the border – acquires an overwhelming importance for both countries: over-patrolled, heavily guarded, always in the spotlight, it has become one of the most violent zones of the world.

Some numbers. Between 10 and 15 per cent of the Mexican population now lives permanently in the United States. Another 15 per cent has lived for months or years in the United States at some point in their life. And maybe up to 20 per cent of the population now living in Mexican territory depend in a certain measure on remittances from their relatives on the other side of the border. A not insignificant proportion of menial jobs, agricultural work and personal services, from nursing for old people to

gardening and childcare in the United States depends on Mexican cheap, illegal workers. Mexican and American authorities and bureaucracies ignore this at their peril: everyday life, on both sides of the border, has this as one basic, unavoidable – even welcome – fact.

Oddly enough, much of what remains of ancient Mexican nationalism is much more alive 'on the other side'. Militant, belligerent Mexicanism is more frequent among emigrants living in the United States, although it is slightly different, anyhow: the National Holiday in Mexico is 16 September, the day that marks the beginning of the Independence War; whereas the National Holiday for Mexicans living in the United States is 5 May, the date of the battle of Puebla, in which the Mexican Army defeated the French in 1862. That is: to be Mexican, a Mexican nationalist, even a belligerent Mexican nationalist, means slightly different things on each side of the border.

North America is a massive economic and demographic fact that, nevertheless, is hard to conceive as a unit, because it is grounded on the asymmetries between the United States and Mexico. It is the border that creates the huge 'illegal', cheap labour force that in part sustains both our economies. It is the looser Mexican regulation – on environmental or health issues, on taxes and fiscal control – that allows for the American investment in Mexico. In other words: North America has been erected not in spite of the border but because of it, not owing to what we have in common but to what keeps us apart, unequal and different.

The other side

The emergence of North America has meant a de-centring of the Mexican elites. In politics, economy, science or art, the Mexican elites are now integrated as periphery to a system that has its centre in the United States.

The standards are set elsewhere, be it for academic performance, social success or political acceptability. And this has generated a peculiar sense of insecurity that appears as a mimetic desire: class distinctions are, as always, cultural distinctions – what is new is that today Mexico and Mexican ways appear clearly within one pole, as signs of backwardness in a class struggle that spins around the idea of Modernity.

There is scarcely anything altogether new in this tension between ever-changing Modernity and so-called Tradition, not even in its guise as a tension between a Mexican and an American way. We might even go as far as saying that our blatant 'Mexicanness' has been our path to (an obviously American) Modernity and it has always exhibited a characteristic class hallmark. Nevertheless, the de-centring of the elites and the decay of the post-revolutionary regime have widened the gap between the National Public Sphere and the common life of most people. In everyday politics, for example, there is an almost unbridgeable breach between local, empirical, pragmatic, old-style political knowledge and practice, and the abstract, up-to-date, cosmopolitan and technocratic knowledge of the elites. And this, obviously enough, results in a growing discredit of national politics – including special-interest groups of environmentalists, human rights activists and the like.

The fate of 'culture' in the narrow sense of the term can be easily understood. During the best part of the twentieth century the State was the single most important sponsor of the arts and literature. For better or worse, State institutions cared for music, painting, sculpture, dance, theatre and literature – they promoted production, protected the artists and tried to create a massive public for it all, as part of the Revolutionary programme. And, if the truth be told, some of the results were remarkable in almost every field. Nowadays, with

the withering of old ideals and standards, or the very idea of a National Culture, most of those cultural institutions (with a few outstanding exceptions) are adrift and mostly looking for approval, for standards, somewhere else. The current craze for Frida Kahlo's paintings is a fitting example: it is basically a response to a European and American fad. In literature, just to mention another example, the universal fame of Carlos Fuentes as true representative of Mexican spirit, élan and colourful passion, is entirely for international consumption, for his novels are of little or no consequence for the Mexican public at the beginning of the new century.

Thus goes our elites' cultural insecurity. As a vestige, or at least a token, of their (lost) centrality, they need at least some Mexican icons – but only international recognition makes them truly Mexican. Another minor inconsequence: while aggressively pushing forwards a Modernisation process that would at last let us get rid of our underdeveloped/Mexican condition, our elites are also the most vocal in the defence of traditional arts and crafts, folklore, etc. – all supposedly at risk of losing authenticity – while the popular classes have no real problem in mixing Halloween with the Day of the Dead, an orange plastic pumpkin with a handful of *cempasuchitl* flowers, a Mexican flag and maybe a rap rhythm.

The main issue – I will try to restate it again – is the *idea* of Mexico. To state it bluntly: on the *institutional* level 'Mexico' is a battlefield of sorts, opposing a liberalising cosmopolitan elite and the strong and resilient remnants of the revolutionary culture; on the *cultural* level (again, in the old-fashioned narrow sense of the term) it can be seen the other way round, with the elites standing for the defence of an authentic, picturesque, colourful artistic idea of the country – of what qualifies as *good taste* – and the majority of the people being much more at ease with a cross-bred variety. For some, being Modern and

truly *Mexican* is a way of not becoming just second-class Americans, whereas for the rest, the assimilation of patterns of work and consumption of the United States is a way out of their condition as second-class Mexicans.

If I am allowed to end on an even more personal note, I would say that Mexico, like any other nation, is a work in the making. I would not worry very much about the strength and authenticity of its culture or its fate as a nation. I find reasons for concern, rather, in the traits of the class struggle – with no credible labour unions or political parties – and mainly in the lack of political, ideological and cultural resources of the elites to figure out new ways to integrate this incredibly complex mosaic that has always been Mexico.

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9

Surrealism and Survival in Romania

Carmen Firan

From the perspective of a foreigner, Romania is a little-known country, usually associated with various media clichés that present it as a predictable part of the former Communist block. In fact, it is an unpredictable and contradictory country, even for Romanians. This paradoxical cultural space has absorbed several cultural influences: the French sophistication between the two World Wars along with the avant-garde movement that emerged in Romania before spreading to Europe, the spicy Orient, the rural civilisation of the Balkans and the ethnic diversity of Transylvania under the Austrian-Hungarian empire. A young state with old roots, Romania was always struggling to define and assert itself at the crossroads of powerful interests. Yet this country managed to find a way to survive, despite its historical wounds and the isolation it suffered for decades from international dialogue. Today, Romania needs to solve its paradoxes and to overcome its own clichés – from the corrupt mentalities embedded by decades of Communism, to the lament of a nation that is still too little known and praised for its contribution to the universal choir of cultural values. It also needs to redefine its national identity according to the new era of globalisation.

As a member of the European Union, Romania will find the right way to redeem itself from its past and move forward into the future through a mutual interchange and an open dialogue with the world.

National surrealism and cultural paradoxes

I grew up in Communist Romania, the only country of Latin language origin in Eastern Europe, but the language didn't help us escape dictatorship. Actually, to quote South America's experience, all you need is a Latin language and a dictatorship for surrealism to be born. I'm thinking not only about the artistic trend, but also about our everyday life, full of 'surrealism' and discrepancies for more than 40 years.

We were not in Latin America though, but in Europe, although during those times a huge gap separated East and West inside the same Europe. We were completely disconnected from Europe's soul, from the open dialogue of values, and enclosed in a dark territory of fear and poverty. Europe represented our lost dream of freedom, our natural home, artificially quarantined by the Communist ideology. After the fall of the Communist regime in 1989, reintegration into mother Europe was another painful process for a country isolated for decades, where everything was upside-down, from damaged economy to corrupt mentalities.

There are different perceptions of Romania and several clichés. It depends if you look at the country from the outside or as an insider. For a Westerner, it is hard to define it at first sight, and even harder to understand it due to its peculiarities, paradoxes and controversies. Probably the West never had a full understanding of Communism. The utopian idea of Communism was more resisted in the West, where it remained just an abstract idea, than in Eastern Europe, where the experiment affected generations in a negative way and distorted national and individual destinies.

In reality, we all know that there were always two Europes. Even before the First World War, we could speak about a sort of 'historical superiority' of the West,

a kind of French, English or German arrogance that Communism only emphasised. During the totalitarian era of the East, these differences were only aggravated.

To rethink and reshape the European consciousness was the main goal of the European Union, which succeeded in creating, through an effective political–cultural dialogue, a common roof, protective and open, for countries from the West and from the East as well. Could the twenty-first century be dominated by a united Europe? It sounds very attractive and challenging.

What brings Romania to this optimistic picture? In order to answer, a brief cultural and historical X-ray could be useful, not only to explain the differences between Romania and other countries, but also to highlight the similarities and the common spiritual ground.

The Romanian cultural matrix resides in the countryside, a rural universe filled with legends and tales, with a rich folklore and pre-Christian traditions. The symbol of Romania is the peasant. Looking old and wise, or just tired, dressed in a long fur coat, a shepherd scrutinizing the horizon, or just searching for his magical ewe or lamb, he represented the essence of this place – agrarian by excellence, resilient over time, the iconic image of stability and persistence. One of the dramatic consequences of the Communist ideology in Romania was the destruction of the villages along with their traditions and customs, and the humiliation of the peasant torn from his natural surroundings, forced to leave his land, his church and his belief and to move to the outskirts of the big cities, in order to work in socialist mammoth factories, where he lost his ancestral identity, where he felt depersonalised and estranged from his native environment.

The genuine peasant changed into a no man's land inhabitant and the word 'peasant' itself was distorted, symbolising a rude, primitive human being. The national

Communism dreamt of producing 'a new man', a hybrid trying to redefine himself for decades to come, in search of his lost national identity and his belonging to the European spirit.

Romania has always been a rich country with poor people. A country that has everything: natural resources, the Danube Delta, the Carpathians and the Black Sea, fertile soil. Once Romania was called the 'granary of Europe'. The Romanian paradox has many layers, extended through its whole history. The state, as it is now, was created only after the Second World War. Romanian principalities, provinces and territories were separated for centuries, but the Romanian language and culture has a surprising unity across all of them. The Romanian people were stronger than borders and the spiritual boundaries overcame imposed territorial fractures or farces of history.

The state is young, but Romanian roots on these territories are old, dating back long before the Roman Empire. And there is yet another paradox: although the Romans ruled for a relatively short time, the Latin language had a huge impact, creating the Romanian language, while later on, other empires, although they dominated for centuries, from Turks to Austrian-Hungarians to Russians, left feeble marks on the language. But they had strong influences, good and bad, on local mentalities. A small country saving its own identity while surrounded by powerful empires is another form of surrealism.

Romania can also be described as a country rich in ethnic diversity striving to preserve its uniqueness at the crossroads between the East and the West, between the Balkans and the Orient, with a people that displays a Mediterranean temper in the South combined with Balkan customs, a Slavic pace in the Northeast, or a rigorous diligence in Transylvania. The characteristics of the

Romanian culture can be situated between pan-Slavism and pan-Germanism, according to some philosophers.

The period of glory for Romania is considered by many to be the era between the two World Wars. After the unification of all its territories in 1918, Romania looked like a fairly large and prosperous state, going through a time of important reforms, a time of economic and cultural flourishing, development of its industrial sector, and it became one of the most important exporters of oil and wheat. Bucharest, nicknamed 'little Paris', as rumours have it, could stand next to any major European metropolis. A new artistic movement emerged, the Romanian avant-garde, which eventually conquered Europe and contributed to the birth of surrealism in visual art, literature and cinema. Between the two World Wars, Romanian culture was for the first time in sync with the latest Western trends in Paris or London, becoming a strong participant in the international dialogue of values. Remarkable avant-garde and surrealist talents emerged in Romania, featuring a cosmopolitan cultural attitude. In 1916, Tristan Tzara, a Romanian émigré to Zurich, invented Dadaism. There were three distinctive groups of artists: *modernist* – focused on Western, urban and intellectual culture; *traditionalist* – oriented towards the religious orthodoxy of the rural world; and the third, proclaiming the birth of the national character, situated at the crossroads between tradition and modernity.

But even this time of prosperity had its paradoxes: except for a few big cities and the wealthy elite, the rest of the country was still impoverished and illiterate and there was no time left for profound changes. The rise of fascism began before the First World War and then Communism took over. After the Second War World, the brutal human rights violations dominated the country making way for Soviet propaganda, which for

several decades ruled Romanian culture by ideological censorship. At the same time, through purges, Stalin and the local Communist leaders annihilated any trace of intellectual opposition. Between 1948 and 1964, one Romanian out of nine (meaning about two million people) was sent into a Communist concentration camp. The official literature, or so-called *socialist realism*, glorified Stalin, his politics and the new proletarian class.

Romania thus entered the harshest dictatorship in Europe, weakened and humiliated by the Fascist regime and the Iron Guard that compromised the country's prestige during the Second World War. Years of terror followed. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Communist gulag continued the Fascist horrors. For almost 50 years, Romania experienced isolation and was cut off from the West.

Despite all the official oppression, intellectuals gathered in informal discussion groups to keep their sanity and, slowly, a counterculture was born. Several groups of artists rejected the aggressive intrusion of the Communist propaganda, bringing along a fresh, nonconformist subversive voice, opposed to the official ideology. Although Romania didn't have an organised *Samizdat*, individual voices of courage made themselves heard, like the political dissident Paul Goma in 1977 or, later, the 'Blue Jeans generation of writers'.

Over the years, Romanians were perceived through various stereotypes, more or less warranted: a people hesitating between excessive praise and self-disparagement, between laments or victimisation and an ostentatious superiority; coming up with dark plots and conspiracies to explain historical events, but also with an interesting, rich culture and a lively artistic life, with sophisticated intellectuals; xenophobic, nationalistic, but still tolerant in many respects;

hospitable, enthusiastic, genuine and warm; inclined towards constant ridicule, with a predisposition to mock everything.

After the fall of Communism, other clichés became associated with Romania, describing a country still haunted by the ghosts of the Communist nomenclature which was soon back in power, by stray dogs, orphans, AIDS victims infected by contaminated blood which they had received in hospitals, human traffic, impoverished Roma population, pickpockets and thieves making headlines in the Western media. I'm not fighting against clichés. They are based, after all, on reality, however exaggerated or generalised it might be. But Romania, despite all its problems, continued to produce an intense cultural life. Even during the totalitarian era, culture had symbolised resistance within the Communist censorship, defence from the absurdity of the system and an underground form of freedom. In the late 1980s, a visitor from England remarked in awe: 'This country looks surreal to me. You have nothing to eat but wait in line for hours to buy theatre tickets and books...' It was our form of survival, sanity and refusal to submit to alienation.

We lived under one of the toughest dictatorships in Europe, watched by the secret police, and isolated from the rest of the world. We did our best to survive within a closed society. One way was to get together in groups selected on the basis of affinities which had to do with art, literature, philosophy or simply a few common tastes. Our lives were simple. We didn't care about cholesterol, pollution or the negative effects of smoking; nor did we worry about the dangers of obesity, drug addiction or violence. We didn't need anti-depressants, although we had good reasons to take Prozac. No one sought psychoanalysis, therapists or shrinks, although we had good reason to be depressed. When you live

in a cave, with few choices, all sorts of self-defence mechanisms spring into action. One is interpersonal communication. In a society like ours, communication involved sincerity and spontaneity. People talked loudly, gesticulated profusely and even cursed often; they lived and hated passionately. They used to make grandiose plans in the evening, over many glasses of alcohol, only to discard them as impossible to achieve the next morning. And yet these people were authentic in their despair and passionate in their fantasies. Paradoxically, in such an abnormal and repressive society, they were anything but alienated.

In fact, they practiced a type of group therapy, unorganised and without clear goals. In that Balkan atmosphere, their conversations in the shadow of ruined 'little Paris' were delightful, a never-ending chatter, spectacular and useless, over full ashtrays and cheap alcohol, all-night-long discussions and hung-over mornings. They weren't in a hurry to get anywhere. They had no place to go.

In the opaque world of Communism, time meant nothing. The dictatorship seemed permanent. To keep our sanity, we had only the refuge of books and an inner language of freedom, parallel to the official one. Words had no power to change our destiny, but they could keep us sane. And our soul? Nobody mentioned it, but it was there all along, in the arabesques of our lamentations, in the last cigarette butts crushed at sunrise against the background of a hideous smoking factory at the outskirts of the city.

People learned not to trust the official language in the press, in schools, and at work. Most of them doubted any official political speech and cultivated disbelief and irony as part of their self-defence mechanism. Everybody was aware of living in a 'make-believe' world, fully aware of its duplicity.

As writers, the metaphor was our main weapon to evade political censorship. Although biographies and memoirs were almost impossible to squeeze through the tight net of censorship, poetry and prose could be enveloped in a protective shell of metaphor and allegory, esoteric enough to get the forbidden truth out regardless of whether it was about political or social reality. Communism disregarded metaphors. It identified the *soul* as its main enemy. Demolishing churches and synagogues was not enough. That merely eliminated places of worship, but they also got to destroy the *metaphors of spirituality*, making them appear weak and misleading.

Another source of refuge was humour, carelessness or frivolity. In spite of our bad times, we managed to maintain our sense of humour. There was no shortage of jokes in those days, which acted like some sort of a safety valve. We seemed to be a surreal people who could not stop laughing, even while we were slowly dying! We were like patients in a militarised hospital, subjected to a utopian treatment for an imaginary disease, feeling both guilt and absolution. Guilt, because of the cowardice each one of us had to practice; absolution, because the collective farce so perfectly played on us.

We invoked many alibis in our defence, from the geo-political conditions to the curse which had supposedly been placed on this part of the world long ago. Barbarian invasions, foreign-born monarchs imposed on us, orthodoxy, our former dependence on Constantinople, and later on Moscow, the cruelty of fate itself and the cunning plotting of our neighbours, the games of the superpowers and so forth – all of these we perceived to be working against us.

Everyone was living at least two parallel lives and, without putting up any opposition, we were more resistant than history itself – ultimately the universally

accepted cause of our misery. History was constantly the enigmatic character to whom we could quietly attribute our glory, guilt and dramas. It could justify any aberration.

Some areas of our history were inexcusably expanded upon, while others were glibly glossed over by the official powers. The same history that can only be one and the same was undergoing subtle changes from year to year, with whimsical erasures and additions, with heroes and events disappearing or reappearing as the rulers dictated, victories or defeats being reinvented at will. We were all running rings around history, juggling with time, hurtling from era to era, either condemning or forgiving it. History was being subjected to all sorts of manipulations by both the mighty and the weak. It was, by turns, our pride and our stigma. It was converted into the ingenious instrument of governing. We were about to be swallowed up by history, fed up with it and yet outside it, our eternal insecurity and our sole certainty.

After the fall of Communism, the Romanian people had to face a new drama. This time it was the paradoxical drama of freedom. With no tradition in civil society, with no community spirit and no training for the democratic exercise, people discovered themselves unprepared for the great challenge they had longed for for so long. What proved to be the hardest was living in freedom. Suddenly the people found themselves in the spotlight. Alone. With only its limitations, inabilities and failures which were now starkly showing in the unforgiving, glaring light of international public scrutiny. Freedom highlights a person's individuality, stripping the crust of collective protection through which a dictatorship levels out a society, bringing it to the lowest denominator, an easier way to manipulate and conquer it.

Freedom scared a lot of people, who, for years and years, had been used to acting according to the crowd, hiding behind the excuse that one cannot assert oneself in a repressed society. Now suddenly thrust into freedom, they felt terribly insecure. The old value system had been reversed, forcing everyone to come up with new motivations and methods of survival. Under these circumstances, it became quite fashionable for people to reexamine their past in a 'new' light, to reevaluate history and culture from 'different' points of view.

The lustration law was not accepted in Romania but a witch hunt started. Hundreds of dissidents, revolutionaries with diplomas, and fighters for democracy appeared overnight. They faked their biographies. Some suddenly lost their memory, conveniently forgetting what they had been, and pretending to be completely clean, uncompromised, hoping the world would thus forget their past and forgive their sins. There was an overabundance of upholders of the law, fine intellectuals preaching about the truth, about the need of a moral cleansing, about regaining the 'national identity', about putting Communism on trial and restoring the dignity of the nation on the international arena.

Essentially, everyone tried to save himself, to secure for himself a place as close to the top as possible, whether that meant a seat in parliament, or a profitable business, an apartment, a house from the government, or a scholarship to study abroad, now that freedom caused another reversal of values, based on new but equally deficient criteria.

There was the same old poverty, but with the added ingredient of insecurity, the first signs of the transition to the market economy and the consequences of the attempts to reform the economy, resulting in unemployment, a dramatic rise in prices, housing shortages and a lack of a social net. The political scene

was dominated by the same old apparatchiks, in search of a retouched biography, while the former police officers found prosperity in business, buying factories and lands for nothing, and quickly spreading the new slogan: 'We are not selling our country'. Instead they divided it among themselves. 'The Revolution was made especially for them, to benefit them. All the shed blood was in vain' was the refrain heard everywhere. Tens of parties and mediocre leaders were spending their energies in useless infighting. The members of parliament were quite pathetic, the members of the government hesitant, incompetent, still influenced by the old mentalities. They constantly invoked the costly legacy of Communism, and again blamed the state of the country on the cruel and ruthless history.

Disappointment, pessimism and hopelessness set in little by little. Within a short time, a parallel black market economy was created, a banking mafia, against the backdrop of the sudden devaluation of the national currency. Corruption was spreading like a plague.

During those times I had an obsessive question: 'Was it the same in the other ex-Communist countries?' Some essayists answered, yes. Others claimed that Ceausescu's dictatorship was the toughest in Eastern Europe, that it was much worse than in former Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Poland or Hungary, with no liberties at all and a very strong secret police that controlled the country. As a consequence, the poverty was overwhelming; the fall of Communism was the result of a bloody revolution; the corruption was higher. On the other hand, although there were some national problems in multiethnic Transylvania, with its mix of Romanians, Hungarians and Germans, they didn't escalate into territorial ruptures like in Czechoslovakia, or into tragic conflicts like in the former Yugoslavia. Romania didn't experience big religious passions either.

The transition to the market economy was slower than in other former Communist countries, but from the political point of view, Romania was stable despite the poor performance of its leaders. It is also a safe country, far from the violence that occurred in Russia, for example, soon after the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Survival

Like other countries in Eastern Europe, Romania today is struggling to find its place in the promised land of capitalism. After the fall of Communism in December 1989, the country experienced a decade of economic instability and decline, caused in part by an obsolete industrial base as well as by the lack of much-needed structural reform. Starting from 2000, however, the economy reached a stage of relative macroeconomic stability. Joining the European Union in January 2007 was nevertheless the most significant event since the fall of Communism.

After the prolonged age of generalised shortages experienced during Communism, when people famously could have money but nothing to buy with it, the consumerist cornucopia blessed Romania with food franchises and supermarkets, fancy restaurants and malls. Romania was just a new market that became more and more interesting as the buying power of its inhabitants increased slowly but steadily. Romanians are big consumers. They will spend the last penny for good food, nice clothes, travelling or to indulge themselves. From this perspective, during the early 1990s, and even more so now, after its admission into the European Union, Romania shows a social energy and vitality that reminds one of the simple, basic dream of being free and enjoying life. Unfortunately, it is not that easy to reach this dream. Over the years many qualified, honest

and hard-working young people left Romania in search of opportunities abroad. If you wanted to 'make it' in Romania, with some notable exceptions, you had only two options: either have some good connections, or bribe your way into a good position. In other words, one needs to join a complicated social game that involves negotiating moral values. A game that defines the Balkan context, which emerged 500 years ago as the Turkish Empire was requesting tribute from the territories in their possessions. During the early 1990s, the 'must have-a-connection' game was played by ex-Communist apparatchiks, who possessed two key elements: the right information and some foreign currency. As a result, a new social class emerged in the mid 1990s: the *nouveaux riches*. Later on, as six or seven governments rotated, five parliaments changed and three presidents were elected, this social structure changed, embedding more and more social networks.

During the process of integration into the European Union, a great deal of political pressure from international organisations accelerated the process of self-definition of the Romanian social and economic framework into a more functional and less bureaucratic structure at all levels. Ordinary Romanians were more eager than the politicians to join the EU. They were hoping that corruption would slow down, and that the country would be under strict surveillance by the international institutions. The majority of Romanians saw the European Union as a salvation from the self-destructive games played by corrupt politicians or officials. Like many times throughout its history, Romania looked abroad to find salvation.

Despite its economic development, despite having more than 17 million cell phone owners and almost 14 million internet users, poverty is still a big problem, and the effects of modernisation are hardly felt in the rural areas. The differences between the rich and the poor are striking, as the middle class is emerging very slowly. Nevertheless, Romanians like to show off. Although the average monthly wage is under 300 euros, there are beauty salons where women pay 100 euros for a hair-styling session. For an ambitious young Romanian girl it is sometimes better to live on an empty stomach than without a fancy dress or a French perfume.

Everybody hopes that accession to the European Union will speed up the country's development. However, everybody is aware that this process takes time and most young people gradually lost their initial euphoria in the early 1990s, hope in the late 1990s and patience in 2000. The working class left the country for better work opportunities and the most desperate ones abandoned themselves to underground jobs. The ones who leave Romania fall into three main categories: those who decided to leave for good, the students and teachers who left for small babysitting or summer fruit-picking jobs for some pocket money, and those who left in order to continue their education in schools abroad or just for adventure. In a study published by the World Bank called 'Migration and money transfer: Eastern Europe and the ex-Soviet Union', it is reported that 38 per cent of the Romanians who live abroad send money home regularly. The massive migration abroad is also causing many problems. Tens of thousands of young families have gone abroad, leaving their children in the care of relatives back home. These children become a social problem, as many of them abandon school, use drugs, practice prostitution or fall prey to shady adults. The elders who have left home do not enjoy a better life; in a country where extended families and care for the elders was a social tradition, one can now see long waiting lists for those who have applied to be admitted into nursing homes, as they no longer have relatives to take care of them.

On the other hand, there is a booming outsourcing market in Romania. According to a global IT IQ report, the world's most important agency that conducts online research on professional qualifications, Romania already has in Europe more than 16,000 certified specialists. The research has studied the qualifications of the labour force in various fields: software, general knowledge, finances, health, industry, information technology, foreign languages and communication, management and executive positions. The research indicated that Romania ranks second in Europe in professional competence and intellectual training.

During Communist times, there was a split between the real beliefs of the people, shared in the privacy of their homes, and the demagogic declarations of the Communist media. At that time, the biggest problem was the absence of a common social project to which people could adhere, and this resulted in generalised indifference. Nowadays, Romania seems to experience another type of discrepancy between the official reports and the people's feelings; on one hand, the government agencies report economic growth, yearly increase of personal income, quality of life, increase of life expectancy; on the other, you hear the complaints of ordinary people (especially the elderly) who declare themselves to be unhappy and poorer than ever.

Romania appears thus as a country of controversies and paradoxes, with sophisticated intellectuals, rude people, a promising new generation, kitschy palaces or casinos and beautiful monasteries, upscale resorts, magnificent geography and bad roads. There is as much hope in this country as there is resignation created by tough economic times or national political turmoil. Romania is young and old, joyful and sad, sometimes disappointing, sometimes uplifting. It is always moving forward in quest of

its soul and to reassert its new identity. Romania is anything but boring. Its real potential will be seen in the years to come. In the long run, its voice will hopefully add fresh and rich nuances, creative and powerful tonalities, to the chorus of a united Europe.

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10

Unwritten Rules, Open Secrets, Knowing Smiles

Alena Ledeneva

Myths, signals and 'non-translatables'
There is a certain mythology that Russia is a land of irregularities and paradoxes, to a large extent impenetrable for outsiders. At the level of clichés, the 'Russian soul' and 'Russian chaos' are often given some taken-for-granted explanatory power. Among other usual suspects, clues such as a 'traumatic past', 'kleptomania', or 'size matters' point to important dimensions of the analysis. A common assumption behind all these ideas is that there is some kind of disorder in Russia, which makes it different and distinct from more orderly economies. A certain non-transparency of the 'rules of the game' in Russia has become an accepted commonplace. A similar conclusion could be drawn from the analysis of emerging post-Soviet discourses referring to the ubiquitous workings of the informal economy. Many of these are incomprehensible without cross-cultural translation and even then their meanings deviate in translation. Yet these 'non-translatables' and 'linguistic innovations' are the best indicators of fundamental changes in society – they signal and point to the existing unwritten rules, known only to insiders.

I argue that in order to make the rules of the game transparent, one should start by altering the approach. Rather than looking only at what does not work in Russia and why, one should concentrate on what does work and how. This essay is based on the assumption that there

is order in Russia and that it is possible, however hard it might be, to grasp the logic and articulate the rules of that order which counteracts the change. Let me give some examples. Corruption and the ineffectiveness of the rule of law in Russia is one of the main obstacles to Russian economic and political development.[1] Not only does the weak rule of law deter foreign investment in the Russian economy, it also undermines efforts to rein in acute problems such as property rights, capital flight, tax evasion and abuses of corporate governance. Many reforms were designed to remedy the inefficiency of the rule of law but failed at the stage of implementation.[2] Why? Following our alternative perspective, one should ask, 'If the rule of law does not work in Russia, then what does?' Indeed, if legislative reforms and law enforcement in Russia do not operate in the expected way, it is logical to suggest that something is working against them and working really efficiently. What is it?

A tentative answer can be found in popular wisdom: 'Russia is a country of unread laws and unwritten rules.' Or, as they say, 'the imperfection of our laws is compensated for by their non-observance' (*nesovershenstvo nashikh zakonov kompensiruetsya ikh nevypolneniem*). It is not that the requisite components of the rule of law are absent in Russia; rather, the ability of the rule of law to function coherently has been diverted by a powerful set of practices that has evolved organically in the post-Soviet milieu. Taking such an outlook as a point of departure, I will argue that the 'rules of the game' in Russia can actually be understood if so-called 'unwritten rules' are taken into account. Adopting a perspective of unwritten rules and understanding how they work can help to make the rules of the game in Russia more transparent and therefore subject to positive change and reform.

Given the scale of the informal economy in Russia,[3] there is no shortage of examples that illustrate how unwritten rules operate. Tax evasion practices alone provide an excellent ground for studying the informal order of things. On the one hand, there are commonly used ways of reducing the tax liability and of evading taxes, which are considered dysfunctional for the economy. On the other hand, 'saved' taxes are often used for investment, as there are few other sources for investment in the economy. What looks like capital flight can in fact make its comeback in the form of foreign investment. The fact that, in the 1990s, Cyprus was both the most popular offshore zone for Russian business and one of the country's top five foreign investors, matching the level of France and the UK, is indicative of this. In other words, the informal order balances off the formal one. This accounts for why things are never so bad or so good as they seem in Russia and draws attention to unwritten rules prescribing the ways in which the informal order of things intervenes with, compensates for or diverts the formal one.

Another striking set of examples derives from the role of the state as a major shareholder in many large corporations. Insider deals have prevailed (particularly since 1995) as a method of state asset disposal, and other opaque corporate governance arrangements have proliferated. Since the 2000s, similar methods have been used for the state to reassert its control over the strategic sectors and key industries. These deals are impossible to decode without understanding the logic of unwritten rules, just as it is impossible to decipher fully the 'information wars' and '*kompromat* (compromising material) wars' omnipresent in Russia of the 1990s. Unwritten rules have also played a part in regulating non-monetary exchanges. Barter chains redistributing income among the 'inner circle', as well as among firms

and their multiple subsidiaries, have revolutionised practices of 'give-and-take' and have provided them with a legally amenable form.

All of these phenomena of the new Russian economy share an important feature: agents at all levels employ practices that have come to be known as extralegal or informal. These practices are to a large extent responsible for the non-transparency of the 'rules of the game' in the Russian economy, mainly because they are regulated by what is referred to as informal arrangements, unwritten codes or unspecified rules. All these are elusive in nature and need further clarification.

Unwritten rules

Nobel laureate, economist Douglass North has defined institutions as the 'rules of the game in a society or, more formally, humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction'.[4] 'They [institutions] are perfectly analogous to the rules of the game in a competitive team sport. That is, they consist of formal written rules as well as typically unwritten codes of conduct that underlie and supplement formal rules, such as not deliberately injuring a key player on the opposing team. And as this analogy would imply, the rules and informal codes are sometimes violated and punishment is enacted. Taken together, the formal and informal rules and the type and effectiveness of enforcement shape the whole character of the game.' His distinction between formal and informal types of constraints has become revolutionary for the neo-institutional analysis.

Unwritten rules should not be confused with informal constraints. The unwritten rules are not about knowing the rules, they are about following the rules. Knowing a rule does not imply an ability to follow it, or mastery of it, just as knowing a recipe does not assure

practical skill in its implementation, and knowing the literal meaning of a word does not automatically mean that one will use it correctly in context. In Wittgenstein's terminology there are practices of 'rule-following' (i.e. being able to continue the sequence of numbers 2, 4, 6, 8...) that are distinct from rules that are interpreted, explicated and understood (i.e. an ability to figure out the formulae of this sequence). In a classic example of chess playing, Wittgenstein shows that certain mastery and expertise can be achieved only by dealing with constraints in practice.

A distinction between a rule and mastery of the rule can be illustrated by the metaphor of driving in Russia. To drive 'properly', one has to mix both formal (traffic rules) and informal rules (conventions); to apply them as needed in appropriate contexts and to switch fluidly between them; and, crucially, to negotiate oneself out of trouble if caught. This is apart from struggling to avoid the holes in the roads by radical manoeuvres and watching others doing the same. In other words, unwritten rules are not only about how to follow the rules of the game but also about how to break them. They imply that the rules of the game are mastered with particular expertise.

Unwritten rules are the know-how needed to 'navigate' between formal and informal sets of rules and between the rules and their enforcement. Without being articulated, they 'prescribe' which rules to follow in which context and 'set' the best approach for getting things done. Applying one formal rule rather than another, using restrictions (quotas, filters, etc.) and small print, and enforcing some decisions but not the others are examples of how constraints can be mediated. The focus of unwritten rules is not on constraints *per se*, as in the case of formal and informal codes, but on the enabling aspects of those constraints. To put it more bluntly, unwritten rules define the ways of circumventing

constraints, both formal and informal, of manipulating their enforcement to one's own advantage and of avoiding penalties by combining the three elements of the rules of the game creatively.

Unwritten rules exist in all societies,[5] but predominate (and even become indispensable) in those *where enforcement, formal and informal rules are not synchronised and do not constitute coherent rules of the game*. North shows that when people perceive the structure of the rules of the system to be fair and just, transaction costs are low and enforcement costs are negligible, which helps the efficiency of the economy. When people perceive the system to be unjust, the costs of transacting go up. In other words, if one cannot follow both formal and informal sets of rules coherently, this will be reflected in their merger and certain patterns of rule-following or unwritten rules. It might be tempting to think that unwritten rules are generally disadvantageous for the system. This is only true, however, if the rules of the game – formal and informal constraints and their enforcement – were tied to the public interest and were beneficial to economic performance. As this has not always been the case in Russia, the impact of unwritten rules is rather ambivalent.

Cultural traditions in Russia separate the concept of justice from that of formal law, which is grasped in a discrepancy in connotations between the terms *spravedlivost'* (justice) and *zakonnost'* (lawfulness). In his study 'Muscovite political folkways',[6] Edward Keenan explains such a gap between the informal and the formal in terms of political culture. He argues that Russian political culture has been strongly influenced over time by both the psychological attitudes and the practical, adaptive techniques that were developed by the earliest Slavic settlers. The conditions of economic and social life that faced them – isolation, poor land, a severe climate,

unpredictable harvests and a generally hostile environment – gave rise to a vigorous culture characterised by a specific set of traits: caution, calculation, resoluteness, stoicism, endurance and, above all, an orientation around survival. Over the centuries, Keenan claims, these traits manifested themselves in the three distinct but compatible cultural settings of medieval Muscovy: the peasant village, the court and the bureaucracy. These share certain common features which constitute the enduring elements of Russian political culture:

- The operational basis of each setting is informal and traditional (lacking a necessary connection between real power and formal status)
- Decision-making is corporate and conspiratorial
- Stability and risk-avoidance are favoured over innovation and progress
- There is a reluctance to promulgate systematic codified law (those who need to know the rules know them)

Keenan suggests that the peasant, court and bureaucratic cultures fused during the Soviet period – especially since Stalin – in a way that strengthened and purified the 'deep structures' of Russian society in a modern regime: a strong leader and corporate rule ('grand prince and boyars' became 'general secretary of Communist Party and Politburo'), conspiratorial politics and pervasive informality ('it is more reliable to depend upon informal and personal relations than it is to rely upon the impersonal legal procedures and institutions that are favoured in other societies').

Keenan's conclusions about the nature of the Soviet system (his analysis predated the end of the USSR) have relevance for our examination of the post-Soviet era as well. Distant and sceptical attitudes to the law produce a fundamental problem of public governance and limit the

constituency for the effective functioning of the rule of law. The disregard of the law is coupled with disregard of the state. The state is partly responsible.

Over the course of the 1990s, the public felt betrayed by the outcomes of privatisation and placed all the blame on state institutions and bureaucrats who found ways to prosper while abandoning the general population to its own devices. A widespread sense of injustice fuelled the use of informal practices. For instance, before recent tax reforms, the nominal rates of all taxes often resulted in cumulative rates of more than 100 per cent of revenues. Economic agents who feel compelled to evade taxes blame the state for forcing them into such a position. The state is scapegoated as corrupt and incompetent, further diminishing its legitimacy and deepening attitudes of civic passivity. When taken together with deep-rooted historical legacies, these tendencies present serious obstacles to the development of the rule of law, a full-fledged democracy and a market economy and sustain an arena for unwritten rules.

Thus, there is little prospect of transparency in the Russian economy so long as the conditions are in place that make the rules of the game in Russia dependent upon unwritten rules. Let me summarise the nature of such dependency:

· *The 'rules of the game' in the economy are non-transparent and frequently change,* because the existing legal framework does not function coherently
· *Anybody can be framed and found guilty of some violation of the formal rules,* as the economy operates in such a way that there is always something to be caught for
· *Due to the pervasiveness of the offence punishment is bound to occur selectively* on the basis of criteria developed outside the legal domain
· While everybody is under the threat of punishment, *the actual punishment is 'suspended', but can be enforced at any*

time but in a select number of cases. Punishment thus becomes a resource in short supply that is distributed according to extralegal criteria
· *Unwritten rules come into being to compensate for the defects in the rules of the game and to form the basis for selective punishment*
· Violation of unwritten rules can result in enforcement of written ones, which *paradoxically makes it more important to observe the unwritten rules than the written*

The latter in turn feeds back into the non-transparency of the 'rules of the game' in the Russian economy.

I believe that these attributes of the system have not changed much during Russia's transition to a market economy. In the same way that the planned economy was not really a planned economy and was actually run with help of *tolkachi* ('pushers' for the completion of plans in industry), *blat* (use of personal networks for getting things done) and other informal arrangements, the market economy today is not really a market economy. This is due primarily to the key role that unwritten rules still play in the system,[7] and their Soviet roots.

Open secrets
The common knowledge about the gap between the official discourse (planned economy) and the ways in which things are done in practice (like *tolkachi* and *blat*) constitutes a grey area worthy of research. Commonplaces and other trivial aspects of day-to-day life can sometimes reveal profound features of societies and political regimes that are hidden when tackling them directly.[8] Open secrets of socialism express tensions in the relationship between the individual and the political regime. The tacit knowledge of open secrets of the Soviet regime translates into 'doublethink', and the social

competence of handling them with a knowing smile.

In the famous folklore definition of the six paradoxes of socialism every paradox points to an open secret – an informal practice, widespread but hidden from outsiders: absenteeism in 'no unemployment but nobody works'; false reporting in 'nobody works but productivity increases'; shortages in 'productivity increases but shops are empty'; *blat* in 'shops are empty but fridges are full'; unfair privileges in 'fridges are full but nobody is satisfied'; cynicism in 'nobody is satisfied but all vote unanimously'. These practices were not really unknown but 'shameful' for socialism and therefore hidden from the official discourse – thus making them its open secrets of socialism.

Belonging and complicity expressed in knowing smiles reflect on the key paradox of the totalitarian power that generated a '*Homo Sovieticus*' who has brought it to its end. So goes the seventh, post-socialist paradox: 'all voted unanimously but the system has collapsed anyway'.

As a phrase, 'open secret' is similar to Torstein Veblen's paradoxical concepts of 'trained incapacity', 'conspicuous consumption', 'trained incapacity', 'business sabotage' and 'sagacious restriction of output', in which mutually exclusive parts clash in order to create a new meaning. People's reactions to paradoxes of socialism – knowing smiles – are the acknowledgement of understanding of such meaning, the meaning of the failed purpose.

One might think that an open secret is not a secret at all, since it concerns things that 'everyone knows', whether within a particular group or more widely in a society. This view would be a mistake, however, because open secrets are only partly open. Open secrets are *secrets* in the sense that they are excluded from formal or official discourse. But they are *open* in the sense that they are familiar and referred to in idioms and language games, though these often require explanation for outsiders. The ambiguity involved is a real and significant one. There is a tacit acceptance that what is known remains in shadows. Open secrets occupy areas of tension, where a public affirmation of knowledge would threaten other values or goods that those involved want to protect. This point is noted in Georg Simmel's celebrated discussion of secrecy, which reveals its complexity and subtlety. Simmel defines secrecy as 'consciously willed concealment' – open secrets are clearly still secrets according to this definition. Simmel makes the point that secrecy is a relative phenomenon, at least as soon as it is shared: 'a secret that two know is never a secret'.[9]

Goffman takes the idea further by opposing diplomatic, official and strategic secrets to secrets that are, to various degrees, 'open secrets' because of everyday familiarity with one another's doings.[10] The degree of openness is likely to correspond to the reaction when the secret is broken or spoken about. If the knowing smile is the likely reaction to bringing up the subject of *blat*, the type of reaction of breaking 'closed secrets' or 'dark secrets' – the opposite of open secrets – might be rather different.[11]

Dark secrets are usually confined to very small groups bound by strong emotions that effectively block what may be 'known' yet never admitted to. A telling example is provided by the movie, *Capturing the Friedmans*, which deservedly sparked much debate when it first appeared. The film has a curious history. The filmmaker originally set out to interview one of the brothers in the family, who was a very well-known clown in New York City. During the course of the interviews, it became apparent that more powerful emotional dynamics were at work in his family milieu. Subsequent long interviews with his brothers, mother and father brought to light a history of sexual abuse by the father involving young boys in his care (whether he abused

his own sons never became fully clear). All the family members seemed aware of what was going on, but the issue was never discussed in the domestic context itself, only revealed obliquely in the interviews – and in videos which the family routinely made of one another.

In contrast, depictions of open secrets in late Soviet movies, such as Danelia's *Afonia* (1975), *Mimino* (1977), *Osennii maraphon* (Autumn Marathon, 1979), Riavanov's *Ironiia sud'by* (The Irony of Fate, 1975), *Sluzhebnyi roman* (An Office Romance, 1977), *Garazh* (The Garage, 1979) and Bortko's *Blondonka za uglom* (The Blond Around the Corner, 1984), convey attitudes to informal practices that are light and playful, even if meant to be corrective.[12] They are 'satiricised' rather than genuinely satirical and target particular groups that engage in these practices themselves. Similarly to the *Krokodil* images, satirical films claim to co-opt Soviet audiences into a stigmatising laughter, but at the same time they introduce techniques of handling open secrets and define the boundaries of what is possible. By the 1980s, understanding of the formal (and enabling) nature of constraints and acknowledging the possibility of circumventing them became almost universal – a variety of know-how was shared by insiders of a circle, a group or society as a whole. Depending on the reference group, open secrets varied in degree of openness. *Blat* is an example of a widely acknowledged open secret (even 20 years since the collapse of the Soviet Union, only seven per cent in an all-Russia national survey found it difficult to define *blat*, in contrast to 27 per cent having difficulty in defining *telefonnoe pravo* (political pressure on the judiciary), for example.[13]

Commonly recognised but rarely registered in written sources, apart from their 'satirised' or 'critical in a controlled way' images, inevitably linked with the defects of particular individuals rather than attributed with a systemic character, these practices testified to various

ways in which socialism failed to satisfy individual needs. 'Satirised' images of the *Krokodil* were acceptable because they never targeted the intrinsic failures of the Soviet system. Just about every part of everyday life was satirised, if not in the controlled discourse of the *Krokodil*, then in *anekdot*. The failures of the system were out in the open but not acknowledged as systemic. They did not appear in the proceedings of the Central Committee. That is what censorship did – it did not allow the formal admission of a failure on the part of the system; one could never come to the conclusion that the system that had emerged in the Soviet system was intrinsically doomed to failure.[14] The regime could not exist without people circumventing its own declared principles. The regime needed people to take care of its systemic defects and to lubricate the rigidities of its constraints. But the regime was unwilling to admit it. The failures of the Soviet system,[15] which all the insiders were complicit in reproducing, were its main open secrets, satirised, smiled at and... kept!

Thus, on the one hand, *blat* was a commonplace and its instances could make the front page of the *Krokodil* in 1980s (without using the word *blat*). On the other, the political regime keeps its reliance on informal practices hidden and shifts the responsibility for engaging in informal practices on individuals. The *Krokodil* helped to promote the narrative of the 'grand misrecognition game': everybody does it (engages in informal practices, unofficial discourse, doublethink) but it has nothing to do with socialism. Although designed to create humour, the *Krokodil* could not help being part of the political repressive machinery designed to introduce and reinforce moral/political standards. Uncovering a form of politics that pretends to be humour reveals new dimensions of symbolic violence.

As a form of controlled critique, the *Krokodil* exercised the power of tension management in a number

of ways. Being the main official publication that refers to informal practices, the *Krokodil* – itself perhaps being a form of false reporting – claimed to perform the functions of producing Soviet satire, of eradicating social ills and of giving a platform for revealing critique and self-critique (*samokritika*) for the system, but could not deliver. Officially published and therefore working within the boundaries established by the regime, the *Krokodil* was not about satire – it was about the adequate 'framing' of social ills and their 'satirisation' (with an appropriate sound association with 'sanitisation'). By introducing themes and boundaries – where, how and what to smile at – the *Krokodil* socialised and educated the Soviet public on the matters of everyday life.[16] On its pages one can see some realities of the 1930s, 1950s, 1980s, but not others, and therefore conclude what can be discussed, criticised and satirised and what cannot (this function of the *Krokodil* would be similar to satirical publications in other societies). While claiming the task of eradication of social ills, the *Krokodil* was engaged in educating the public on how to react to certain themes and concerns – what could or should be smiled at, and how – it was a pedagogical device, like all Soviet mass culture, assisting the 'misrecognition game' of the regime.[17] The ways of revealing social ills to the public were also the ways of concealment. Most importantly, the *Krokodil* inverted the role that satire has in other societies – to criticise – into one that it does not have in other societies – to de-moralise people and to make them complicit in the failures of the regime. One of the things we still do not know about the Soviet system (despite all the academic literature about the one party state, the redistributive economy, nomenklatura and its pathologies) is the way in which people were made to accede to power within the system. It was not just force, oppression, or rewards for co-optation or inclusion that brought people into that system. There was more to it than

that – the social psychology of the Soviet power and its emotional content has never been unpacked or smiled at knowingly by researchers.

Knowing smiles

The very question, 'Why do people smile about commonplaces that are strictly speaking neither funny nor enjoyable in any obvious way' may already suggest an answer. Just as it is different from the reactions to the disclosure of 'closed secrets', a knowing smile is different from a smile of joy or laughter. Even if reminiscent of the Russian literary tradition of 'laughter through tears',[18] the knowing smile is relieved of intense emotions because of the mundane nature of *blat* – the familiarity that brings contempt rather than laughter or tears.

I identify a knowing smile as acknowledgement and competent mastery of 'open secrets'. When reciprocated, it is a sign of sharing awareness and ability 'to read between the lines', 'to see behind the façade', with some complicity in 'beating the system' but without shouting about the 'emperor has no clothes' secret. To put it in Simmel's terms, 'although at first sight an empty form, [a knowing smile] is an excellent symbol of that reciprocal apprehension, which is the presumption of every social relationship'.[19] The 'emptiness' of the knowing smile may signify the inability to articulate tacit knowledge (the actual workings of paradoxes are complicated)[20] but it enables the reproduction of daily interactions without pressure of recognition of one's own compromised behaviour or the failures of the regime. It allows people to go on with their everyday lives and helps the system to reproduce itself. The 'emptiness' of the knowing smile is also relevant in the sense that knowing smiles in the stagnation period would not be the same as a knowing smile under Stalinism – its content is

contextual and defined by whatever social competence may be involved in a particular period.

The meaning of the knowing smile about *blat* is elusive, inevitably defined by period, place and context. But personalities and relationships are just as essential to interpretations of knowing smiles.[21] Now that it is possible to ask people to articulate their views on informal practices without constraint (just as in the 1950s, those who left the Soviet Union were able to describe their *blat* experience in the Harvard Interviewing Project,[22] the collapse of the Soviet Union has made *blat* a matter of the past and thus enabled people to articulate it), I have conducted a number of interviews about knowing smiles and ad hoc experiments, testing for the emotions behind them, to determine that 'empty' signs of competence could be emotionally charged in articulation and hide a varying degree of personal involvement, or an implicit relationship with informal practices. Some emotions were associated with knowing smiles about *blat* much more often than others and could be divided into three nominal groups – 'positive,' 'neutral' and 'negative' – accordingly.

At a very basic level, chats about *blat* produce a smile of linguistic recognition. As was brilliantly grasped by Zhvanetskii, 'only those who belong would understand...' (*tol'ko svoi ponimaet kak prinosit' pol'zu obschestvu vopreki ego zhe zakonam*). The pleasure of sharing untranslatable 'games of words', behind which, in Zhvanetskii's satirical piece, hide the untranslatable 'games of deeds' – what I call informal practices – provides a sense of belonging to a circle of people who 'know how'.[23] Just as it is a pleasure to recognise a foreign idiom or understand a joke, it is enjoyable to recognise a native 'language game' that points to an open secret that might be tricky for a foreigner to understand. A knowing smile of belonging ('we are all complicit in our own oppression and in our own corruption') is most common but it also has an

implication of dividing us and them, 'subconsciously indicating secret pleasure from co-operation' between us against them. 'Us' implies complicity of people in the circle who care about each other. 'Them' refers to the state, strangers, or outsiders, who take care of themselves. Such division is representative of what Gudkov has referred to as 'negative identity'.[24]

Other knowing smiles associated with guilty pleasures include the one of the 'pleasure of doing something wrong', the 'pleasure of perversion', the 'pleasure of crossing boundaries in the society which is overregulated'. Empowering an individual through crossing some boundaries, conscious or unconscious, feeds into one of the central themes in my study of informal practices – *the enabling power of constraints*. Knowing smiles (audacious, mischievous or naughty) can imply active use of constraints; 'positive opportunism', the experience of turning the weaknesses of the system (*prokoly sistemy*) to one's advantage, known as 'cheating the state' or 'beating the system', all point to satisfaction from a covert system of rewards and abuse of state institutions in totalitarian regimes.

Reactions associated with indifference and a weak emotional charge – the knowing smiles of ignorance, apathy or acceptance – are no less important. Dismissive smiles 'undermine the significance of the issue or indicate lack of interest or concern' while accepting smiles 'can display anything from admission of the necessity of *blat* involved, directly or indirectly', the individual helplessness vis-à-vis the regime, as well as the overall acceptance of the ways things are, failure or not. Often, the knowing smile is a way of disguising ignorance and erroneous associations.[25] In such cases, the knowing smile is a cover for not understanding the processes at work – 'of course I understand what's going on' – when in fact this is a form of laziness. Neutral

smiles emphasise the openness of open secrets and the widespread scale of *blat* practices but also provide an escape route from taking them seriously by turning them into a smiling matter. They tackle uncertainty and display a passive habit of acceptance, the *habitus*[26] of *Homo Sovieticus* that ensures that one does not articulate or even question what the open secret really is about while smiling knowingly. Neutral knowing smiles are similar to what Goffman identifies as 'civil inattention', and are thus most functional in *signalling and testifying normality* ('the unserious nature of practices as opposed to the big corruption scandals') and enable people to 'go on'.[27]

Negative knowing smiles are generated by emotions associated with embarrassment, shame and guilt. These smiles (shifty, awkward, uncomfortable, nervous smiles) show involvement and present a way of 'easing out of the situation' or represent a defence mechanism. Defence mechanisms are essential to protect one's positive and altruistic self-image.

All types of knowing smiles have a common denominator – social competence of handling open secrets and dealing with situations of moral squeeze, regardless of expressed attitude or emotional load. Social competence embraces tacit knowledge about what is normal, the ability 'to go on', a skill to turn formal constraints to one's advantage and a capacity to play the 'doublethink' game in self-defence and in the defence of the system people live under. It implies ambivalence about the idea of being honest, upright and dedicated to official goals. 'Someone who readily believes whatever official discourse says has no independent thought.'[28] 'Independence', 'individualism' and 'civic rights' in totalitarian societies are channelled through 'distance', 'doublethink' and 'double-deed'. In his classic novel *1984*, George Orwell defines doublethink as 'the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously'.

The Party intellectual knows in which direction his memories must be altered; he therefore knows that he is playing tricks with reality; but by the exercise of doublethink he also satisfies himself that reality is not violated... [T]he essential act of the Party is to use conscious deception while retaining the firmness of purpose that goes with complete honesty... To tell deliberate lies while genuinely believing in them... all this is indispensably necessary.[29]

Taken out of humorous contexts and into the everyday workings of society, the knowing smile – whether as a sign of recognition, misrecognition or both – serves to point out open secrets, tensions or situations of moral or logical squeeze, that individuals are forced to resolve themselves whether they deny or accept, fight or benefit from the existing gap between the official story and reality. The inadequacies of the system shifted onto the individuals to handle is well illustrated in an *anekdot*. A politburo member is giving a speech about industrialisation and 20-storey skyscrapers recently built on Karl Marx Street in Kharkov. Suddenly one of the listeners interrupts him:

'Comrade Kalinin, I am from Khar'kov. I walk down that street every day, but I have not seen any skyscrapers!'

'Comrade,' replies Kalinin, 'instead of loitering on the streets you should read newspapers and find out what's going on in your city'.[30]

In tune with this folk wisdom, Hannah Arendt theorises totalitarian ideologies as those aiming not at the transformation of the outside world but at the transformation of human nature.[31] Yuri Levada's empirically backed analysis results in the idea of *Homo Sovieticus*:

The Soviet experiment produced not so much a new human type as an individual who was wholly adapted to Soviet reality, one willing to accept it as a given, with no alternative. A society that was closed on all sides, even from its own historical reality, raised generations who could not imagine any way of life except the one they were given. The lack of alternatives turned the universal practice of adaptation into a habit, a mass behavioral structure that was neither dissected nor subject to analysis.[32]

The near ubiquitous exchange of 'knowing smiles' in everyday contexts is exactly that behavioural structure that, up to now, has escaped dissection and analysis. Yet it is the basis of normality and routine interaction that is so fundamental for the *modus operandi* in societies according to Goffman.[33] The function of knowing smiles is that, by *dismissing* their importance and by *accepting* commonplaces that rule out reflection upon them, they reproduce unwritten rules and open secrets and thus the system of power based on everybody's complicity in it. In other words, smiling at open secrets is allowing them to go unchallenged. Knowing smiles are an integral part of maintaining the yawning gap between the official discourse of the political regime and the unwritten rules it relies on. One is forced to keep open secrets a secret while also following the unwritten rules and engaging in informal practices that bridge the gaps between formal constraints of the regime and its informal impositions. Such an engagement makes one the insider of the system but also makes one complicit and fundamentally dependent on the regime. One is forced to put oneself in a compromised position and to apply self-control under the 'system of suspended punishment', only applied 'where necessary'.[34] The system makes people complicit in their own demoralisation and their own corruption.[35] Knowing

smiles actually serve to de-moralise people and not to allow one to moralise. Individual dependence is replicated at societal level, where the political and the economic system are dependent on informal practices in their inner workings.[36] In his 2001 analysis, Levada phrases it sharply and suggests little change for the *Homo Post-Sovieticus.*

At the individual level, the whole system of deals made with the state, which was intrinsic to the Soviet arrangement, inevitably led to moral corruption, the acceptance of sham, the padding of figures, string pulling, bribery, and doublethink. These conditions were necessary if society and the economy were to function. The collapse of the Soviet system did not introduce anything fundamentally new; it only eliminated the social and institutional (punitive) regulators that had limited the effect of the corrupting mechanisms.[37]

Following Goffman's methodology, one should suggest that the system will change when people stop smiling knowingly at references such as *blat* and other unwritten rules still propping up the existing regime. Levada's survey data are revealing in this respect.[38] In conclusion, I must emphasise that smiling at open secrets is a universal practice, not restricted to the Soviet doublethink or even to its post-Soviet reincarnation. Due to the inherent duality of informal practices and their paradoxical role in subverting the formal systems which they penetrate and exploit but also support,[39] they find their uses in post-Soviet contexts and in other societies that feature a gap between the official and the unofficial. People do not have to live under the Soviet system to smile at the *anekdot* of its six paradoxes above. The context of telling an *anekdot* prepares one for smiling and provokes a smile of recognition of a different kind, not necessarily of familiarity with the reality of socialism but of an

elegant unfolding of paradoxes or by proxy of one's own experiences. The manipulative use of the formal rules and using them to one's own personal advantage may be particularly strong in repressive systems but is not limited to them. This is illustrated by the studies of corruption and rent-seeking behaviour in the Middle East, Latin American and African resource-rich economies, as well as in the recent analyses of the 2008 sub-prime crisis elsewhere.

It is not the wrong-doing but the reaction to it that often determines the difference between societies. Although there might be some cross-cultural recognition and smiling at the subject matters of *blat* and corruption, there is a great deal of serious public awareness, academic interest and policy concern in the UK and the US, Finland and Norway.

Given the importance of personal background and experience in producing knowing smiles, one might imagine that changes in bringing up and educating younger generations will lead to the evaporation of Soviet-style practices. To date, the legitimacy of informal practices among the younger generations in Russia suggests otherwise. Levada's data suggest that the legacy of the 'doublethink' is still relevant. Thus, groups under 40 find evasion of military service justified: the youngest respondents, directly subject to conscription, are more than twice as likely to justify draft evasion as to condemn it.[40] Future knowing smiles, competence in unwritten rules and the doublethink on civic duty are thus set in motion. Unless such open secrets are articulated, explained or integrated into policies and cultural exchange, the fundamental non-transparency of societies is not going to diminish.[41]

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Notes

1 See William W Lewis, 'Russia's Survival of the Weakest', *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, 5 November 1999; and other sources at the Global McKinsey Institute site (www.mckinsey.com)

2 K Hendley, 'Legal development in post-Soviet Russia', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1997, pp. 228–251

3 According to Interfax, Vladimir Makarov, the deputy head of the Interior Ministry's Economics Crime Department, said that up to 45 per cent of the country's goods and services are part of the shadow economy. He also said that more than 40 Moscow banks are currently involved in what he called 'serious' shady deals. These comments were echoed by Duma Security Committee chairman Alexander Kulikov, who told RIA-Novosti the same day that the treasury receives only five per cent of taxes owed because of operations in the shadow economy (Quoted from *RFE/RL*, vol. 5, no. 28, part 1, 9 February 2001)

4 DC North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 3

5 Oxbridge unwritten rules are spelt out in FM Cornford, *Microcosmographia Academica*, Cambridge, MainSail Press, 1993

6 Edward Keenan, 'Muscovite political folkways', in *The Russian Review*, vol. 45, 1986, pp. 115–181

7 Some Moscow observers note that, under President Putin, law enforcement is just as selective and law enforcement agencies appear to be pursuing corruption allegations almost exclusively when they involve known opponents of the Kremlin. A variety of 'official' legal, administrative and economic sanctions can be levied against 'selected' victims. To start with, the fire brigade, tax police and sanitation department can be called upon to issue citations for tax irregularities or violations of fire, safety and public health codes on request. If necessary, this can be followed by further economic sanctions, informal arm-twisting, negative publicity in the press, etc. – a whole menu with legal changes for dessert

8 Svetlana Boym, *Commonplaces: Mythologies of everyday life in Russia*, Cornell University Press, 2000

9 Georg Simmel, 'The sociology of secrets and of secret societies,' *American Journal Society*, vol. 11, no. 4, 1906. Sharing a secret is often compulsive: when one cannot bear keeping a secret to oneself, one reloads the burden on another person to keep it

10 Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1971, pp. 7–14

11 See the discussion of the sociology of secrecy in Kim Lane Scheppele's *Legal Secrets: Equality and efficiency in the common law*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1988, pp. 3–23

12 Lesley Milne (ed.), *Reflective Laughter: Aspects of humour in Russian culture*, Anthem Press, London, 2004, Introduction. From the perspective of informal practices, I would not separate humour into official culture and unofficial culture that is co-opted in building socialism and the alternative *anekdot*. Both helped to reproduce the façade of socialism

13 Alena Ledeneva, 'From Russia with *Blat*: Can informal practices help modernize Russia?' *Social Research*, vol. 76, no. 1, 2009; Alena Ledeneva, 'Telephone justice in Russia', *Post-Soviet Affairs*, vol. 24, no. 4, 2008, pp. 324–50

14 The reason why satire works in the UK is because it never attacks the democratic system, rather it targets the failings of personalities, as seen, for example, in *Private Eye*.

15 The Soviet system also failed to change individual needs, despite all its repressive potential and 'experimental grounds of the concentration camps' (Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, San Diego, London, Harcourt, 1968)

16 These boundaries are shifting as the implications of 'smiling' in the 1930s are different from, say, the 1950s and 1980s, as are the implications of not smiling at the right times

17 Alena Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours: Blat, networking and informal exchange*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 79

18 Griboedov, Gogol and Saltykov-Shchedrin quoted in Milne, *Reflective Laughter*

19 Simmel, 'The sociology of secrets and of secret societies', p. 442

20 See Kristin Roth-Ey, *Soviet Culture in the Media Age* (forthcoming)

21 Charles Tilly, *Why?*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 19–20

22 Sheila Fitzpatrick, '*Blat* in Stalin's time', in *Bribery and Blat in Russia: Negotiating reciprocity from the Middle Ages to the 1990s*, ed. by Stephen Lovell, Alena Ledeneva and Andrei Rogachevskii, Basingstoke, Macmillan, 2000; Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary life in extraordinary times: Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2000

23 Mikhail Zhvanetskii, 'Nepovodimye igry' in *Izbrannoe*, Moskva, Eksmo, 2009, pp. 131–33 (originally recorded at the 1986 New Year's Eve performance)

24 Lev Gudkov, *Negativnaya identichnost*, Moskva, 2006

25 In contemporary Russia, for example, a simple reaction to success is to associate it with connections, corruption, or *siloviki* when it is really isn't just about that. 'You can blame it all on *blat* when in fact it's not *blat*'

26   Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste*, London, Routledge, 1989

27   Goffman, *The Presentation of Self*, 1990 (1959)

28   Mayfair M Yang, *Gifts, Favours and Banquets: The art of social relationships in China*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1994

29   Quoted in Iurii Levada, 'Homo Post-Sovieticus', *Sociological Research*, vol. 40, no. 6, 2001, p. 17

30   Quoted by Seth Graham, in 'Varieties of reflexivity in the Russo-Soviet anekdot', in Milne, *Reflective Laughter*, p. 176

31   Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 458

32   Levada, 'Homo Post-Sovieticus', pp. 6–7

33   Cited in Giddens, 'On rereading *The Presentation of Self*: some reflections', *Social Psychology Quarterly*, vol. 72, no. 4, December 2009, pp. 290–95

34   Ledeneva, *Russia's Economy of Favours*, p. 77

35   Now, viewing the Soviet system with the benefit of hindsight, with all these things coming to the fore, we can start seeing without worrying if it is going to upset those who were complicit in their own repression

36   Alena Ledeneva, *Unwritten Rules: How Russia really works*, London, Centre for European Reform, 2001, pp. 4–5

37   Levada, 'Homo Post-Sovieticus', p. 9

38   For example, when a survey shows that among Russians today only 11 per cent can say that they have 'never lied to anyone', and only 32 per cent can say that they 'have never taken something that belonged to someone else without permission', it attests to one of the simplest and most widespread types of human deception. This type is based on the diversity of normative fields themselves (social, group, role, and other fields), which determine the orientations and frameworks of each individual's activity. What interests us, however, are the more specific types and structures of 'deceptive' behaviour that are linked to the specific functioning of social norms, in particular historical and nation-state conditions – for example, the evasion of civic obligations and disobedience to the traffic rules (Levada, 'Homo Post-Sovieticus')

39   Alena Ledeneva, *How Russia Really Works: The informal practices that shaped post-Soviet politics and business*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2006

40   Levada, 'Homo Post-Sovieticus'

41   The proposed analysis of open secrets and knowing smiles poses an empirical question of their universality/specificity. It is also worth pondering what forms of research might deepen our understanding of societies. Finally, one could pursue the line of analysis of the emotional content of corruption

11

Uzbekness:
From Otherness to Ideology

Hamid Ismailov

*Once Khodja Nasreddin, a folkloric hero of Oriental
people, went abroad and when he was asked by a passerby:
'Is today a night of a full moon, because as you see the moon
is full in the sky?' – he replied: 'Sorry, I'm a stranger in this
city, so I don't know...'*

As an Oriental writer I spend the majority of my
time and maybe efforts describing that 'otherness' or
the particularities of mentality, and specifics of outlook
of the Uzbeks, or Russians, or Soviets, or strangers in
the West, so it's not a strange theme for me at all. So
here is an article about so-called 'Uzbekness', which was
written in 1989 while Uzbekistan was still part of the
Soviet Union. It's useful to see also how this 'Uzbekness'
of Uzbeks is changing or has changed in the 20 years
which have passed since the article was written. In the
second part of the paper I try to analyse how the concept
of 'Uzbekness' was put as a cornerstone of the new state
ideology and how the Uzbek authorities used its different
parts for their political and pragmatic ends in different
spheres of social life. Many of these observations could
be applied not just to Uzbeks but also to their neighbours
in Central Asia, though the 'otherness' of every ethnicity
or nation in Central Asia and post-Soviet territories may
differ from each other.

Uzbekness, 1989

Who are we, Uzbeks, and what do we think of the world?
In Uzbek the words and their order would have been:
'We, Uzbeks, who are we and of the world what do we
think?' The sentence reflects a fragment of the language
system. The verb (action) comes last, after those
concerned and their misadventures have been described
and all the other words said. Not until the end of the
utterance can one tell whether what is being said is a
question or a negation. There is also no morphological
distinction of gender – a grammatical feature peculiarly
echoed in Uzbek men's complete disregard for woman
(the veil for them!). However, with today's equal rights,
she has fully replaced him in the cotton fields. Besides,
Uzbek word-building is agglutinative and progressive;
words grow with assiduous consistency, like trees – from
the roots upwards.

Such, in outline, is the Logos of the Uzbeks. When
my friend, a French poet Jean-Pierre Balpe, saw today's
life of the scions of the great thinkers and conquerors like
Beruni, Timur, Al Khoresmi, Babur, Navoi and Ulugbek,
he said patience was the first feature of the Uzbek
character and also its last.

We too shall patiently traverse the Road of the Uzbek
Cosmos, but let us first deal with the small things.

1

An Uzbek legend begins: 'In the land of the Body, ruled by
Reason and Love, a child was born, and was called Heart.'
For the Uzbek the world begins as Home, Accord, and
Family. Family means accord in the home and home in
accord. The Uzbek homes in a *makhallya*, or a *guzar*, stand
shoulder to shoulder as in a line of defence. The *makhallya*
(also sometimes called *guzar*) is a family of homes with
its own hierarchy and ethics, the foundation of peace and
accord. The *kishlak*, or city, is a family of *makhallyas* and

guzars. The world is the Family and vice versa. This is what
the Uzbek expects to see when he opens his eyes. But he
finds he is in a *bezhik* (wooden cradle) bound hand and foot,
and rocking violently. This initial commotion imprints itself
to persist in his swaddled conscience for the rest of his life.

In the Family, Grandfather is the head, Grandmother
controls, Father provides, Mother feeds, Brothers protect,
Sisters foster, the Home stands, the Child grows.
Generation follows generation and life builds up in the
manner of Uzbek words – from the root upwards, to
infinity.

The decay of the Home and the Family began long
before we passed from the feudal to the socialist patriarchal
home. In his novel, *Night and Day*, Abdulhamid Chulpon,
a great Uzbek writer of the twentieth century, shows the
stages of this destruction: the traditional house – house of
rendez-vous – house of prostitution.

In many works, his counterparts Mahmudhodja
Bekhbudi and Abdurauf Fitrat argued that patriarchal
Uzbek life must be disrupted from within. The latter
even believed that all our ills derived from the pillars of
patriarchal family life: the desire to identify or replicate
the social life with the family one and to observe etiquette.
Be that as it may, the Home is falling, Accord is about to
crumble, the Family is on the brink of decay – but we still
have a long way to go to the end of the Uzbek sentence.
We've just begun.

2

The Child grows and one day it takes its first steps, and
at the very start of the Road it discovers a Garden. The
World is like a Garden – this is what the Uzbek lives
for in the midst of the two giant Deserts in the Oasis
he has created. His language is a Garden of Words, his
art a Garden of Ornaments, his philosophy a Garden of
Contemplation, his paradise is a Garden with a River.

There's no Home without a Garden, no Family without Children. To plant and to grow a tree is tantamount to giving birth to and fostering a child. The field is the exile of the garden, cotton its imprisonment.

Over the last century, after invasion by Russia in 1864, the area of the fields under cotton increased almost hundred-fold, as did the yields. Over the last 15 years, the areas allotted to gardens have shrunk to one-fifteenth of what they were – and today make up a mere one per cent of the arable lands of Uzbekistan.

Therefore, the Garden World is rather a Dreamland Garden. Actually, today the Uzbek sees the world as cotton. His language is technical cotton, his art its chaff, his philosophy: 'cotton is the pride of the nation', even his football team is Pakhtakor (Cotton-picker).

Two decades ago a famous Uzbek poet, Abdullah Aripov, appealed to the Uzbek to stand straight and take at least one look at the stars. Ten years ago another poet, Shavkat Rahmon, adjured the dwarf-tree itself to grow taller and bitterly surmised that spines could no longer unbend.

Today, the Aral Sea is drying up, the land salinating and turning into deserts, people are being poisoned (some figures of USSR Ministry of Public Health said the pesticide content in food has increased by 26 per cent). But the heraldic cotton-boll reigns supreme, shielding contemporary slavery from the eye with its whiteness. Meanwhile, discussions and sessions ramble on, as we continue formulating the Uzbek sentence, in which the verb (action), as we know, comes last.

3

The currently oft-referred-to expression, 'feast in the midst of a plague', is of British origin; but it is made for the Uzbek. Nothing can overcome his craving for the feast, or *toi*. The Child is hardly out in the Garden when the event is joyously celebrated in the cradle feast. The

circumcision feast awaits him when he is back; the send-off feast when the boy leaves for the army; the *kaitish* feast to welcome him back home. (By the way, in accordance with the non-existent linguistic feminine gender there's nothing similar for girls). Marriage is a sequence of small, larger and great feasts – the wedding ceremony. 'When the Uzbek grows rich, he builds a house and calls a feast', says the proverb, though this is not quite correct. The Uzbek will put a feast together even if he has been robbed of his last coin and his last shirt.

The vision of the world as a feast is profoundly philosophical. We are all guests here, but unfortunately, it has not been ordained that we see the Host. Ah, to take the Host's place for a moment! Can there be greater bliss? And are any meats too good for the guests in this fleeting world?

Have you ever been to an Uzbek wedding? Songs, *askiya* (competition of wits), performers – all passers-by welcome. But the host is always in the background. Modesty will never permit showing off. His business is to arrange the feast, for there will always be others to manage it.

This situation is quite similar to what we had seen often in Soviet times: a 'limited contingent of leaders' hailed from Moscow to popular gatherings, with packages of 'justice and honesty' and a conductor's baton to direct the national instruments.

However, Uzbeks say 'a guest is dearer than one's father' and will sooner give up a parent's life than hurt a guest's feelings. An Uzbek writer of the beginning of the twentieth century, Makhmud-khodja Bekhbudi, speaks of this in his play *Patricide*, as does contemporary poet Khurschid Davron, in his poem of the same title. It reminds us of the readiness to renounce religion, customs, script, and to forget our origins for the sake of etiquette.

But the feast goes on.

4

There is a more quiet, 'gastronomical' version of the feast – the *chaihana*, or tea house (a Central Asian analogue of the pub); no obligations, no involvement.

A few kopecks to pay for the tea, an onion to go with the shared pilav, and one can ponder to one's heart's content the burdens and vanity of life hearkening to Khodja Nasreddin's anecdotes in the company of one's peers.

Afandi lost his purse and told his wife everyone was losing purses at the bazaar today.

'Did you lose yours?' she asked. 'Yes. I was the first.'

Uzbeks like to laugh and poke fun, and they will spare no one, not even themselves. To witness a contest of wits, one need not travel to a special festival – suffice it to enter any *chaihana*. They make fun of each other and of themselves, and in this way gradually overcome and sublimate the ancient belligerence of the steppe, as well as today's propensity to speak subversively. The famed epic, *Baburnameh*, by the founder of the Great Mogul empire, provides an excellent example of this disregard for authority in humour:

While at a game of chess, a famous Uzbek poet of the 15th century, Alisher Navoi, stretched his leg out. It touched his counterpart Binoi's bottom. Navoi said, 'You can't stretch out a leg in Herat without touch-ing a poet's bottom.' Binoi answered, 'It's the same if you fold it under.'

Speaking of poets. Rocked from side to side, since the cradle, from their very birth, these wits and quipsters write poetry and songs of such profound sorrow that, with the same Abdullah Aripov, one wonders: 'If the song about this life is so impossibly sorrowful, how then could men endure the sorrow of life itself?'

Thus, set off by the rocking cradle, life in the *chaihana* moves or stands still in a tangle of the tragic and the ridiculous. Remember Roman Yakobson: 'An utterance centred on itself breeds a poetic function in the language.' In much the same way, communion centred on, and concerned with, itself is the *chaihana*. Hence the abundance of poets in ancient Herat and contemporary Uzbekistan.

5

All the above is but one scale in the balance of truth. The other is, of course, the Bazaar. An outstanding Uzbek writer and a poet of the twentieth century Gafur Gulyam's most Uzbek work, 'The Mischief-Maker', shows that the path of the Uzbek proceeds from and returns to the Bazaar. He is an habitué of the Bazaar, which may easily cause the delusion that he is a profiteer. This is not so.

Today he only sells what he has harvested himself. He wouldn't be able to buy fruit and vegetables even if he did want to make a profit on reselling. In Tashkent, a kilogram of apples costs six to eight rubles, in Moscow two to three rubles (NB Soviet prices of 1989). One needn't be a Marxist to understand that trade is an agreement, just and equitable. On it rests civil law, and hence the civic society we are to become. Marx's commodity exchange theory is, for the Uzbek, nothing but materialised communication. Therefore, communication is intellectual exchange – exchange of information. Consequently, he is as fully justified in his formula, 'The world is a bazaar', as the Russian in his, 'The world is bedlam'.

Trade is always an equation which brings extremes together ('a newspaper article equals 1.5 ladies' boots' or '159 strokes of the weeding blade equal one kopeck').

But Marx warned that value relations were between people, not commodities. A case in point:

'Where do you grow your pomegranates, old man?'

'Kuva. No better place in the world for pomegranates!'

'So you're from Kuva? Where do you live?'

'Finkelstein's plot.'

'Then you must know Tolib the butcher, son of Ruzvan-bibi?'

'Sure, I buy meat from him every day.'

'Tell him you saw me – and all the best cuts are yours.' (Putting aside the best pomegranates) 'You and I are almost relatives, then. I'm not asking the price – here, three rubles. I'm off home. My kids adore pomegranates.'

'Hey, what's your name?'

Here is another.

'How much are your dried apricots?'

'Three rubles.'

'How about three kilos for eight rubles?'

'Agreed.'

'Then five kilos for twelve, or six for fourteen, or rather eight for sixteen, even nine for seventeen. Could you weigh them by the kilo?... Good. Here's the first 1.5. On second thought, one kilo will do. I'll go see what other people have to offer.'

'Phew, thank Allah, he's gone.'

Alas, trade is always controlled by the buyer. One of the most important junctions of the Great Silk Route and the most ancient centre of world trade is currently in a state of paralysis. Indeed, who else sells cotton at half the world price? At a price that does not reflect those dried up seas and rivers, the 54 kilos of pesticides per hectare, the annual 300,000 cases of hepatitis, the 42,000 annually incapacitated, and the 82,000 born mentally handicapped (NB Figures of 1989). Some profiteers, these Uzbeks! They can't even trade properly today. They've forgotten how, have been made to forget. The same in all things, not only the bazaar.

6

Can the Uzbek's world be regarded as the world of the Great Mosque? Or, in other words, is it based on the idea of council, or assembly – what is known as *sobornost* in Russian? Is there an 'Uzbek idea' as such? To what extent does Islam cover what we spoke of above? After all, much of this also applies, say, to the Tadjiks.

The question would have been out of place before 1917. In Chulpon's novel, *Night and Day*, a *mullah* and a *jaded* or a *reformist* argue about 'nation'. The *mullah* says that for a true believer his nation is Islam, and when asked about his nationality he should reply, 'Ibrahim Halilullakh', which means, 'I'm from the nation of Abraham'.

Theoretically, the Uzbek idea has always been part of the broad context of Islamic and/or Turkic unity. Later this idea acquired – not without outside help – the tinge of Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism. Clearly, the addition of 'pan', which replaced the idea of unity with the threat of world conquest, was neither theoretically nor practically justified, whereas the idea of unification has as much right to existence as the idea of Pan-Americanism or a common European home.

By 'outside help' I do not refer to the remote 1917, when 26-year-old Fyodor Kolesov brought down Turkestan's first democracy, the coalition government of the Turkestan Autonomy, which had been proclaimed by the region's Muslim assembly. It was made up of representatives of local Muslims (95 per cent of the population) and of all the European parties and movements – from Zionists to Dashnaktsutyunites (Armenian nationalist party). The 'help' in question is the division by Russia's Council for Religious Affairs of the Central Asian Muslim Board and that of Kazakhstan. To follow that line of reasoning, one can expect the opening of a Karakalpakian Directorate as compensation for the dried-up Aral. This, naturally, to meet the desires of the working faithful.

It is characteristic of the Uzbek to move forwards with his face turned backwards. Similarly, our hero, finding himself in the mosque and looking into the past, would have to admit that Turkestan's Islam had its own deep and independent traditions. Suffice it to recall the great theologians Imam Bukhari, Imam Termesi, Burkhanitdin Marginoni, and the founders of the major orders of Sufism: Nadjimiddin Kubro of Kubravia, Ahmad Yassavi of Yassavia, and Bakhoutdin Nakshbandi of Nakshbandia.

A need unfilled keeps thought on the move and, as he thinks of the future, the Uzbek is in a state of perennial intermediacy, assigned to him as his main idea.

7

Alisher Navoi has a wonderful ghazal. In it he queries his Soul: where does his mortal suffering come from? The Soul blames the Body, the Body blames the Heart, the Heart accuses the Mind, etc... etc. Finally the poet exclaims, 'Each has claimed it is not involved and gained pardon. Therefore, suffer till the hour of death, for they

are all within you and such is your destiny.' I'd suggest the ghazal as the epitaph for our hero's gravestone.

Let us now consider 'the world as an Assembly'. A great Uzbek writer of the twentieth century, Abdullah Kadyri's *Days Gone By*, the most Uzbek of all books (the first novel of the Kadyri school), is essentially a sequence of assemblies of varied nature and composition. This feature determines the novel's form.

The Uzbeks still have the tradition of the 'assembly of the refined' – both among men and among women. It is called *gap* ('word', 'dialogue'). These are the gatherings where friends discuss poetry or arts, music or books and also entertain themselves with nice music, dances, food. Thus do Uzbek Logos and Psyche draw together. If one is consistent (Uzbek-wise) and returns to what caused this assembly of assemblies, then one can assume that the proposed Cosmos–Psyche–Logos can be narrowed or expanded (Eros, Ethos, etc.). However, just as the author is judged only by the laws of his own work, ethnoses can adhere to their own hierarchies of universalia, their understanding of the world can derive from their own notions of it, and they can count on being able to structure life in their own likeness.

The sacred Thought–Word–Action sequence proclaimed by Zoroaster, who lived where we live today, meticulously collected and drew in, before the final Action, a multitude of various Thoughts and Words. Today's collection (assembly), blending Islam and vulgarised Marxism, Zoroastrian deification of entirety and Nils Bohr's principle of complementarity, ideas of *perestroika* and the nomad tribe's love of freedom, etc. – this assembly, or collection, is the Field of his Lot, not of Destiny, and on this Lot today's Uzbek rushes around. The Place of Judgment between Hades and Paradise is called Arosat. *Arosatda kolmok* ('to be stranded in Arosat') signifies unresolvable intermediacy, perennial hesitation, a certain

congenital unpredictability, an abruptly discontinued Uzbek sentence. The only way for our hero to leave Arosat is to arrive at the Verb. He'll either be dead and in Paradise or alive and in today's Hell, where only the Fire of the scorching sun and of his burning heart is eternal and immutable – since Water is gone, Earth killed by pesticides, and Air poisoned by chemical waste.

Where should the Uzbek turn his steps – where among the spiralling circle of stellar assemblies, glittering like cotton, like tears, like sand? This Cosmic question blends with the age-long query: 'Or should he stand still forever...?'

From otherness to ideology

Writing about Uzbekistan, and especially about its 'otherness', is easy and difficult at the same time. Easy because, as in any country with a super-authoritarian rule, only the preferences, beliefs, knowledge and ideas of the state head – the President – play a role. At the same time it's difficult because, as in the case of an iceberg, everything else of importance lies under the thick layers of water. Because of this paradox, Uzbekistan is a country which is predictable and unpredictable at the same time. Predictable in the sense that you are able to calculate the President's direction, meaning that you are able to guess where this very traditional, patriarchally organised, monolithic-conformist society is moving. The most obvious example is the outcome of two votes in 1992 on the preservation of the Soviet Union. At the beginning of the year, in a referendum organised by Mikhail Gorbachev, then still in power, over 95 per cent of Uzbekistan's population voted for the preservation of the USSR, since the leadership of Uzbekistan was for it; and at the end of the same year the same percentage of the population voted for independence and sovereignty, again

just because of the Uzbek authorities' U-turn. After these preliminary and rather schematic arguments, it's easier to refer to what happens in the ideological sphere of the now independent and sovereign Uzbekistan.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, which has given such an unexpected independence to Uzbekistan, as well as other Central Asian republics, the key concept of identity, around which the new state was meant to be built, was the notion of *Mustakillik* – Independence. At the same time, in the ideological sphere after the discreditation of the Communist ideology, another key concept – *Uzbekchilik*, or Uzbekness – has been steadily introduced and a new ideology has evolved around this concept. Therefore it is interesting to relate this concept to various aspects of life in Post-Soviet Uzbekistan.

Uzbekness and the President

Now it is easy to explain why I have started from that relationship. The President himself has inherited the ideology of Uzbekness largely from the first informal grassroots movements of Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* era – 'Birlik', 'Erk' and others, which were recently crushed as oppositional by the President himself. In turn, these national–democratic organisations have learned and, to some extent, developed the idea of Uzbekness from the Jadids – the liberal-reformist Islamist movement of the beginning of twentieth century.

(The Institute of Strategic Studies under the President quite 'scientifically' determines Uzbekness as: 'a concrete reflection of national character and spirit of the common people, as expressed in moral and spiritual values, cultural heritage, historical continuity of generations and implemented in specific forms of tradition'.) The President himself, in his book *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the 21st Century*, calls the resurgence of spiritual values and national identity the main

precondition for stability and a guarantee of progress. Though the interpretation of the conditions of stability and guarantees of progress by the President, as they are reflected in his activities, is quite ambiguous: he turns one face towards the Uzbek domestic consumers, being not shy to appear in front of the indigenous nation as an inveterate nationalist; at the same time he is quite different towards the external audiences, as well as towards the internal Russian-speaking minority, talking about tolerance and international harmony.

Uzbekness and Uzbeks

It would be incorrect to assume that the revival of the Uzbekness ideology is only the whim of the President. It is rather a product of the president's awareness of the reality itself. After all, the reality, calling itself now 'the Uzbeks' (about 20 million people just in Uzbekistan) consists of parts that have self-identified themselves 80 years ago as completely separate ethnic units. At the beginning of the twentieth century and before the creation of the 'Uzbek' socialist nation, there were disputes on how to name it. Among the options discussed were the names of Turks, Sarts, Kipchaks, Muslim, and finally Uzbek. In pre-revolutionary encyclopaedias for example the number of Sarts in Turkestan was 2.5 million, while the Uzbeks were only 1.5 million. And even now Uzbekistan can be divided into at least six ethnic–cultural habitats: Ferghana, Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Kashkadarya–Surkhan and Khorezm, not counting the Karakalpakstan Autonomous Republic, the inhabitants of which differ widely in their understanding and implementation of Uzbekness. Hence there is the notorious parochialism, nepotism and cronyism, which play a significant role not only in the organisation of society, but in the power structure, and in its ideology.

Uzbekness and history

Uzbekistan first appeared on the world map under its current name in 1924 after the Leninist–Stalinist national demarcation, which followed the creation of new socialist nations. Prior to that, Central Asia was respectively configured according to the power of a ruler or conqueror. Before the Russian conquest of that territory in the late nineteenth century, the Uzbek territory consisted of two Khanates and one Emirate (kingdoms). This fact in particular explains the diversity of ethnic identifications in certain parts of Uzbekistan at the beginning of the twentieth century. Since gaining independence, when the concept of a socialist nation was cut at its root, it was necessary to look deeper than the length of 70 years. On the one hand, historians have been mobilised to create a new history of the Uzbek people, stretching back two and a half thousand years. The first sign of a new historical view was an article by two academics, challenging the fact of Uzbeks deriving from Turkic origins. On the other hand the Uzbek historiography, headed by the President himself, started to build up a new emblematic figure, similar to what Lenin was to the Soviet ideology. As an emblem of the new Uzbek independent nation the new historians chose a medieval ruler and conqueror, Amir Timur, or Tamerlane, known to the West since the days of Christopher Marlowe. It was him, and not, let's say, Sheibani Khan, who brought the very ethnonym Uzbek to these parts of the Golden Horde in the fifteenth century, who was chosen as the key figure.

The capital of his vast Empire, stretching from India to Syria was Samarkand, the city where President Karimov himself was born. And yet, ethnically belonging to the Turkised Mongol Barlas tribe, Amir Timur could not be plotted on any of the above graphs, and therefore could be accepted by all sub-ethnicities. In addition, as a hard ruler he would have legitimised the authoritarian

power of the President of the newly independent state. And finally, as the subject of attacks by Russian historiography, he became a key figure in the new anti-Russian, anti-Soviet history. In the book of wise sayings of President Karimov, which was published recently, none of the historical figures feature to the same extent as Amir Timur.

Uzbekness and development models

The great historical past is considered in Uzbekistan as a basis for the great future. 'Uzbekistan is a country with a great future,' says one of the most famous slogans of the Uzbek President. In choosing that future the President was flexible enough in the first years of independence, when he used to propose alternative models of development initially of Turkey, then South Korea, then Japan, and afterwards of China, parallel to his visits to those countries; and this gave enough food for his few critics beyond the borders of Uzbekistan. In the end, in one of his books the President proclaimed that Uzbekistan has its own way of development and progress, and by doing that he actually stimulated the development of the Uzbekness concept as a nation-state ideology.

Uzbekness and Islam

By creating the ideology of Uzbekness, of course, it is impossible to circumvent such an ideologically significant element of Uzbek consciousness and life as Islam. The same double standard of behaviour that differentiates the internal and external audiences is characteristic of Uzbek leadership in relation to Islam. On one hand the President not only took his Presidential oath on the Constitution and the Koran, but also visited the holiest place of the Muslims – the Kaaba in Mecca, an honour which is received by a rare Muslim. In nearly every speech which the President delivers in Uzbek, he

appeals at the end to the Creator, the Almighty, with the request of support and patronage. And on the other hand, under his rule, rather than even during the Soviet atheistic times, dozens of thousands of clergymen or just ordinary Muslims were thrown into prison on false charges of possession of drugs or weapons, or expelled from the country. The so-called fight against Islamic extremism, fundamentalism and Wahhabism is one of the favourite bogeys of the Uzbek leader, willingly portraying himself as the sole bulwark opposing the Islamic onslaught from the South.

However, there are features in Islam which the leadership of Uzbekistan love and even include into the Code of Uzbekness, and above all, these are: monotheism, with a practical distillation of unity of command, and obedience to God, with the earthly equivalent of obedience to authority. President Karimov emphasises in his wise sayings that the communal Islamic character of Uzbeks is their invaluable quality in the eyes of the leadership.

Uzbekness and community

The very communal character of Uzbek life in a traditional Uzbek *makhallya* (neighbourhood) was chosen by the leadership of Uzbekistan as a basis of social organisation of the population. The phenomenon of modern Uzbekistan's *makhallya* became one of the most fashionable topics for Western academic research. Branches of self-government, which are increasingly used as transmission belts of government and ideology, penetrate to the lowest level – *makhallyas*; on the other hand, *makhallyas*, for example in the old town of Tashkent, were regarded as the citadels of religious opposition to the authorities, and therefore many of them were demolished and their population was scattered in urban areas.

Uzbekness and spirituality

In spite of its ideological seeds, planted in the early years of independence, the process of creating and implementing Uzbekness pursued more utilitarian and pragmatic goals and, in general, repeated the Communist totalitarian system of ideological governance. So, now in Uzbekistan the process of creating Centres of Spirituality and Enlightenment from top to bottom is taking place. These are sorts of political departments in the administrative, industrial and public education sectors. If you replace, let's say, the emblematic figure of Lenin by Amir Timur, or the idea of Communism by the idea of a free market, the philosophy of dialectical materialism by the Tasawwuf or Sufism, etc., the function of these elements in society and the state remain essentially the same. The essence of them is the ideology of total control from top to bottom. However, as it were, a national audit of spirituality has eliminated or sterilised public institutions which were in the forefront of Gorbachev's *perestroika*, such as the Writers' Union, social movements Birlik, Erk, Tumaris and independent student organisations.

Uzbekness and the media

The Soviet style of relation towards the media is also characteristic of the relations between the authorities and the Uzbek media. Freedom of speech, declared by the Constitution, by several laws on freedom of journalism and even by the Law on abolishment of censorship is, as the Communist phraseology goes, 'a paper tiger'. Media subsidised by the state, in addition to a strict political censorship, are also under the yoke of economic censorship. Papers of opposition movements have been closed and now from time to time publish a very limited circulation from abroad; the so-called independent press within the country is also under the strict control of the system. On the other hand,

under the auspices of the President, several bodies were established to develop and promote a new ideology of Uzbekness, such as the magazines *Tafakkur* (Thinking) and *Mulokot* (Dialogue), etc.

Uzbekness and literature

As in any traditional society it is literature which has played the role of public consciousness in Uzbekistan and the same literature primarily prepared the ground for the creation of the Uzbekness ideology. However, after this ideology had been adopted by the state, Uzbek literature found itself in disarray. Shrewder were those writers and poets who wrote in Soviet times poems and novels about the Party and Lenin; in fact, according to the new ideology, it has been sufficient to replace the Party with the Nation, and Lenin with Amir Timur, or at worst with the President, and this literature was in demand. It was more difficult for the writers and poets of a literary–nationalist streak combined with dissidence which grew during the Soviet era. The subject of their dissidence has now become a state ideology, and therefore some of them were recruited from the opposition to the current ruling party, publishing books such as *Feeling of a Motherland* or *An Encyclopaedia of Uzbekness*; but another few, for whom the literature was higher than the current politics, were forced to emigrate or go into internal exile.

Uzbekness and education

If any segment of the population is able to absorb the new ideology and master it as the original one, it is of course children and youth. And since nearly half the population of Uzbekistan falls into this category, it is clear that one of the first acts of leadership in the sphere of ideology was reforming the education system. The education system

is still based on the European form of general education, though the content has been amended according to the above-mentioned Uzbekness paradigms. At the same time it was decided to change the alphabet based on the Cyrillic system to the Latin script. In this case the form of the change was more important than the essence, and change of graphics has been implemented for the sake of change itself. Arguments about bringing together the Uzbek people and Western technology through the Latin alphabet, or improving the phonetics of the Uzbek language, do not stand up to serious criticism. The disastrous consequences of this shift have already started to affect Uzbeks in the form of the appearance of a new generation of students who cannot read either books, or newspapers (all still published in the Cyrillic alphabet), as well as a generation of parents unable to help their children, having no clue of the Latin alphabet. This change of orthography only adds to the problems of the Russian minority in Uzbekistan.

Given the fact that the former Communist elite, who were in power in Uzbekistan during the Soviet era, remained in power in independent Uzbekistan, there has developed a very paradoxical situation with regard to the alphabet change, since the elite themselves don't read in the Roman alphabet. The same paradox is taking place in the official status of the Uzbek language, adopted under the pressure of informal movements during the Perestroika time. These elites are taken hostage by their own decisions because they are overwhelmingly Russian-speaking. And since the law on the status of the Uzbek language, especially regarding its exclusive use in work places, is indefinitely delayed, it's hard to imagine that one day the current President of Uzbekistan will suddenly deliver one of his speeches on Uzbekness in the Latin alphabet newly adopted by himself.

Uzbekness and the West

Our previous reflections show that Uzbekness is a concept used and abused by the Uzbek authorities for their political or pragmatic ends. We talked about internal and external consumers for whom this concept is designed. Thus, in their relationship with the West, the Uzbek authorities have learned how to use their 'otherness', expressed through Uzbekness, on many fronts. For example, when it comes to the need for the democratisation of society, or political reforms, or human rights, the Uzbek authorities usually bring the argument that the people of Uzbekistan are not yet ready for these changes because of local traditions. The same authorities are very quick in their own adaptation of some features of Western civilisation, when it comes to villas, yachts, football clubs or fashion shows, but for the rest of the people there's an imperative of Uzbekness.

The same thing happens with the thesis of 'otherness', which is often used in the counter-arguments against Western institutions and values: the same rulers who fiercely defend their 'otherness' do not allow the same 'otherness' for their subjects; the 'otherness' in their right to be Westernised stops with themselves. It's obvious that I am not arguing against either the 'otherness' of other people or cultural sensitivity in engaging with them. What I am saying is that we shouldn't fool ourselves when this 'otherness' is used and abused for political, economic, pragmatic and other ends by a few at the expense of many.

I have started my notes with an anecdote of Hodja Nasreddin and I would like to conclude with another one.

Once Mullah Nasreddin was in a neighbouring village. On the way home, he bought a watermelon. Eager to eat, he cut it in half and ate the half, leaving another half on the road and saying to himself:

'Let him who sees this watermelon think that here was a nobleman.'
He walked a bit, then came back, picked up the abandoned half, ate
it, and said to himself:

'Let them think that the nobleman was with a servant, who had
eaten this half.'

He walked a little more, felt sorry, went back, picked up the crust
and ate it, saying:

'Let them think that the nobleman had also an ass.'

So sometimes believing in and absolutising the 'otherness' of some people is similar to believing in the scenario which greedy and witty Hodja Nasreddin prepared for us.

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'These days, we do not lack information about other societies and countries,' writes Eva Hoffman, in her introduction to this illuminating collection of essays. But why, we must ask, does an unprecedented level of knowledge not translate into greater understanding?

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Often, they suggest, it is the experience of emigration or displacement which is the key: it reveals most sharply to us not only how culture shapes our human environment but also the inner landscapes of the self which perceives it.

In his opening essay, 'Barbarism, Civilisation, Cultures', Tzvetan Todorov argues forcefully that without this much-prized knowledge of what 'culture' is, we may increasingly fail to become what he calls 'a civilised person: one who is able, at all times and in all places, to recognise the humanity of others fully'. This is an urgent and indispensable book for our world now.

Eva Hoffman is an academic and writer whose concerns include history, memory and identity. She is the author of *Lost in Translation*, *Exit into History*, *Shetl*, *After Such Knowledge* and two novels, *Secrets* and *Illuminations*. Born in Poland, she lives in London.