

Europe's Other Self

The history of Europe is not only internal, but external: its relation with its Others. **Stuart Hall** examines the impact of fundamentalism and Third World migration on European identity

We are advancing steadily towards two anniversary occasions for Europe. The countdown has already begun to 1992, the birthday of the new Europe. Despite the rearguard action of the Thatcherite rump, the supra-national shape of the new Europe is beginning to emerge. This occasion will be inward-looking - the lowering of economic and trading barriers, the opening of convergence and integration which everyone hopes will bring prosperity to western European peoples. Here, it is the waning of the era of the separate nation-states, which have for so long provided the engine of European growth. Once again, Europe is able to produce from within her own borders and resources, both material and spiritual, the conditions for the next phase of social development. This has been the dominant narrative of modernity for some time - an 'internalist' story, with capitalism growing from the womb of feudalism and Europe's self-generating capacity to produce, like a silk-worm, the circumstances of her own evolution from within her own body.

The other anniversary marks another, equally important, but less frequently celebrated aspect. 1992 is also the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's so-called 'discovery' of the New World. This event, along with the Portuguese opening-up of the African coastline and advance (with the assistance of Arab traders who had long plied those waters) into the Indian Ocean and beyond, marked the opening of the era of European expansion - the process of exploration, conquest and colonisation by which virtually the whole globe was harnessed in one way or another to Europe. 'Globalisation', which we often speak of as if it began with the 'Big Bang', and the computerisation of the Stock Exchange, really started there with Columbus's 'mistake', and has been going on ever since. (He was really on the way somewhere else and remained stubbornly convinced, when he hit the New World, that, like any other

good European businessman, he had arrived in Japan.)

Europe's external relations with its Others has been central to the European story since its inception, and remains so. The story of European identity is often told as if it had no exterior. But this tells us more about how cultural identities are constructed - as 'imagined communities', through the marking of difference with others - than it does about the actual relations of unequal exchange and uneven development through which a common European identity was forged. Now that a new Europe is taking shape, the same contradictory process of marking symbolic boundaries and constructing symbolic frontiers between inside and outside, interior and exterior, belonging and otherness, is providing a silent accompaniment to the march to 1992.

One of the key sites of this discursive work is, of course, eastern Europe - a boundary which has always given western Europe trouble. Westwards, what used to be called 'the Green Sea of Darkness' provided a natural boundary. But eastwards, the continent refuses to end naturally. It stretches out to the Urals and beyond, into the dark unknown from which the barbarians descended. Where does Europe stop and Asia begin? The question is critical - European prosperity depends on finding an answer to it. In the negotiations between European capitalism and the disintegrating communist empires of eastern Europe - the Second World - we are about to discover the answer.

Currently, the line is staked out in terms of the contrast between the 'international' West and the 'nationalist' East. As national boundaries are weakened and eroded in western Europe, we are told, so in eastern Europe there is a resurgence of nationalism. The contrast between the 'rational' and civilised West and the irrational and barbarous East underpins this opposition. Of course, many of the nationalisms which are helping to fragment the old communist empire are driven by

ethnic absolutism, hatred of difference, racial exclusiveness and religious orthodoxy. But it ill behoves western Europe to complain. Its own development occurred on the back of nationalisms which also had their own racially and ethnically exclusive character. It is not a surprise that the Croatians, the Slovenes, the Latvians, the Estonians, etc, should regard the construction of a little nation of their own as a passport to the West. These emergent nationalisms are not simply revivals of the past but reworkings of it in the circumstances of the present - entry tickets to the new Europe. Though they look like a return to a pre-1914 historical agenda, they are functioning as a way of evading the past and making a bid for modernity (ie, entry to the Euro-club).

As Europe consolidates and converges, so a similar exercise in boundary maintenance is in progress with respect to its Third World 'Others'. Currently, the two favourite discursive markers in this discourse are 'refugees' and 'fundamentalism'. The question of illegal immigration has once again surfaced as an urgent topic of European discussion, the redoubtable French Socialist prime minister, Edith Cresson, regretting that 'of every ten immigrants found to be here illegally, only three are expelled', and Jacques Chirac, that model of the new European cosmopolitan enlightenment, remarking on the 'noise and smell' of foreigners which drove decent French people 'understandably crazy'. Douglas Hurd and Kenneth Baker have been spinning complicated webs around the distinction between 'political refugees' and 'economic migrants'. Political refugees deserve refuge in enlightened Europe, home of liberty. Usually they are few in number, and it is often hard to prove conclusively that they are in direct danger from some oppressive or tyrannical regime of the kind which poverty and indebtedness breeds - which allows a reasonable proportion to be bundled unceremoniously back to the waiting arms of the local police.

Economic migrants, on the other hand, are simply the unwitting casualties of the 'normal' processes of market forces as they operate at the periphery. Europe, whose banking arrangements have destroyed subsistence agriculture and whose new Gatt arrangements will price most of them out of the commodity markets, owes them nothing. It is true that, Tebbit-like, they got on their bikes (or the nearest equivalent - a one-way charter flight ticket) and, quite rationally, went to seek their fortunes in the only place where fortunes are to be made. But this will never do. Suddenly, European prosperity is a strictly European affair, designed exclusively for what every self-respecting Euro-politician is calling 'our populations'. No wonder, when the Berlin Wall collapsed, every self-respecting Pole and East German who had a Lada capable of making the jour-

ney climbed aboard, and like Columbus in search of pure gold, headed west. The frontiers are closing...

The problem is (as Colin Prescod's excellent BBC2 series, *Black On Europe*, about the plight of western Europe's ethnic minorities, has been showing) the 'barbarians' are already inside the gate; and face-to-face with them, European cosmopolitanism does not stand up well to the test. Millions of Muslims in France, Sudanese and Ethiopians in Italy, Turks and Africans in Germany, Portugal, Spain, Asians and Afro-Caribbeans in Britain, Indonesians and Surinamese in Holland, bear witness, not only to the actual mechanisms of 'globalisation' but to the difficulty of sloughing off in one easy movement Europe's long colonial past or keeping the periphery in place.

The so-called 'homogeneous populations' of the new Europe - the ethnic absolutism on which the new 'openness' is being constructed - has always been, at best, an elaborate metaphor. As Dafydd Ellis Thomas, the Plaid Cymru MP, recently pointed out, no single western European state corresponds to one people. The Slovenes, like the Scots, the Welsh and the Basques, may hope to bring into existence a nation which is a state - that is, a state which is the expression of a homogeneous ethnic group. But all the major European nations are already hybridised - multicultural. And now this is compounded by the most astonishing aspect of 'globalisation' - the tidal wave of migrations which it has stimulated. Peoples, drawn inexorably through the laws of uneven development into the networks of a globalised world system, and long accustomed to dwell simultaneously in the 'local' worlds of traditional societies and the 'global' worlds of international capital, have simply packed their few belongings and set out - legally or illegally - to cross those visible and invisible frontiers designed to keep them immured in the 'backwardness' of their ethnic particularisms, in search of the far side of Paradise. Every major European and North American city today is a multi-cultural metropolis.

The category of 'fundamentalism', revived with new vigour somewhere between the Rushdie affair and the Gulf war, is the latest mechanism whose frontier effect is designed to keep the migrating millions on the other side of the fence. It collapses the extraordinary diversity and proliferation of difference which is the law of globalisation into the simplifying oppositions of Western rationalism, modernity and liberal tolerance of one side, versus the retreat into the irrationalism of ethnic and religious particularism. Would that liberalism and fundamentalism were so easy to distribute into their respective spaces. Of course, there are 'fundamentalist' regimes in the world; and their retreat into racial purity, religious orthodoxy and a rigid cultural traditional-

ism has done nothing for the millions of poor people languishing under their rule. The view, held by some western radicals, that because these regimes (sometimes) oppose the West we should support them, is a profound error, forced on us by the fact that we continue to work with these simple binary oppositions. We might call this, following Marx's remark about anti-semitism, not 'the socialism', but the 'anti-imperialism of fools'. There was a lot of it about during the Gulf war on the dubious grounds that, because Saddam Hussein was 'bad news' for Washington, he must be somehow 'good news' for the Iraqis. Whereas, what poor people in the Third World need, against the oligarchic regimes which have often risen to power with the aid of western governments and arms merchants, is more, not less democracy - just like us.

As a concept designed to help us understand the rapidly shifting relations between the different 'worlds', fundamentalism is virtually useless. Islam, the principal culprit in this fundamentalist discourse, is an immensely diverse set of peoples, beliefs, traditions and practices. What it shares with Christianity is more extensive than that between any other world religion. It may be the fact that they are so close which makes them such implacable enemies - think of the way Christian, Jewish and Islamic theological history converges on Jerusalem. 'Fundamentalism' as a term is a way of suppressing this diversity, forgetting a shared history too involuted to submit to simplifying slogans, of refusing to live with difference. In fact, Muslim responses to the Ayatollah's *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie were much more varied than has been recognised; and they had as much to do with the local contexts and historical conjunctures in which they were expressed as the 'essential fundamentalism' they were taken to represent.

If what we mean by 'fundamentalism' is a defensive and exclusive retreat into a rigid and unchanging version of the past inhabited as Truth, then there is plenty of it about, not least in the so-called 'modern West'. The attempt to shore up the market-driven destruction of the social fabric of British society during the Thatcher years by an appeal to Victorian values, the evocation of Britannia Resurgent in the Falklands war, the Thatcher-Tebbit test of 'are you one of us?', the stout defence of 'Englishness' which is being inscribed by diktat through the National Curriculum in schools, the backlash, both here and with much greater vigour and venom in the US, against 'multiculturalism' - these are but a few of the outward and manifest signs that a kind of fundamentalism is alive and well at the centre of 'modernity'. Some would argue that it has stood at the side of modernity - the Enlightenment's 'dark shadow' - from its inception.

In fact, 'globalisation' (which carries the ring of modernity and cosmopoli-

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tanism about it) and 'fundamentalism' are not opposites but complementary; two sides of the same coin. As the new forms of globalisation unhinge the negotiated compromises between tradition and modernity in the Third World, the process calls into being in response a vigorous 'localism'. Localism can be purely defensive - inward-turning, exclusive, absolutist, a retreat into an enclave form of ethnicity. But there are many 'ethnicities', just as there are many types of nationalism, not all of them harnessed irreversibly to a reactionary politics, as over-rationalist versions of both liberalism and marxism once claimed. The construction of alternative local histories and cultures can be a resource for building the future, not just a return to the 'safe haven' of the past: an *invention* rather than simply a rediscovery of tradition, which provides marginalised people with the cultural means to construct those new identities and counter-narratives without which they cannot survive, let alone contest and negotiate with the West on anything approaching equal terms.

This is why, paradoxically, in the era of globalisation, the margins, the periphery, the 'local', has time and again proved to be culturally the most productive space. Face to face with the contradictory realities of 'globalisation', *everybody* is discovering their ethnicity: not the purity of their origins, which in a migrating world is impossible to discover, but simply the fact that they come from particular places, speak particular languages, inhabit distinctive cultural traditions, belong to particular landscapes and share with many others who are not 'the same' as them, particular histories. In short, living with, rather than simply forgetting, 'difference'. This is preferable to the endless forgetting - the historical amnesia - coupled with a vapid postmodern nostalgia which is globalisation's stock-in-trade.

Identity is always an open, complex and unfinished game - always 'under construction' (in Europe as much as in the Middle East, Africa or the Caribbean). It always moves into the future by a symbolic detour through the past. It produces new subjects. But they always bear the indelible traces of those specific histories, traditions and cultures through which identities form themselves - produce themselves anew. The people of the periphery have no other cultural resources with which to defend themselves against the homogenising 'indifference' of globalisation, no other languages in which to define a different, more vernacular, set of modernities for themselves. In this sense, the rise of ethnicity (only some variants of which are 'fundamentalist') is one of the products of 'globalisation' - the most subversive of its many unintended consequences.

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