“MUSLIM NATIONALISM” AND THE POLITICS OF OTHERNESS IN THE AGE OF NEO-DIASPORA

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“Nationalism could almost be defined as intense national feeling for a country that does not yet exist, or for someone else’s country.”

(Michael Ignatieff)

“One day the gloom will be lifted from the Nile Valley, the Indus Valley, and far beyond and [there will be] men and women who call themselves Muslims, citizens of the only remaining superpower in the world. . . Tomorrow, with them, will be the children of the Old World. Together they will say . . . verily I am one of the Muslims. The voices will echo from the four corners of the continent and resonate in corridors of power.”

(Robert D. Crane, formerly a foreign policy adviser to President Nixon, a Muslim activist, speaking in a sermon at the American Muslim Council, AMC Report, February 1994, p. 8)

The turn of the past millennium is a time of unprecedented liquidity in the social and cultural global morphology and in its conceptual understandings. It is hence a time of disturbed, therefore reconstructed, established modes of self-identity and related ideologies, Nationalism prominently included. A major engine generating this flux is the extensively rehashed G word, Globalization, which has a profound impact on the re-organization of the economic and demographic world-order, and consequently on the life worlds and collective identities of human societies worldwide. It occurs mainly through the new connectivity afforded by the rapid growth of Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs), and through diasporization, afforded by the new permeability of borders and the ensuing massive traffic and re-location of people.

One of the unsung features of the current Globalization process—much unlike former historical manifestations of Globalization—is the speed with which it develops, in both reality and scholarly research. When McLuhan came up with the groundbreaking notion of a “global village”, it connoted—and to some minds still does—a
one-way process of homogenization worldwide by a hegemonic Western/American civilization. It meant the “Lexus” overpowering the “Olive Tree”, “McWorld” antiquating Jihad, CNN towering over local or state sponsored broadcasters of events and opinions.

However, following on rapidly from the initial fascination with that term, research has come to recognize this all-engulfing process as triggering reactive responses of assertive localism, a “counter-movement of indigenization”, by both national and sub-national groups. In realization of this counter-process the binary model of local/particular vs. universal/homogenized was introduced in critical theory. That too, before long, was sidelined as further study of the variety of empirical cases showed that the process and the outcome of globalization are much more complex than simply a polar tension, and the binary model of global-particular is too simplistic to serve as a useful analytical tool. The awareness of such complexity is expressed in the new terms current in scholarly discussion, such as “creolization” and “hybridity”, and mostly in Ronald Robertson’s concept of glocalism. In the main the term has been used to denote the “in-between” space, or blended manifestations of the meeting between the polar opposites of universalism and particularism (even though the latter is probably no longer purely local). A third space is produced of a hybrid culture, a new global-local nexus.

As this interaction proved to be a constant and dynamic process of ‘becoming’, further notions were developed in the scholarly literature to deal with its definition. Arjun Appadurai has broken the spaces in the new world order to “ethnoscapes”, produced by flows of people, “technospaces”, machinery and plant flows, “financescapes”, produced by the rapid flow of money, “mediascapes”, flowing images of information, and “ideoscapes”, linked to the flow of images associated with ideologies. Manuel Castells developed the notion of the hegemony of the (non-bordered) “space of flows” over the “space of place” (which is territorially defined and controlled), and Jonathan Friedman that of “identity space”. The hegemony of

2 Arjan Appadurai, Modernity at Large, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 33