



THE  
TURBULENCE  
OF MIGRATION

Nikos Papastergiadis



# The Turbulence of Migration

*For Teodor*

# **The Turbulence of Migration**

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*Globalization, Deterritorialization and  
Hybridity*

Nikos Papastergiadis

Polity Press

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First published in 2000 by Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Reprinted 2004, 2007

Polity Press  
65 Bridge Street  
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Polity Press  
350 Main Street  
Malden, MA 02148, USA

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Papastergiadis, Nikos, 1962–

The turbulence of migration : globalization, deterritorialization and hybridity / Nikos Papastergiadis.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN: 978-0-7456-1430-4 — ISBN: 978-0-7456-1431-1 (pbk)

1. Emigration and immigration. 2. International economic relations.  
3. Cultural relations. 4. Immigrants—Social conditions. I. Title  
JV6032.P34 2000  
325—dc21

99-27521  
CIP

Typeset in 10 on 12 pt Times by Ace Filmsetting Ltd, Frome, Somerset  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Marston Book Services Limited, Oxford

This book is printed on acid-free paper

For further information on Polity, visit our website: [www.polity.co.uk](http://www.polity.co.uk)

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# Acknowledgements

I began writing this book in 1993 when, with my first ever laptop computer, I headed out to Australia. After having 'keyed in' half of my first draft I experienced the now legendary 'hard disk failure'. In retrospect, I am grateful for this little catastrophe for it punctured all my illusions about the infallibility of modern technology and alerted me to the pitfalls of writing on the road. Over the next five years this book slowly emerged in the form of long essays, many of which were prodded along by other editors. I would like to acknowledge the encouragement offered by Diana Nemiroff, Gilane Tawadros, Pnina Werbner and the editorial team of the *Arena* journal. This book would not have found its present shape without the incisive and helpful comments from Tony Giddens, John Thompson and Lynn Dunlop at Polity Press. The reader's reports from John Solomos and John Rex were invaluable.

The breadth and texture of this book is mostly due to the different worlds in which I live and work. This is an attempt to bring them together, or at least to demonstrate that conversations that began in one place can be resumed in another. I am especially grateful to Scott McQuire, Bill Papastergiadis, Peter Ash, Rita Armstrong, John Berger, Victoria Lynn, Peter Lyssiotis, Constanze Zikos, Rasheed Araeen, Gillian Bottomley, Guy Brett, Ron Benner, Ann Brydon, Pavel Buchler, Anne Daniel, Jean Fisher, Helena Guldberg, Sneja Gunew, Jamelie Hassan, Richard Hylton, Vivian Kondos, Lois McNab, Don Miller, Stephen Snoddy, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Nick Tsoutas, Liz Turnbull and Leon Van Schaik.

My greatest debt lies with my friends and colleagues at Manchester University. This book reflects the lively debates, conversation in corridors and long lunches that made me think through the connections between political economy

and cultural theory. In particular, I would like to thank Teodor Shanin, Huw Beynon, Helen Sampson, Steve Quilley, Sheila Rowbotham, Simon Miller, Peter McMylor, Fiona Divine, Paul Kelemen, Mike Savage, David Morgan, Rod Watson, Rosemary Mellor, John Hutnyk, Anna Grimshaw, Peter Halfpenny, Jeff Henderson, Patrick Joyce, Marcia Poynton, Andrew Causey and Katherine Isaacs, who once gave me an invaluable piece of advice: 'When you are in a hole, stop digging.'

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# Introduction: The Turbulence of Migration

The subjects of history, once the settled farmers and citizens, have now become the migrants, the refugees, the *Gastarbeiter*, the asylum seekers, the urban homeless.

Neal Ascherson, *The Black Sea*

Migration, in its endless motion, surrounds and pervades almost all aspects of contemporary society. As has often been noted, the modern world is in a state of flux and turbulence. It is a system in which the circulation of people, resources and information follows multiple paths. The energy and barriers that either cause or deflect the contemporary patterns of movement have both obvious and hidden locations. While nothing is utterly random, the consequences of change are often far from predictable. For the most part, we seem to travel in this world without that invisible captain, who can see ahead and periodically warn us to 'return to our seats and fasten our security belts'. The journey nowadays is particularly treacherous, with financial storms which can break out in Hong Kong and have repercussions in New York, acid rains generated in the north drifting south, the global emission of CFC gases directly affecting the growth of the hole in the ozone layer above the Antarctic, the threat of atomic fallout looming larger as the nuclear arsenals of thirty or more countries are positioned along jagged lines of brinkmanship, and the systemic flooding of the ranks of the unemployed as the chilling technology of economic rationalization bites into every locale. These are just some of the known sources of fear. There may be other storms on the horizon which we cannot name, let alone control, that force people to move.

The turbulence of modern migration has destabilized the routes of move-

ment and created uncertainty about the possibilities of settlement. The scale and complexity of movement that is occurring currently has never been witnessed before in history, and its consequences have exceeded earlier predictions. To take account of this excess, migration must be understood in a broad sense. I see it not just as a term referring to the plight of the 'burnt ones', the destitute others who have been displaced from their homelands. It is also a metaphor for the complex forces which are integral to the radical transformations of modernity. The world changes around us and we change with it, but in the modern period the process of change has also altered fundamental perceptions of time and space. Countless people are on the move and even those who have never left their homeland are moved by this restless epoch.

These changes have a profound effect on the way we understand our sense of belonging in the world. It is impossible to give an exact location and date for the emergence of modernity. Modernity has had multiple birthplaces. Giddens's general definition of modernity, as referring to the institutional changes that took place somewhere around the eighteenth century, is about as accurate as one can get.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the modern period, most people have understood their sense of belonging in terms of an allegiance to a nation-state. This task of conferring clear and unambiguous forms of belonging was never a straightforward operation. Nation-states were from the outset composed of people with different cultural identities. Among the central aims of the project of nation-building was the unification of these diverse peoples under a common identity, and the regulation of movement across their territorial borders. However, the complex patterns of movement across national boundaries, and the articulation of new forms of identity by minority groups that emerged in the past couple of decades, have destabilized the foundations of the nation-state.

This book seeks to examine the interconnected processes of globalization and migration and to explore their impact on the established notions of belonging. It seeks to question the dominant forms of citizenship and cultural identity which defined belonging according to national categories and exclusive practices of identification, by exploring the emergent forms of diasporic and hybrid identities. There is a great urgency in our need to rethink the politics of identity. If the historical and cultural field that shapes contemporary society is increasingly diverse and varied, then we can no longer exclusively focus on the traditions and institutions that have taken root in a given place over a long historical period. The identity of society has to reflect this process of mixture that emerges whenever two or more cultures meet.

The political will to adopt such an approach towards migrant communities and minority groups has not been readily forthcoming. While there is a growing recognition that we are living in a far more turbulent world, a critical language and affirmative structures to address these changes have been lagging behind. A haunting paradox lurks at the centre of all claims to national autonomy: while the flows of global movement are proliferating, the fortification

of national boundaries is becoming more vigilant. Every nation-state is at once seeking to maximize the opportunities from transnational corporations, and yet closing its doors to the forms of migration that these economic shifts stimulate. New pressures and new voices have emerged in the cultural and political landscape. Even countries like Germany and Japan, which have boasted of their ethnic homogeneity and aggressively restricted the right to citizenship, are increasingly confronted with the inevitability of seeing themselves as multi-ethnic societies. As nation-states are losing more and more of their power to regulate activities within their territory, they are becoming increasingly aggressive about the defence of their borders. Tougher laws against asylum-seekers, the rounding up of gypsies and ruthless eviction of 'economic migrants' are some of the ways in which governments vent their frustration in a world where they have seemingly lost control but dare not admit it. The need for global action to address local issues has never been more necessary, but there are few signs of supranational co-operation, nor any new agencies with the powers and responsibilities to address human needs on a global scale.

### **New concepts for a turbulent world**

The twin processes of globalization and migration have produced changes in the geopolitical landscape that have compelled social scientists to rethink their conceptual frameworks. Since the 1970s, there has been a growing legitimacy of multicultural perspectives in places like Canada and Australia, which have questioned the dominant political categories for defining citizenship according to birthplace and residence within a nation-state. Previously, most of the literature on migration was staked between the automatic assimilation and the gradual integration of the migrant into the host society. As 'ethnic elites' gained authority within the cultural and political circles of the dominant society, they began to argue in favour of new models for representing the process of cultural interaction, and to demonstrate the negative consequences of insisting upon the denial of the emergent forms of cultural identity. Multicultural perspectives on political rights and cultural exchange thus began to have a dynamic role in the reshaping of contemporary society.

Since the 1980s, especially in the American and French academic communities, the concept of class had come under scrutiny. Conservative scholars like Francis Fukuyama saw the collapse of the Soviet Union as the ultimate triumph of liberalism, and the 'end of history' in terms of class struggle. Samuel Huntington took a more pessimistic view of the global picture, noting the ascendancy of Islam, the rising influence of the east, and predicted cataclysmic 'clashes of civilization'. Structural changes were definitely occurring, the imperial orders were being dismantled and reconfigured, multi-ethnic societies were becoming the norm, and in contradistinction to these patrician scholars, I

believe that the more sober reappraisal of the fundamental social divisions was offered by the new intellectual movements of feminism and postcolonialism.

The concept of space, which in the 1990s was given greater theoretical significance by British geographers like Doreen Massey, added a crucial dimension in the rethinking of the relationship between migration and globalization. In the past there was a tendency to discuss migration in the mechanistic terms of causes and consequences. Space was often seen as a vacant category, reduced to a neutral stage upon which other forces were at play in the narratives of migration. Space was rarely seen as an active part in the field of identity formation. However, it is increasingly evident that contemporary migration has no single origin and no simple end. It is an ongoing process and needs to be seen as an open voyage. Departures and returns are rarely, if ever, final, and so it is important that we acknowledge the transformative effect of the journey, and in general recognize that space is a dynamic field in which identities are in a constant state of interaction. This would enable us to shift the discourse on migration from merely an explanation of either the external causes or the attribution of motivation to an examination of the complex relationships and perceptual shifts that are being formed through the experience of movement. Just as in science there is the new consensus that every entity is composed of interacting forces, there is now an emerging debate in the humanities and social sciences that agency is in a state of mutual transformation with its surrounding structures. Hence, the cultural identity of the migrant will need to be seen as being partly formed by and in the journey, or on what Paul Virilio calls the 'trajective', and not as a locked item that preceded the very act of movement.

These political transformations and intellectual debates on nationalism and multiculturalism, class and agency, and space and time provide the broad horizons of this book. More specifically my aim is to explore the parameters of three questions. First, what are the available models for mapping migration and explaining social change? Second, how is migration linked to the broader social changes associated with globalization? Third, how do concepts like deterritorialization, translation, recognition and hybridity expand our understanding of identity and culture in plural societies?

Throughout this book the term 'turbulence' appears. I have adopted it from James Rosenau's work in international relations in order to break out of the mechanistic models for explaining migration. Turbulence is not just a useful noun for describing the unsettling effect of an unexpected force that alters your course of movement; it is also a metaphor for the broader levels of interconnection and interdependency between the various forces that are in play in the modern world. The flows of migration across the globe are not explicable by any general theory. In the absence of structured patterns of global migration, with direct causes and effects, turbulence is the best formulation for the mobile processes of complex self-organization that are now occurring. These movements may appear chaotic, but there is a logic and order within them. An anal-

ogy can be drawn with phenomena that were once thought to lack any structure, like turbulent flows, and which are now understood as possessing intricate patterns of interconnection. As Manuel de Landa noted, 'a turbulent flow is made out of a hierarchy of eddies and vortices inside more eddies and vortices.'<sup>2</sup> The internal structures of migration have often gone unnoticed. Both the drag effect that is produced on migrants as they are caught in the flow of movement, and the complex linkages that are generated to sustain a momentum, are often overshadowed by the attention given to external forces. I am concerned with the interrelationship between the energy for movement and the effects on its surroundings. What I aim to offer in this book is an account of how the experience of movement has produced novel forms of belonging and stimulated shifts in our understanding of contemporary culture.

To address the contemporary problematic of migration requires a new cross-disciplinary approach. Migration studies are no longer confined to the domain of sociology, demography, politics and economics. Key contributions have also been made by anthropology, history, psychology, geography, philosophy, cultural studies and art criticism. Disciplines like literary theory and political economy, which a decade ago were considered to be poles apart, have now discovered new borders of interest. These new studies have increasingly drawn attention to the complex links between diffuse levels of experience and deep structural changes. For instance, concepts like deterritorialization and hybridity do not reside exclusively in any particular discipline, they have served as 'bridging concepts', extending the parameters of analysis and highlighting a mode of explanation which is alert to the role of difference and contingency in contemporary society.

The critical debates on globalization have also significant implications for both migration studies and the classical sociological and anthropological definitions of the boundaries of society and culture. From the moral questions of how judgements are posed across the boundaries of cultural difference,<sup>3</sup> to the political debates on the future of the nation-state and the institutions of governance in a globalized world,<sup>4</sup> there is now an extensive programme of rethinking conceptual frameworks. Migration, in its contemporary form, also needs to be understood as an interminable and multifarious process. It could be seen as both the all too visible problem and the invisible catalyst in what Habermas called 'the incomplete project of modernity'.<sup>5</sup> Thus the aim of chapters 2 and 3 is to establish a conceptual framework which challenges some of the conventional definitions of migrants and seeks to present broader categories of belonging in modernity.

The twin processes of globalization and migration have shifted the question of cultural identity from the margins to the centre of contemporary debates. Cultural identity, in one form or another, preoccupies the construction of the public sphere. The definition of a criminal code, the provisions for public housing, the rules for immigration, the services established within health and

welfare programmes, conception of madness and disability, the understanding and evaluation of artistic production, the formulation of academic curricula, are all issues which can no longer be addressed without some reference to the discourse of anti-racist discrimination, equal opportunity and affirmative action. Increased recognition and negotiation of cultural difference has challenged the very foundations of almost every institution or practice that shapes the contours of social life.

Both the excesses of political correctness, and the ethnocentric backlash against multiculturalism, are symptoms of a deeper uncertainty about how to measure and manage the viability of cultural differences within a given social space affected by globalizing forces. The structures of the local are increasingly formed by elements and ideas from distant sources. As ideas are rapidly imported from elsewhere and membership of local institutions is altered, the identity of society is subjected to new pressures.

Globalization, as I argue in chapter 4, has raised new questions about the institutions of governance and exposed the limits of the nation-state. The influence of transnational corporations, the integration of financial services within the networks of the global stock markets, the ceding of political power to supranational bodies like the European Union, the deregulatory pressures of global competitiveness in the labour market, the emergence of new social movements to tackle global ecological issues, have all, for good or ill, undermined the legitimacy and putative autonomy of the nation-state. While the modern nation-state demanded the undivided loyalty of its subjects, insisted on sovereignty over its territory, and sought to define the identity of its community in singular terms, it remained intrinsically resistant to the rights of ethnic minorities and diasporic subjectivities. Migration may have spawned new diasporic communities and facilitated the critique of the nation-state, but this in itself has not necessarily produced greater levels of freedom and cross-cultural understanding. For, if it was difficult to secure the terms by which minorities could find democratic forms of representation within the political system of the nation-state, it now seems infinitely more precarious under the conditions of globalization.

### **The ‘chaos’ of global migration**

The current flows of migrant labour are now fundamentally different from earlier forms of mass migration. There have been dramatic shifts in the destinations of migration, restrictions on residency and strict limitations on settlement. The great metropolitan centres of the north and west, New York, Paris, London – in terms of migrant influx – have been eclipsed by the capitals of the east and south. Is this because the prospects of work are better elsewhere, or are there other reasons? There are currently more construction cranes in operation in the



new economic zones of China than anywhere else in the world. The world's tallest building is neither a cathedral in Europe, nor an office block in New York, but the twin towers of Kuala Lumpur. Mexico City is swelling at a rate that is stretching its urban infrastructure to breaking-point. After the Chernobyl nuclear disaster over 400,000 people were displaced; the ecology of their homelands ruined for centuries to come. Today people are on the move for a variety of reasons. NAFTA (North American Free Trade Area) agreements force peasants to be on the move across the Americas; political and ethnic clashes have displaced millions from their homes in Africa; some of the most educated women in the Philippines accept exploitative contracts to work as housemaids in the Gulf States. Do all these people fit under the term migrant?

The early mappings of international migrations were predominantly Eurocentric. They were defined either in relation to the colonial ventures from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, or to the processes of industrialization and rapid urbanization in the late nineteenth and twentieth century. Between 1500 and 1850 approximately 10 million slaves were transported from Africa to the Americas. Between 1815 and 1925 over 25 million Britons were settled in predominantly urban areas of the colonies. The 'classical period' of migration referred to the trajectory of peasants from the peripheral rural-based societies to the core industrial countries of western Europe, the United States, Canada and Australia.

For many migrants the first sight of their new country was caught from the deck of their ship. After the First World War, most migrants heading for the United States would have probably disembarked and gone through immigration procedures on Ellis Island, just off New York. The dock and hall of Ellis Island are now part of a museum. At the end of the twentieth century, the aeroplane has become the dominant means of mass transport. Today, migrants mostly arrive by descending into what Marc Auge calls the 'non places' of modern airports.<sup>6</sup> The journey from a Third World village to a First World city can now be calculated in terms of hours. The greater levels of mobility in modernity, however, have not been reciprocated by more hospitable forms of reception.

The current trends of global migration reveal a far more multidirectional phase. In this context, migration is neither directed to, nor exclusively generated by, the needs of the north and the west. The vast majority of migrants are no longer moving exclusively to the north and the west, but also between the new industrial epicentres within the south and the east. While for the earlier periods of migration, movement was generally mapped in linear terms, with clear co-ordinates between centre and periphery, and definable axial routes, the current phase can best be described as turbulent, a fluid but structured movement, with multidirectional and reversible trajectories. The turbulence of migration is evident not only in the multiplicity of paths but also in the unpredictability of the changes associated with these movements. However, this has not meant that the pattern of movement is random and the direction

totally open-ended. There are also strict barriers and firm counter-forces which either resist or exploit the flows of human movement, just as there are ‘passengers’ who carefully control their journeys rather than being swept towards unknown destinations.

The relationship between work and migration has always been unstable and ambivalent. During the colonial period migrants from the ‘mother country’ were selectively encouraged to ‘settle’ in the ‘new’ societies. The rapid urban expansion and industrialization in the nineteenth century also demanded that some migrants were recruited when certain needs arose, and expelled when their services were no longer deemed necessary. However, in the current geopolitical climate these relationships have become even more jagged. Where migration is now regulated through contractual or negotiated terms, the civil and work rights of migrants are severely limited. Where migration is permitted for temporary periods, policing is extremely draconian and the abuse of human rights is rife. An increasing number of migrants are taking employment and entry into countries on an illegal basis. The migrant in all these circumstances effectively lives in a police state – susceptible to exploitation and constantly in fear of punishment and deportation.

Along with the shifts in global geopolitics there have been profound changes in the patterns of economic and cultural exchanges. The revolution in information technology, which has coincided with the restructuring of capitalist markets and the dismantling of the socialist command economies, has had a drastic impact on the forms of migrant labour. The new dogma of ‘flexibility’ in the workplace has meant that working-class communities can no longer assume that employment can be guaranteed in their particular locale. Declining public transport and congested roads have also meant that the journey from home to work is often increasing. Commuting times of two to three hours a day are not uncommon in Los Angeles and Moscow. Meanwhile politicians across the world are instructing their labour forces that, in order to be competitive in a global market and in a technologically advancing world, they must accept the inevitability of both the mobility of the workplace and the redundancy of traditional skills.

The emergence of global media industries has also meant a greater degree of cultural interpenetration. Ideas developed in one place are increasingly promoted and circulated on a global scale. While this has not necessarily meant that the patterns of reception and identification with the global media forms have been homogeneous, it has implied that each locale has both to mediate signs at a greater rate and also to confront a wider variety of codes. Contemporary cultural systems are criss-crossed by signals from diverse sources, with the result that a culture can no longer be understood as merely reflecting the particular practices which emerge within a specific territorial zone. Certain cultural practices may be concentrated or intensified within a given territory, but the politics of cultural ownership and the practices of dissemination are often

extended beyond their territorial boundaries. It is from this perspective that globalization and migration have led to what I describe in chapter 5 as the deterritorialization of culture.

Migration, it must be stressed, is not a unique feature of our modern times. From the perspective of the frantic mobility of the present it is tempting to imagine the past as a stable and relatively isolationist period. Yet, people have travelled vast distances throughout history. Examples of cross-cultural exchanges, complex networks of trade and translocal identities are ever-present throughout history. Anthropologists have painstakingly examined how different communities borrow religious symbols from each other and develop rituals for integrating different types of strangers. These strategies for internalizing difference have been remarkably elastic, varying from the incorporation of the 'prized' bride of a neighbouring community, to the introduction of a liminal position for the anthropologist. All cultures seem to have mechanisms for making a limited space for others, or for selectively absorbing strangers as 'one of their kind'. Archaeologists have also mapped extraordinary trading routes in ancient history. For instance, the discovery of traces of silk and cocaine in Egyptian tombs has suggested possible links between the Mediterranean, China and South America. Our knowledge of the extent of ancient sea travel is still very crude. Even with Thor Heyerdahl's brave reconstructions of the ancient techniques for transatlantic and cross-Pacific routes, we have only begun to gain a glimpse of the persistence and breadth of pre-modern forms of long-distance navigation:

We do not know when the Egyptian influence on the islands began but the Phoenicians gradually took over. We know little of the origins of the Phoenicians or of the kind of ships they first constructed. Reed boats were originally used among their nearest neighbours east and south, and even west; for an engraved ring from ancient Crete shows a crescent-shaped reed boat with transverse lashings, mast and cabin . . . No one will ever be able to retrace the routes of all these vessels or reconstruct the relationships between all these diversified civilizations, intimately interlocked and yet clearly different as they were, partly imposed on earlier local cultures, and nourished by different rulers, in different geographical environments. Who will ever identify the mariners of the fourth century BC who carried a jar of gold and copper Mediterranean coins to Corvo Island in the outer Azores, a point nearer to North America than to Gibraltar? Seeking fortune or refuge, thousands of ships left their home ports during antiquity, leaving no written records . . . True, the people of America had not seen ribbed ships of wooden planks before the arrival of Columbus, but the people of Morocco and of the entire Mediterranean and of Mesopotamia had seen reed boats, like those that survive in America.<sup>7</sup>

However, until the invention of the 'tall ships', the railway, steamships, automobiles and ultimately the aeroplane, the frequency of movement, the vol-

ume of migrants, and the distance that could be crossed, were restricted. Today there are over 100 million international migrants and 27 million stateless refugees. This means that there are more people living in places that are outside their homeland than at any previous point in history. The turbulence of migration is not only evident in the sheer volume of migrants, but also by the emergence of new subjects, communication networks and forms of economic dependency. The modern migrant no longer conforms to the stereotypical image of the male urban peasant. Women in manufacturing, electronic assembly lines and domestic workers are now at the front line of global migration. Over 65 per cent of the migrants from Sri Lanka and 78 per cent from Indonesia are women.<sup>8</sup> The value of remittances sent to the homelands of foreign workers has been estimated as being over \$10 billion. These transfers of payments are second in value to the trade in crude oil. In places like the Philippines and Albania the major contribution to the national economy is accredited to the earnings of foreign workers.<sup>9</sup> The paradigm of the nation-state as the principal anchor in the conferment of identity has also blinkered our understanding of migrant flows.

### **Modernity and migration**

This book does not seek to track the migration patterns of a specific group, nor does it measure the impact of migration on a particular society. The main concern is to examine the interrelationships between modernity and migration. Thus the flows of movement are not identified in terms of their effects on a given time and place. Most studies on migration are also examinations of the boundaries and structures of belonging to a nation-state. While there are many studies which have demonstrated the significant role of migrants in establishing 'new societies', few have made the larger claims that migration is a central force in the constitution of modernity. The significance of migration is neither confined to the modest contribution of individual migrants, nor captured by the monumental structures of upheaval, but needs to be understood in a broader framework. The tension between movement and settlement is constitutive of modern life. As Derrida noted, the condition of exile is at the centre of the nation's culture.<sup>10</sup> By not confining the significance of migration in terms of the paths into and alterations within the nation-state, I am not denying the value or relevance of this body of scholarship. The nation-state is still an active force in the regulation of migration. We do not live in a borderless world. The significance of migration in the formation of nation-states has only begun to gain its proper recognition. My concern with the broader patterns of global migration is not driven by indifference to or ignorance of such tasks, but is motivated by a parallel need to outline the general context in which migration is occurring and to evaluate the available concepts for representing this phenomenon.

The precise nexus between migration and modernity is still unclear. The

metaphor of the journey, the figure of the stranger and the experience of displacement have been at the centre of many of the cultural representations of modernity. Migrant artists and writers like Picasso and Joyce are among the most celebrated and perplexing figures of modernism. In chapter 6, I have attempted to expand the investigation into the relationship between an exilic consciousness and the modern sensibility, by looking at the contemporary aesthetic practices of borrowing and translation. Artists are not only among the most mobile members of a community, but they are often outriders of the transformations between the local and the global.

Within social theory, however, the links between the experience of migration and the vision of modernity have remained obscured owing to a tendency to conceptualize change as an external force. Throughout the twentieth century the 'sociological imagination' has manifested a tendency to become trapped within a mechanistic paradigm that, while preoccupied with the institutional and structural forces, lost sight of the subtle intersubjective processes of everyday life. It is important to stress a number of broad characteristics and changes that were initiated by modernity: the uneven transformation in the relationship between the urban and the rural, the valorization of technology over tradition, the oscillation between the social values of secularism and religion, the conflict between individuality and collectivity. Studies on modernity, whether empirical or interpretative, have been primarily investigations of the transition between these positions. Social scientists sought to measure change, to identify the co-ordinates or the symbols that mark the passage out of one stage and the emergence of another. But this attention to the beginnings and ends of the journey has often obscured the interminable process, the unending journey of modernity.

Movement is not just the experience of shifting from place to place, it is also linked to our ability to imagine an alternative. The dream of a better life and the nightmares of loss are both expressed by the metaphor of the journey. It is not only our 'life narrative' but the very 'spirit of our time' which seems to be haunted by this metaphor. The journey of modernity – which sought to base action on the solid foundations of reason, which sought to build a rational order that would supersede all previous forms of waste, folly and mystification, which believed that truth and proof could substitute for dogma and religion – has turned out to be an endless march into the unknown. The future, which was filled with such promises of progress, liberation and emancipation, is now darkened by fear and insecurity. Zygmunt Bauman, one of the most astute and sober critics of the transformations of modernity, argues that the pre-set destination of modernity is now unattainable and that there has been a break in the vision of progress and control. His account of postmodernity is not an apocalyptic declaration of ending, nor a naïve proclamation of succession, but a bitter-sweet appraisal of the way modernity has lost its direction and driving force. The measurement of modernity against its own goals has revealed that its aspira-

tions and promises can no longer be plotted on to a linear graph, or situated in a privileged location. At this juncture, modernity does not seem to follow a clear path; progress drifts and tumbles. As Bauman noted, the distinctive feature of postmodernity is that while it can no longer predict what lies ahead, there is still the insistence that it is better to keep moving.

Modernity is what it is – an obsessive march forward – not because it always wants more, but because it never gets enough; not because it grows more ambitious and adventurous, but because its adventures are bitter and its ambitions frustrated. The march must go on because any place of arrival is but a temporary station. No place is privileged, no place is better than another, as from no place the horizon is nearer than from any other. This is why the agitation and flurry are lived out as a forward march; this is, indeed, why the Brownian movement seems to acquire a front and a rear, and restlessness a direction; it is the detritus of burnt-out fuels and the soot of extinct flames that mark the trajectories of progress.<sup>11</sup>

The restless trajectories of modernity can also be witnessed through the transformations in the representations of identity. Bauman notes that the modern construction of the human subject as a peripatetic being has shifted from a pilgrim to a tourist.<sup>12</sup> This shift in subjectivity is not only linked to a destabilization of the cultural codes that distinguish between places of origin and reverence, but to a broader rupture in the sense of belonging and the perception of destiny within an individual's life-narrative. Home and shrine are no longer defined in terms of fixed location or within ritually bounded zones. All the co-ordinates of transition and destination in a life's passage are now defined as if everything is suspended along an infinite stage. From a moral perspective, we seem to be in a situation that says a great deal about where we have come from, a little about where it is we would like to go, but demonstrates almost no knowledge of why we are moving in the first place, or what it is that drives us on and away.

The dynamic of displacement is intrinsic to migration and modernity; however, the links between them have been largely overlooked. Migration was often interpreted as a transitional phase within modernity. As a consequence, the earlier sociological models, which shared the founding assumptions of modernity, have tended to represent migration in terms of trauma and disruption. The emphasis given to tracking the harsh economic, desperate political or brutal military forces that push people away from their homes has often obscured the less tangible desires and dreams for transformation which give migration its inner heading. Since the pioneering work of sociologists like Stephen Castles and Jean Martin in the 1970s, there has been an unequivocal demonstration of both the central role played by economic and political structures in the regulation of migration, and the distorted levels of cultural exchange caused by the migrant's socio-economic inferiority within the host society. While the sociological mainstream emphasized the levels of stratification and integration, the

critical schools stressed the contradictions and conflicts, but both positions understood the social as a total system. Migration was thus seen as either a necessary addition or an unwelcome burden to this system. The impact of migration was reduced to a temporary feature, rather than an ongoing constitutive process within modernity. However, as the postmodern critiques of the social have attempted to redefine the boundaries and processes which shape society, there has been a further opportunity to reconceptualize the relationship between migration and modernity.

By turning my attention to the forms of cultural survival, I have not sought to ignore the crucial role of bureaucratic and institutional networks which have influenced the possibility of minority groups gaining an economic and political grounding. I am keenly aware of the inequalities that cut into the position of migrants. Nevertheless my overriding aim is a critique of the kinds of identities and affiliations that emerge in and despite the polarization and conflict of globalization. There is no desire to join in with those facile and sponsored choruses which celebrate the vitality of cultural diversity while detaching it from all socio-economic references; rather there is an attempt both to theorize the small acts of cultural defiance and to articulate the degrees of residual incommensurability which the dominant frameworks render inchoate and invisible. As I argue in chapter 7, the points of difference between competing cultural codes and the concepts which remain untranslatable matter a great deal, for they reveal not just a differing set of priorities, but also the seeds of rival world-views.

### **The stranger in modernity**

Of all the classical social theorists who identified the significance of migration, Georg Simmel was exceptional because he appreciated both the predicament and the sensibility of the stranger. However, even his account of the stranger does not provide us with a universal model for representing all the forms of estrangement generated by global migration. Simmel's representation of the stranger is limited in two fundamental ways. First, there is an almost imperceptible elision between the figure of the stranger and the process of estrangement as a trope for creative and critical thinking. This ambiguous relationship between the figure of the stranger and the trope of estrangement has caused much confusion, especially in the recent debates on sexual and cultural difference. Second, Simmel's construction of the stranger is embedded within a series of dichotomies, us–them, modern–traditional, insider–outsider; and while the stranger oscillates between these positions, it presupposes that these prior positions are fixed and counterposed according to a binary logic. In the current phases of global migration there is a need for a more complex framework of differentiation, one that is capable of addressing the shifting patterns of inclusion and exclusion.

It is now commonplace for our neighbours to be strangers from distant countries, our security in the workplace to be dependent on the priorities of transnational corporations, and our cultural knowledge to be formed through the interaction of signs taken from a variety of places. Our sense of identity is neither immune to nor above these transformations, but it is inextricably linked to them. However, the representation of identity has often been cast in far more narrow and restrictive terms. In particular, the identities of peasants, migrants and minorities were confined to traditional categories, reflecting primordial values and embodying exclusionist practices. Identity was defined in terms of a unique essence. Difference was presented in oppositional terms maintaining a convenient boundary between migrants and settlers. That model of representation and those boundaries are untenable in contemporary society.

As I argue in chapter 8, there are now a number of contributors to the debates on identity who demonstrate the need to shift the conceptual framework in terms of an ongoing process of negotiating differences that cross and ground our life's narrative, rather than the rigid performance of a predetermined script. Identity is not about determining a singular path that constantly closes down the horizons of becoming by pulling back everything to a single point of origin. While the role of the past is a significant force in the shaping of any identity, it does not have the exclusive power to determine all the possibilities for shaping identity in the present. Today the stereotypical images of the stranger as asylum-seeker, gypsy or refugee often precede the arrival of migrants, proliferating on the screens of media networks, which in turn unsettle colonial poles of centre and periphery. The identity of the stranger is thus crucially affected by the media and its use of stereotypes. In this context the ambivalence that is projected against the stranger can take more extreme forms.

What is also overlooked in many of the recent debates on identity politics is the relational aspects of identities. While it is necessary to recognize the specific contexts within which identities are constituted there must always be a concurrent process of connecting identity to a broader social consciousness. Edward Said has been particularly critical of the tendency towards exclusivism in identity politics. He argues that the politics of ethnic affirmation have been driven by the logic of displacement where one form of ethnic particularity competes with another for the position of authority. To counter this ingrown and defensive vision, Said offers a mode of being that he calls 'worldliness', which is a form of identity that emerges through the practice of connecting individual meanings of cultural differences within the 'large, many-windowed house of human culture as a whole'.<sup>13</sup>

Hybridity has become one of the most useful concepts for representing the meaning of cultural difference in identity. In the work of Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall identity is defined as hybrid, not only to suggest that origins, influences and interests are multiple, complex and contradictory, but also to stress that our sense of self in this world is always incomplete. Self-image is formed *in*, not prior to,



the process of interaction with others. This interpretation of identity as hybrid is a direct challenge to earlier quasi-scientific claims that hybrids were sterile, physically weak, mentally inferior and morally confused. The colonizing fantasies of the 'master race' as culturally and eugenically superior were underscored by a stigma that was projected on hybrids. This stigma has now been converted into a positive gain. In many of the recent applications of this concept, the figure of the hybrid is extended to serve as a 'bridging person', one that is both the benefactor of a cultural surplus, and the embodiment of a new synthesis. However, this benign view of hybridity has a number of limitations. By stressing the hybrid's positive achievement of reconciliation between cultural differences it blurs the very relational process that hybridity ought to highlight. In the rush to find an alternative to aggressive and chauvinistic forms of identity, the concept of hybridity has frequently been promoted to the position of a new form of global identity. This celebration of identity as hybridity has failed to pay sufficient attention to the deeper logic of accumulation and consumption that frames modern identity. In a society where the principle that dominates social relations is not reciprocity but consumption, hybridity is often reduced to the occasional experience of exotic commodities which can be repackaged to sustain the insatiable trade in new forms of cultural identity. Hybridity, as a metaphor for identity formation, can only function critically when the dual forces of movement and bridging, displacement and connection, are seen as operating together. It is only when there is a consciousness of this oscillation between different positions and perspectives, that hybridity can offer a new understanding of identity.

### **Communities of difference**

In the final chapter of this book I conclude that the significance of migration for modern society will not be grasped if its meaning is confined to conventional definitions of physical movement and social settlement. As a consequence of the restless dynamism in modern society, the boundaries of community, as well as the more general sense of belonging, have changed radically. We need to understand the flows of cultural change from at least two perspectives: the movement of people, and the circulation of symbols. However, as noted earlier the introduction of foreign symbols and different cultural practices is no longer dependent on the physical presence of strangers. As new channels of communication travel are established across borders, new forms of cultural displacement can occur without the movement of people.

This transformation in the cultural politics of belonging is clearly linked to the expansion of media technologies. Benedict Anderson astutely tracked the influence of the invention of the printing press and the mass literary projects that led to what he called the 'imagined community'.<sup>14</sup> Once texts could be reproduced in greater volume and circulate across vast distances, new

affiliations between people could be formed. Communities were established with less regard for geographic proximity and more attention to a common language and shared ideals. People felt a belonging through a communion of certain structures of belief, rather than by the obligations and responsibilities that are drawn from day-to-day and face-to-face contact.

The revolution initiated by 'print capitalism', which altered the sense of 'togetherness' as it magnified the possibilities for disseminating narratives of 'us' and 'them', has taken a further turn with the ascendancy of camera and computer-based telecommunications. The increased domestic access to telephones, faxes and electronic mail, the diversity of uses for television screens from pleasure and information to security and surveillance has led collectively to a proliferation of images and messages. These technological advances enabled optimists, like Marshall McLuhan, to prophesy over the birth of a new communitarianism. However, as McLuhan also noted, the essential drive of telecommunication is interruptive: 'Nothing can be further from the spirit of the new technology than "a place for everything and everything in its place". You can't go home again.'<sup>15</sup> For him, this radical transformation of our relationship to space was meant to mark a liberation from the 'tyranny of distance', and provide the network for a single and integrated society that would occupy the whole planet.

Such enthusiasm has not been shared by all the commentators on the new technologies of telecommunication. For Guy Debord, the promise of a global village was warily perceived as either a mirage or a new form of totalitarian surveillance. The illusion that home was everywhere in the spectacle was, for Debord, underscored by the haunting feeling of being at home nowhere. He predicted that the access to the new media technologies would be highly selective, and their uses reflect the vested interests of existing holders of power.<sup>16</sup> Whether or not we agree that the increasing role of the media has led to political emancipation or cultural enrichment, it is now beyond doubt that, for those who are 'hooked' into these circuits, there has been a series of transformations in the modalities of individual perception and collective memory. Paul Virilio also claimed that, as the screen dominates the post-industrial interior, the moral density of civic society is eviscerated:

At the end of the 20th century, urban space loses its geopolitical reality to the exclusive benefit of systems of instantaneous deportation whose technological intensity ceaselessly upsets all of our social structures. These systems include the deportation of attention, of the human face-to-face and the urban vis-à-vis encounters at the level of human/machine interaction. In effect, all of this participation in a new 'post urban' and transnational kind of concentration.<sup>17</sup>

The links between modernity, migration and the media have remained relatively undertheorized. However, Scott McQuire's recent work has excavated many of the deep philosophical and cultural paths that intersect at the junction