Chapter IV

Identity and the Culture of Globalization

Bhabha’s theory of hybridity, as elaborated in The Location of Culture, entails a mixed identity and a world culture that derives from various sources to create a multicultural society where there is a simultaneous feeling of belonging as well as alienation. Bhabha’s ‘interstitial’ space is defined with a sense of simultaneous attraction and repulsion, and its characteristic ambivalence leads to the anxiety of inhabiting the space in between; of being neither here nor there (182). It is the space of continuous deferral of identity where no final signification is possible (The Location of Culture 267; Derrida, ‘Differance’ 9).

The issue of identity has been of central importance through the analyses of colonial and postcolonial episodes of polar representations, resistance movements, and the ostensibly liberating theory of hybridization. But in the passage from academic hybridity to applied multiculturalism and forces of globalization, identity develops a new politics and representational dynamic that is evermore complex and critical.

Multiculturalism and globalization are concepts founded upon the premise of hybridization through cultural contact. The previous chapter was devoted to the analysis of hybridity and interstices as explained by Bhabha, and their impact and relevance to third-world identity. While this has been broadly marked as the first phase of Bhabha’s work, the second phase is centered upon the collective existence of the various communities of the world in a multicultural society (Moore-Gilbert 115). In a multicultural society, where there is a constant effort towards globalizing the various and differing communities into a standard hybridized culture, identity occupies a space of rigorous contestation.

Within the complex grid of forces of international politics, capitalist economic system, brand wars, cyberspace dynamics, environmental concerns, and historical and
cultural underpinnings, identity derives exceptional overtones and becomes the space of immense manipulation. Like the politics of colonization, the politics of multiculturalism is also not linear but quite complex. Identity, as placed within the paradigm of hybridization, is targeted by various forces which shall be studied in comprehensive detail at this juncture. This chapter is devoted to a critical analysis of the representational politics of third-world identity and its location in the extremely volatile and fast moving era of multinational relations and global structuring.

In order to define identity in terms of the culture of globalization, it is imperative to explore the concept of hybridization and globalization in applied terms. Globalization can be euphorically imagined as an attempt to universalize the interstitial experience. As an economic and political venture, it is based on the extension of the interstitial space to either side of the borders binding the interstices. With reference to the process of hybridization, Bhabha defines identity as ‘less than one and double’ (The Location of Culture 139). In simplified terms, identity acquires a state where it is affiliated to no one category in totality, but is oscillating between two ends. In terms of globalization, identity in this state of interstices is applied to cultural systems in universal terms. The attempt towards globalization is not universally homogeneous in its application or reception. It is only a development of ‘relations between cultures’ as T. S. Eliot puts it (qtd. in Bhabha, ‘Culture’s In-Between’ 54). Globalization refers not to homogenization but to the customization of global economic cultural systems to local preferences and taste. In this context, the global refers to what is manipulated by international, transnational and multinational economic forces to form the popular culture worldwide. With the advanced international communication systems and the hegemony of the corporate world to create identities for potential consumers, the global culture is a construct created to increase profitability. The local refers to the ethnic and/or traditional culture and its attributes. In order to increase salability, systems of global trade are appropriated to suit a consumer’s taste. The appropriation affects professional ethics followed by the corporate, modes of trade employed, and the final product offered to the consumer. This customization is of course only symbolic at most times and aimed to assist global acceptance and augment profitability.
The culture of globalization rests upon making the boundaries and borders porous and inducing a spirit of inclusivity as opposed to the ethics of purity and segregation. Identifying the systems of interaction and inclusion propagated by globalization as an attempt to homogenize by subduing differences is too simplistic.

[W]e should be careful not to equate the communicative and interactive connecting of such [local] cultures – including very asymmetrical forms of such communication and interaction, as well as “third cultures” of mediation – with the notion of homogenization of all cultures. (Robertson 31)

A homogenous world culture of globalization is not possible in the absence of an ‘other’ which can be ‘discarded, rejected or demonified in order to generate the sense of cultural identity’ (Featherstone, ‘Global Culture’ 11). Following the binary logic of defining the ‘self’ by the ‘other’, the ‘other’ in global terms must inhabit the extra-terrestrial space. This ‘other’ forms the foundation of the imaginary world of science fictions and it is against this common ‘other’ that the sense of a global homogenous culture can be developed. In the absence of a common ‘other’ then, the homogenization and compression of the various local cultures to one category is not only euphoric but also unrealistic.

The culture of globalization in applied terms is rather a system of ‘glocalization’ (Robertson 34); it is a system of appropriating the extra-local or global culture to local tastes. It must be mentioned here that the term ‘global’ by definition refers to what belongs to the whole world including the local that is being globalized. But in the present context it refers only to what is perceived as popular in worldly terms by the local. Globalization then becomes a culture of incorporating in the local what is compatible with the global thus far. In very crude terms too, the “global” refers to what belongs to the whole world, which in turn is an amalgamation of various localities. The global then cannot lie beyond the local (Robertson 34) but includes it.

It must be noted here however that the culture of localism is visualized as a response to the culture of globalization in the same way as the development of nationalism is seen as a natural corollary to imperialism. Said observes a Hegelian dialectic between nationalism and hybridization (in terms of migration) and suggests that
‘all nationalisms in their early stages develop from a condition of estrangement’ (Reflections 176). Globalization indeed refers to the ‘linking of localities’, but it also involves the ‘invention’ of localities (Robertson 35). In this context it becomes the process of ‘interlacing of social events and social relations “at distance” with local contextualities’ (Giddens 21), or the ‘tailoring of many products to the needs of various local specifications’ (Ritzer 76), real or imaginary. This makes ‘glocalization’ an effort towards ‘selective incorporation’ with ‘each nation-state incorporating a different mixture of “alien” ideas’ (Robertson 41). The culture of globalization then cannot be termed as one of homogenization; it is rather that of branding heterogeneity in a common system.

Further, despite the visible commonness in the sweep of capitalism on a global scale, the political and social aspects of various localities remain distinct. Globalization appears to depict the evolution of human affairs towards a uniform pattern, as Hobsbawm suggests, but the political and social systems remain far from uniform even though ‘gas stations, IPods and computer geeks are the same worldwide’ (Globalization 116). To add to this:

(Inclusion does not necessarily redress inequality nor does it produce equality. Adding to a never-ending list of members in “the global village” merely draws peoples into the capitalist system, complete with racial, patriarchal and global unevenness. (Chen 13-14)

This ‘unevenness’ on a global scale is clearly depictive of an essential heterogeneity in globalization. The simultaneous presence of sameness and difference is reminiscent of the power function of the imperial order in transforming the ‘other’ to a state of ‘almost the same but not quite/White’ as Bhabha suggests (Location 122, 128).

The location of identity in any circumstance is a complicated task, but within the framework of globalization it becomes all the more complex. The era of globalization has come about as a period when all lessons of history fail to predict what can happen. The advent of global capitalism has not only transformed the world of nations and identities in a novel way, it has also proved that the old method of analyzing culture is now fast becoming obsolete. As Aijaz Ahmad suggests:
A knowledge of the world as it now is presumes corrections in the knowledge of the world as it – the world, and the knowledge of it – previously was. (In Theory 287)

Before venturing on to a critical analysis of third-world identity in the sphere of multiculturalism, a few qualifications need to be made with regard to the foundational aspects of defining identity as a concept in the current scenario.

Throughout history, debates regarding identity politics have been centered round the concepts of space and time and their relative significance in the process of identity construction and articulation. But these fundamental concepts have altered immensely in the age of globalization. The attempt to locate identity has always been closely tied to the space inhabited by it. The spatial referent of identity has always been a vital source of understanding it. Any analysis of identity is constantly evocative of the rhetoric of origin and habitation. It is based on these suggestions of place that identity is supplied with various characteristics often received through discursive perceptions. Similarly, time offers another reference to identity and with it the construct of identity completes its vector quality. Time refers to the period in which identity is experienced and framed. Identity is located at the conjunction of space and time and defined at the point of convergence between the two.

Our sense of who we are, where we belong and what our obligations encompass – in short, our identity – is profoundly affected by our sense of location in space and time. (Harvey 294)

However, in the era of globalization an unprecedented change comes about which not only alters the tangential location of these referents but also causes a transformation in the way they are perceived and articulated. The attempt to articulate identity is made by locating it in specific places ‘having an integral relation to bounded spaces internally coherent and differentiated from each other by separation’ (Massey 64). The border lines between nations or communities, imagined or real, are then constitutive of the spatial factor of identification and locate them in a specific place that is separated from the others in a strict fashion and also related to them in the ‘self’ and ‘other’ symbiosis.
Spatiality is a means to define the ‘self’ in relation to the others, as entangled and separated’ (Grossberg 101).

In the initial stages of identity analysis, the third-world represented the colonized space inhabited by the ‘other’, as opposed to the colonizing space, that houses the ‘self’. Discourses about identity were created by a process of linear humanization of space. The politics of colonialism has been deeply attached to geography and spatial situation. But in the present context, territorial situation has derived a new significance. This change has come about because of four main factors. First, with enhanced travel systems and the development of the tourism industry, migration or even crossing over the borders does not carry the defining metaphor of displacement as it did in the past. Unlike their ancestors who migrated as slaves or through self willed but difficult passages, the present population migrates across borders independently and without much difficulty. What is more, like most other things in the world, migration is not an irreversible action in material terms and one can retrieve from it. With the migration of labour from third world to first world and that of infrastructure from first world to third world, economic and political geography is indelibly destabilized (Hardt and Negri 254). Secondly, with the development of a parallel universe of the Internet, physical location has become a virtual aspect in the process of locating identity within social boundaries, allowing all to become equal “netizens” (citizens of the Internet), sharing a common space which is devoid of boundaries and barriers. Thirdly, due to the immense cultural contact and appropriation that comes with various historical, social and economic factors, people everywhere experience a similar social surrounding, but also a sort of alienation from their original cultures. Finally, with the rise of multinational capitalism and its foundational globalization process, there is a growing desire not to belong to one place but rather be at home everywhere. The ostensible desire of cosmopolitanism comes in the form of the popular effort and ambition to be global citizens as opposed to belonging to a specific nationality. This reflects a transformation in the importance of restricted geographical location and identification with it.

Considering the unchallenged flow of capital, consumer products and with them, global culture, there seems hardly any significance attached to belongingness in terms of identity or place. The idea of being an Indian, American or European national begins to
crumble in the market place and collapses entirely in the cyberspace where there is total anonymity of space. Geographical or spatial identity then gives way to temporal-contextual mobile metaphors for identity which carry with them the ability of transmutation as well. Spatiality is no more a linear and straightforward concept but a complex experience of various cultures, communities and nations: ‘[t]he isle is full of noises’, to borrow Chantal Zabus’ metaphor (38). Further in the multicultural society, colonization changes from being territorial in the main, to economic and commercial. The process of defining identity has closer relation with economic location than territorial origin. Spatiality in terms of belonging to a nation or community holds a strong ground mainly in the form of spatial subjectivities, ceremonial national identities and narcissisms attached with them. This is not to say that identity has lost all relation with space of origin or habitation, but that space as a factor of determining identity has lost its rigidity and has acquired a transmutable form. Space can be both contextual and/or geographical in the global framework.

With the hybridization of space, the imaginations of space in the form of nations and communities change into those of a ‘meeting place’ (Massey 68) where various spaces merge to create a place that is simultaneously homely and alienating. It is a ‘flattened’ world (Freidman The World is Flat) and since identity and space are understood to be ‘co-constitutive’ (Massey 10), identity fabricated on a virtual, non static open space acquires a fluidity and openness of its own.

Further, differences of space are reflected as differences of time. Temporality is observed as a spatial concept in the era of globalization. The globalizing world or the first world is seen as the advanced and progressive world aped by the rest. The progressive world is observed as ahead of the rest and is generally defined as fast moving. This difference in the treatment of temporality by space is suggestive of a lack of ‘coevalness [which] aims at recognizing contemporality as the condition for truly dialectical confrontation’ (Fabian 154). In the absence of this ‘contemporality’, space is marked in terms of time relatively with regard to the rate of progress on the parameters set by the so called advanced spaces. In this condition, mimicry of the globalizing forces or the neo-colonizers is not a state of being, but a state of time. It is no more ‘almost the same but not quite’ as Bhabha terms it (Location 122), but rather almost the same but not yet. The
evolution in the perception of space and time causes a radical change in the systems of location and identification. With this ‘time-space compression’, identity lands into a crisis of location and signification (Harvey 294).

With respect to neocolonialism which is the other face of globalization, the term ‘third world’ also requires to be relocated in the study of identity. Without going into the chronological and historical development of the term, it can be said that the ‘third world’ broadly refers to the colonies of western imperialism. This is the group of nations and communities that have been colonized and subjected to the disruption caused by imperialism. This world is located against the imperial societies in a state of canonical polarity and is restricted in this opposition in homogeneous, universal and timeless frames. However, the third world has occupied a new meaning and location in the present context. The term no longer constitutes erstwhile colonized spaces alone but any part of the world which is not included in the superpowers. It still remains promising as a ‘career’ as Said notes with reference to Disraeli in Orientalism (5), but it has become a more complicated career in the globalizing world. For one, with the euphemisms lent by the hegemony of capitalism, this ‘third world’ is no longer called an ‘underdeveloped’ world, but is ostensibly granted an organic quality with the comparatively redeeming and dynamic adjective: ‘developing’, which on the one hand sounds liberating, but on the other, ensures that it can be altered as per the demands of capitalism and the globalization process and that it will continue in the process of development, but never reach there as developed. Further, the ‘third world’ offers itself as a resource as well as a target. From hiring cheaper and trained manpower to buying abundantly available natural and mineral resources and finally creating a loyal consumer demand for products with the seeming claim of empowerment, the capitalist endeavour is to extensively exploit the prospects of the third world. Once again the seemingly liberating dynamism granted to the third world serves as the foundation for creating variable identity constructs for it as the service and manpower provider as well as the loyal customer. Though this is reminiscent of the colonial practice of trade and profit, the system of globalization operates with a certain difference.
While the hegemony of imperialism is based upon creating myths of third-world inferiority, the hegemony of globalization rests upon creating myths of empowerment with the consumer (third world) as the force behind the decisions of production. But, [1]he customer is not king, as the culture industry would have us believe, not its subject but the object, . . . The culture industry misuses its concern for the masses in order to *duplicate, reinforce and strengthen* their mentality, which it presumes is given and unchanging. [my emphasis] (Adorno 99)

The consumer is led to believe that 'he or she is an actor, where in fact he or she is at best a chooser' (Appadurai, ‘Disjuncture’ 307). With active market research and advertising techniques, the capitalist industry creates a discourse of consumerism and since the consumer is centered in the third-world market, a myth regarding the centrality of the third world is also created. It is on this myth of centrality that the continuous demand of capitalist goods in the third world depends. However, in the garb of consumerism and demand centered market behaviours, the effective hierarchy of the world remains intact. The first world is still identified as a temporally forward world with the third world doggedly following the standards set by it.

The logic of polarity still holds strong in the globalizing world but it is subdued on popular demand. The third and the first worlds still occupy distinct and oppositional positions, but the symbiosis of being mutually dependent (which was present in the strict binary of ‘self’ and ‘other’ too) is highlighted here to disguise the polarity with a pretence of alliance. The economic space of the globalizing world is at once bound and unbound. There is a simultaneous existence of ‘a geography of borderlessness and mobility, and a geography of border discipline’ and this paradox of space is ‘negotiated’ (Massey 86) through the forces of global capitalist discourses. There is an existence of free trade but the freedom is restricted by rules regarding the flow of capital in terms of direction as well as volume.

When the parameters of observing sameness and difference change from race and nationality in the prime to capitalization indices, the understanding of the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ is also bound to change. The binary opposition between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ in absolute separatism is replaced with a co-dependence in the culture of globalization.
With the setting up of multinational corporations and transnational corporations, the first and third world come into an inter-dependent capitalist contact. The capital flows from the first world to the third world are monitored and regulated by the former establishing authority over the latter. Meanwhile the third world holds a position of promise as a source of cheap labour and services initially and a loyal clientele eventually for the first-world entrepreneur. Alongside this seemingly encouraging symbiosis, the threat caused to local and cottage industries because of the advent of multinational giants arouses resistance in the third world against any kind of foreign influence. In the age of migration and competition with immigrants for employment, the first world too experiences a resistance from within against transnational expansion. This leads to the development of an ambivalent relationship between the first and third world and at the same time points to an apparent redistribution of authority between them.

Bhabha points to the ambivalence related with the hybridized identity in occupying the interstitial space in The Location of Culture. He further emphasizes that the hybridized identity is constantly in a state of ‘transit’. The interstitial space is marked with a simultaneous ‘presence and absence’ that characterizes the ‘flux between polarities’ (Location 1). This indeterminacy and duality in identity reflects a break from the earlier patterns of defining the ‘self’ against an opposite ‘other’. The ‘other’ is now housed within the ‘self’ and is not just a referent to define the latter with; it is rather constitutive of the identity of the interstitial being. Further the development of an identity that is hybridized is bound to create a space where no final signification is possible (Location 267; Derrida ‘Différance’ 9) as identity is constantly pulsating between the polarities in an ambivalent state of simultaneous attraction and repulsion (Location 107). The indeterminacy in signifying meaning suggests that identity in the interstitial space is marked with an attempt towards negotiating a balance between endlessly erupting differences. The stark opposition between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ which served as the foundation for the discourses of orientalism is replaced with a necessary condition for appropriation, translation, re-historicizing and re-signifying (55) the differences between various presences so as to negotiate an in-between identity which is not static in hybridity but constantly developing conflicts to negotiate.
Another change that has come about in the era of globalization is that the systems of consumption have gained increasing significance over systems of production. With regard to identity performance too, the consumption ethic of an individual has gained greater consequence. Objects define ‘the performance of one’s personal and social identities’ (Woodward 134). Further, consumption also becomes a parameter of establishing social hierarchies and categories. With Thorstein Veblen’s concept of ‘conspicuous consumption’ (68), consumption becomes a means to satisfy the demands of social status rather than functionality. Objects are used for the ‘cultivation of identity . . . irrespective of . . . [their] aesthetic or functional qualities’ (Woodward 135). With this emphasis on consumption and its conspicuousness, the significance of an object is determined by its ‘exchange value’ rather than its ‘use value’ (Baudrillard, Consumer Society 8). Identity has come to be greatly influenced by consumption and with the internalization of objects of consumption in the area of identity politics, a new dimension has come into play with regard to representational systems. Besides the interstices between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ that house the hybridized identity, a new interstices has developed between the ‘subject’ and ‘object’ of consumption. It is in the ‘potential spaces’ [my emphasis] (Winnicott 100) between the ‘subject’ and the ‘object’ that the consumable object is ‘imaginatively elaborated’ (Winnicott 101) or ‘invested with meaning’ (Woodward 140) which in turn reflects upon the identity of the subject and transforms its definition. It can be said then, that there is an interstitial space between the subject and the object of consumption, in which the play of identification takes place.

Quite like the imperial project, the project of globalization through capitalist multi-nationalism is also supported by a discourse of inevitability. The agents of the culture of free trade and exchange project the advent of globalization as a natural phenomena as true and undeniable as ‘gravity’ (Massey 5). The spread of globalization is based on the discourse of its unavoidability and a belief that the underdeveloped and developing countries can be raised to development only by linking them to the transnational, first-world controlled global market (Hardt and Negri 283). This representation of globalization as an essential and unstoppable phenomenon creates the groundwork upon which the discourses of its culture can be designed. This entails that identity in the world of multiculturalism and globalization needs must be globalized too.
Since the third world represents the experimental ground for globalizing activity, identity with reference to the third world is necessarily put in inclusive and supranational terms.

The culture of globalization also draws upon the rhetoric of world peace and harmony. Said envisions a euphoria of multiculturalism where cultures and identities can be consolidated on a global scale so that there is no desire to rule over the others (Culture and Imperialism 407). Bhabha, though claiming to reveal the complexities of the hybridized cultural model beyond the simplistic conclusions of Said, repeats the error in imagining an absence of ‘transcendentalism’ and ‘sublation’ in a state of hybridity (Location 38). The discourse of globalization bases itself on the same argument of peace and equality. It is believed that:

>Cross-culturality [is] the potential termination of an apparently endless human history of conquest and annihilation justified by the myth of group “purity”. (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 36)

Cross-culturality and globalization are suggestive of a movement beyond the rhetoric of “purity” to a state of hybridity which is not haunted by the drive to separate based on native originalities and their unadulterated existence. Where the culture of localism is seen to cause separatism, genocide, terrorism and war, the culture of globalization seemingly promises a peaceful and rather secular environment.

But what becomes noteworthy in this context is that in the attempt to unite, the culture of globalization reminds local cultures of their differences as well. History bears witness that nations have always been in conflict with each other on various grounds: social, communal, religious, political, and economic. This clash in interests shows that different communities and cultures have different and possibly antagonistic features. In such a case, globalization cannot refer to a peaceful mélange of all cultures of the world, including their differences. As Held observes:

>Globalization can engender an awareness of political difference as much as an awareness of common identity; enhanced international communications can highlight conflicts of interest and ideology, and not merely remove obstacles to mutual understanding. (qtd. in Pieterse 49-50)
In attempting to move beyond differences, globalization can also lead to exhuming them. It can lead to the ‘reinforcement of both supranational and sub-national regionalism’ (Pieterse 50). Further, if the culture of globalization advocates a transcendence of difference and a development of a collective community, the increasing instances of terrorism remain unexplained. The effort of globalization in making claims to world peace and harmony is suggestive of bringing about a kind of “homogeneous hybridization” in various communities of the world so that there is no conflict between them. But the terrorist attempts against the capitalist world order and its discourses of conformism are depictive of alternate identification systems which refuse to be cast into a homogeneous frame of differentiation.

The space of interstices is simplistically imagined as the space of endless hybridization to the extent of homogenizing difference. This hybridization is unrealistically assumed to endlessly dilute difference and subsequently lead to a state where no signification is possible and no identity is determinable or recognizable. But the idea of an indeterminate, pulsating and multi-affiliated identity is not stable in the least. It is suggestive of a world order where identities are essentially fluid and floating in the common space of interstices. The world then should be a space marked with chaos and a total absence of hierarchies. But the world today is that of capitalism and hierarchies are not only significant to it but also quite fundamental. The incongruity in the definition of interstices and identity is suggestive of there being a difference between the academic theories of hybridity and their application in real space and time.

It is significant to note here that the process of globalization does not entail an attempt to bring about a culture of secularism and equality. A general view of the world shows that for all the tall claims of globalization and the ‘global village’ (McLuhan) there remains a strict hierarchy in the order of the nations and their state and rate of development. Reference to this difference is often ignored under the pretense that these countries are just a little ‘behind’ and will catch up soon (Massey 5). The culture of globalization is ironically ‘not truly global’. It is ‘geographically, economically and culturally partial and sectoral’ (Li 16). The positive effects of globalization are centered in a restricted part of the world while the rest of it pays the price for the former’s development. A telling example of this lopsided influence of the so-called global
development is the following advertisement of the Royal Trust mapping the world as per the stock market capitalization (qtd in Li 19).

The representation of the world in terms of capitalization indices reveals the prominence of the first world as a powerful and gargantuan space with the surrounding miniature spaces as insignificant. In this context, the role of the USA in propagating and perpetuating the neocolonial exercise of globalization cannot be ignored. As an agent of the globalization process, the USA holds an entrepreneurial position in the world today. This is not to state that capitalism or international trade is an American invention, but the employment of these forces to globalize the world into a single culture of subservience to capitalism is definitely an American strategy. In the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference of New England, the superpowers of the world constituted three organizations with the
ostensible claim to enhance stability in the various economies of the world, provide aid for developmental activities and develop free international trade relations maintaining the sovereignty of all nations and their boundaries. But these organizations soon changed not only in their nomenclature but also in their nature and role in world economy. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) which was formed to ‘administer international monetary flow’ [my emphasis] (Steger, Globalization: A Very Short Introduction 38) has come to dictate it. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), which was formed to finance European postwar reconstruction, has mutated into the World Bank and funds industrial projects in the third world. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was meant to enforce ‘multilateral trade agreements’ (Steger, Globalization: A Very Short Introduction 38), but transformed as the World Trade Organization (WTO), it has become the nucleus of economic globalization as an American project.

The objection to the World Bank is that it tends to make stringent conditions that conform to its own precepts of what is economically desirable, not those of the country itself. This is exacerbated by the fact that it works with governments rather than people. . . . The World Trade Organization . . . seems to be an outfit designed to facilitate entry for western or transnational companies into other markets on the best terms, while ensuring that the favour is not reciprocated the other way round, and doing nothing to alleviate the sinking price paid for commodities to the non-western world. (Young, Postcolonialism 134)

In the 1960’s and 70’s, when the newly industrializing countries (NICs) of the third world began to participate actively in global trade through export oriented industrialization (EOI), the ostensible claim of the World Bank to foster development seemingly flourished. But this development came at the cost of third-world national economies. Further, with the rise in offshore capital investment, and the subsequent shift from gold-dollar standard to the non-convertible dollar in 1971, the development programme turned into an exploitative regime. The third-world industry began to thrive on hefty loans from the World Bank which were multiplying constantly. The IMF took up the role of the banker of the world, and began the project of the development of the ‘transnational corporate system’ in collaboration with the World Bank (McMichael 280).
The third world was now trapped in the vicious cycle of surmounting debt, which was not to aid national development but rather to pay-off old debts. The trinity of American capitalism, that is, the IMF, World Bank and WTO then designed trading systems for the third world wherein profit generation for the US-based transnational corporations was the unmasked and only motive. The off-shoring of production units to foreign soils for cheaper labour and resources, the outsourcing of jobs to low-paid foreign employees and the absolute invasion of the third-world market with international products and services are all means to strengthen American control on world economy. Under the impact of the globalization processes, the ethnic industries and national produce fail simply on the grounds of higher price. Further, with the off-shoring of TNCs in the third world, a surplus capital inflow is observed in the latter in the form of wages and salaries. However, this surplus is only a funding to create affordability in the third-world consumer for the first-world product. The American globalization strategy works through the modesoperandi of generating virtual surplus capital in the third world in the form of loans to US-based TNCs, employing third-world resources and labour at cheaper rates to produce goods for international sale, and finally reaping enormous profits by selling to the third-world consumer. Further, in the garb of creating jobs for the natives and developing infrastructure, the TNCs rob the country of its economic independence and surpass the state’s authority simply by virtue of international network and economic supremacy. It is noteworthy that the third-world countries which house TNC production units mostly report a lower GDP in comparison to the TNC’s turnover (Steger, Globalization: A Very Short Introduction 48-51). Behind the glorious façade of global development, the gap between the rich and the poor is increasing tremendously leading to an imbalance in the social wealth distribution system. At the bottom line, this development reflects profits of the US governed TNCs and the development of the first world. Even within the nations, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer (Sernau 36). The handful of affluent that the third world celebrates with pride is a miniscule percentage of the total population and the lopsided distribution of wealth within these nations worsens under the capitalist order.
For much of the world, globalization as it has been managed seems like a pact with the devil. A few people in the country become wealthier; GDP statistics, for what they are worth, look better, but ways of life and basic values are threatened. . . . Closer integration into the global economy has brought greater volatility, insecurity and inequality. (Stiglitz, Making Globalization Work 292)

The poor are identified as ‘flawed consumers’ (Bauman Work, Consumerism 38, 90) as they are incapable of consuming from the capitalist market ‘in the manner that consumer society expects’ (Bryman 173). These ‘flawed consumers’ constitute the ‘other’ in the polar identification system of the global capitalist market which privileges the rich consumer as a ‘fully fledged member’ casting away the poor as an abnormal opposite (Bryman 173).

Ironically, the third world which forms the foundation of transnational corporate growth in terms of economics of scale loses when it comes to establishing economic prowess. It is this victimization of the third world as a means of forwarding American trade which results in a backlash in the form of anti-globalization movements and terrorist attacks. The politics of identity now begins to take the shape of a much more tangible and empirical competition between the haves and the have-nots. The vicious cycle of third-world economic dependence on the first world increases the latter’s strength as an invincible leader in international economic scenario. With the established foundation of global capitalism, the representation of the world by the Royal Trust (refer: picture above) not only reflects power relations but also the strong and undeniable hierarchy in the world order despite all claims to secularism and equality with reference to globalization.

Further, globalization brews on competition and not on unconditional integration. It is constantly iterative of the idiom of the nation-state and the relative development of one on top of the other through an interactive procedure (Li 17). The foundational tool of globalization is capitalism which is suggestive of profit through competition and this makes the culture of globalization that of division rather than integration. It can be observed that the performance of identity is competitive in nature in the capitalist multicultural/ multinational sphere and identity in its hybridity is competing against other hybrid forms for a higher position in the hierarchy of internationalism. Ironically
however, the essential drive in individuals towards marking a ‘distinction’ or ‘difference’ from others is actually an attempt towards ‘conformism’ (Baudrillard, Consumer Society 92). This ambivalence in the system of identification through difference is the foundational premise upon which the cultural of difference is realized.

Superficial peace and order is observed with reference to globalization, but this order is depictive of capitalist interdependence rather than a sense of universal philanthropism. As Marx and Engels note, capitalism makes all civilized nations and every individual member of them dependent for the satisfaction of his wants on the whole world destroying the formal natural exclusiveness of separate nations. (75-6)

Such capitalist inter-relatedness makes individual members ambivalent in their relation with each other. There is a simultaneous feeling of competition and mutual development between the concerned nations. This characteristic partial symbiosis gives globalization the foundation upon which the discourse of world development and equality is based.

Another important observation at this point is that the culture of globalization entails the process of actively making global. This conversion of the “non-global” to the global necessitates pruning and trimming the perceptions of the “non-global” identities to the popularly believed “new improved inclusive version”. Like the imperial order, the discourse of globalization and the attempt to create a class of middle-men between various local cultures seems to suggest the production of a mix-and-match identity that is partly local and partly global. Globalization is presented not as a definite cultural form but rather as a culture of inclusion. This compatibility-inducing culture of internationalism, as it is perceived, is offered to local cultures in appropriated forms as per local trends. The culture of globalization is presented in glocal forms to make it palatable (Ritzer 169).

By popular definition, ‘global identity’ is received as a sort of internationalism – a liberation from boundaries – a sort of elevation from origin to be at home everywhere. But what does ‘global’ include? The euphoric dream of secularism and the claim that it can be reached through the process of globalization (whatever the alignment refers to) raises serious doubts. First, if globality cannot be depictive of an equality of all in
hybridity, can it be called global? Secondly, if it cannot be called global, who are the perpetrators of this discourse of globality? Thirdly, if globality is a consumer product (and so it seems to be), is it just a collection of tokens (harmless and mostly unimportant) from various cultures, loosely incorporated in the ruling culture? And fourthly, if it is so, what identity is promised to the people from these ‘token’ cultures?

The study of identity with respect to the culture of globalization runs parallel with the study of capitalism and its politics. The culture of globalization takes on a ‘grobal’ form within the international capitalist scenario. It functions through ‘a process in which growth imperatives…push organizations and nations to expand globally and to impose themselves on the local’ (Ritzer xiii). In this profit oriented globally expanding market system, structures of growth oriented globalization, or ‘grobalization’ (Ritzer 41) govern the space of identity. Identity is fashioned on productive metaphors of internationalism tending to first-worldism.

The simultaneously grobal and glocal measures of hybridization suggest a sense of difference in spite of orchestrated cultural interaction. The presence of this difference despite the seemingly “homogenizing” hybridization is suggestive of a process of ‘selective incorporation’ (Robertson 41) as well as appropriation of alien ideas to local sensibility. In such a space of interaction and incorporation, identity is not brought to a homogeneous and globally equal state but rather made permeable. Identity is universally hybridized due to globalization, but the extent and the constitution of this fusion is varied and cannot be observed as a foundation for equality or homogeneity.

However it can be said that hybridization leads to a difference in the performance of hierarchy. While in the era of imperial annexation, hierarchy was strictly governed by the binary discourses of superiority and inferiority and a seemingly direct and consequential claim to significance, in the era of hybridization, identity has developed a new referential system. With the strictly polar categories of identification in the prior times there was an obvious desire to fit in and claim belonging to one place. In the current scenario however, the state of being *neither here nor there* is not only suggestive of a widened scope of identity but also of an empowering position in the international system, free to choose and change one’s affiliations. Migration as a metaphor is not suggestive of uprooting but rather liberation. Similarly, the condition of being diasporic is
suggestive of global association and grants a sense of cosmopolitanism to identity. Further, even as a victim the diasporic condition attracts attention and centrality in today’s world with its somewhat ostensible obsession with subalternity.

Based on market indices and consumption dynamics it can be observed that hyphenated identity claims popularity. The facet of hybridity fixation can be observed in the literary scenario where with every success of Rushdie or Seth, the idea of diasporic existence and its anxiety becomes a source of excitement and every nomadic venture seems to hold a promise of productivity. The interstitial beings or the ‘liminal personae’, as Victor Turner calls them (qtd. in Ramraj 216), are liberated from the stereotypical categories of origin and belonging and are free to selectively consume from the competition-based global free market.

While Said describes exile as something ‘terrible to experience . . . [an] unhealable rift . . . [an] essential sadness’ (Reflections 173), he also acknowledges the present age as that of ‘the refugee, the displaced person, mass immigration’ (174). Even Bhabha accords a special status to the ‘migrant’s double vision’ (Location 5). A radical change has come about with the wave of hybridization and cultural permeability. Migration is not necessarily a forced exile in the current age, but can be self-willed too (Ramraj 214). This latter form of migration is largely described as a preferred state of existence as it liberates the expatriates and émigrés from the ‘rigid proscriptions’ of restricted cultural or community spaces and allows an ‘ambiguous status’ to them, and ‘choice in the matter is certainly a possibility’ (Said, Reflections 181). This matter of choice in cultural terms is the unfettering aspect of hybridization and can be a source of the euphoria of multiculturalism that Bhabha theorized upon (Location 38). Though the empowerment related with cosmopolitanism can be debated.

By means of the installation of a continuous alterity with respect to other identities, the cosmopolitan can only play roles, participate superficially in other people’s realities, but can have no reality of his or her own other than alterity itself. (Friedman, J. 204)
Similarly, intellectuals who migrate from their nation to the first world and claim the voice of the third world have been accused of refusing their national identity and taking on a first-world status (Ahmad, ‘The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality’ 13).

Further, under the driving and binding force of capitalism and international economics, hybridization becomes an orchestrated programme designed to hybridize to a certain extent only: to be ‘almost the same but not quite’ [my emphasis] (Bhabha, Location 122). Identity in the hybridized market scenario is packaged to suit the economic system and consumption is prompted by advertising and parameters of social status. Bhabha’s theory of the hybridized identity and the interstitial being offers the dictum of universal hybridity which serves as the foundation upon which the discourses of capitalism and consumerist market dynamic rest. Bhabha’s hybridized identity provides capitalism with the definitive interstitial ‘self’ that is offered to the consumer for enhancing profit quotients and market shares for the actors of first-world capitalist order. It is a simulation of the euphoric vision of world culture and global identities claimed by the hybridity thesis in the capitalist free-market system. The homogenously and comfortably hybridized ‘self’ proposed by the capitalist system not only appeals to the consumer but also creates a constant demand in the market for hyphenation or a trendy mix-and-match.

The capitalist insistence upon fusion results in a parallel demand for the maintenance of individuality. It is noteworthy however that this individuality is to be preserved on universally acceptable patterns only. This points towards a paradoxical creation of an identity that is at once hybridized and culturally unique. Identity simultaneously occupies the space of manipulation and imposition, and that of statement and response: oppositional and/or otherwise. It becomes the site of political manipulation through global representation systems ranging from the likes of the ‘United Colours of Benetton’ directly derived from the celebratory model of unity in diversity (refer: image below), to the seemingly individuating temptations of brands like Reebok confidently claiming: ‘I am what I am’; and in counterpoint, it also marks the site of power and self definition through response to the attempts at aligning the world with the likes of Fab India, Chokhi Dhaani, Ainu markets of Japan and Han Chinese markets and their claims towards the maintenance of cultural and traditional identity. That they take on capitalist
United Colors of Benetton posters depicting unity in diversity
Images taken from www.benetton.com/press
systems for such an expression can be debated as a matter of irony or adept political response. While on the one hand these attempts display a total failure of purpose of conserving cultural identity and tradition from the threats of global market systems and capitalist internationalism by founding their structures of operation on the systems of competitive consumerism itself, on the other hand they can also be observed as advanced in their warring response by adopting the methods of the system against itself, by writing back to the empire, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin might put it. Either way, identity in the current scenario suffers from the syndrome of mass production and consumption for the expression of the so called liberation of fusion as well as the ostentation of uniqueness. The ironic bulk production of identity points to a simulation of identity and not a practice of it.

The mass production of identity with the apparent avowal of maintaining individuality refers to the creation of synthesized products that carry with them the local as well as the global; individual as well as what is supposed to be common. The anxiety of this blending, which can also be terrorizing at times, is shrouded under the garb of productivity and inevitability related with hybridization and globalization. The identity marketed through such a system of orchestrated hyphenation is depictive of a universal hybridization mechanism pervading all from hyper malls to hyper real identities. Fredric Jameson points towards the lack of capability to cognitively map an identity in the commodified hyper-space. With respect to the mall, he says that it represents:

[A] postmodern hyperspace [that] has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the human body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually and cognitively to map its position in a mappable external world. (‘Postmodernism’ 83)

From bringing the objects of consumption into forced and at times jarring fusion under one roof (Bryman 67), to diluting the use value and sign value of these into a single consumptive factor of meaningless consumption for conspicuousness (Veblen 68) or mythically created needs, the mall represents the postmodern space of nothingness which is full of objects but emptied of meaning (Ritzer). The consumption of synthetic products which are robbed of meaning and significance through the sublation of ‘use value’ by
sign value’ and the ‘metaconsumption’ of goods for superficial and impassionate ends (Baudrillard, Consumer Society 90) reflect upon the identity of the consumer. It is here that the fractures of the consumptive goods permeate the identity of the consumer to create a fractured and empty identity: the hyper-identity.

The simulation of identity in terms of consumption points to the absence of content in identity. As the postcolonial theories regarding third-world identity reflect an empty sign that signifies everything that the west is not, and is nothing more concrete than the imagination of the colonizer, in the capitalist world, with the complete internalization of the ‘other’ in the ‘self’, the identity of the third world is that of a consumer based on the simulated products that he/she consumes. Through the hegemonic tool of marketing and advertising, capitalism creates perceptions of ideal consumers and places them in a state of preference as the seemingly empowered and controlling factors of the system. This myth of empowerment, better known as consumerism, is directed towards the practice of perceptions to create profits based on the consumption of illusive products which have ‘no objective reality’ and represent the nothingness that underlines the current market dynamic (Ritzer 180; Trout 6-7).

Based on the active practice of nothingness, identity is an empty sign in the world of consumerism which can be informed with any meaning. This disposable identity can be created and changed at will and can be modified as per need. An identity which is fit for all occasions and all consumers is offered through mass produced goods with various perceptions adapting them to need and appropriateness. George Ritzer marks the example of ‘Mecca Cola’ within this context (181) as a symbol of apparent localization of capitalist ventures even in the most adverse scenarios, to underline the flexibility of capitalist perception systems. Inadvertently, perhaps, Ritzer also points towards the creation of local somethings as an attempt towards cashing on the traditional perceptions of the masses rather than the professed purpose of keeping culture alive. It can be remarked here that such cultural markets profiting by selling cultural ‘knick-knacks’, or ‘kitsch objects’ (Baudrillard, Consumer Society 12) are perhaps examples of glocalizing the local. Further the glocalization of extra local objects to local tastes is also a means of promoting profit margins by creating pseudo-global consumable identities ostensibly pointing to a sense of cultural intermix. To repeat Robertson’s views:
The idea of glocalization in its business sense is closely related to . . . micromarketing: the tailoring and advertising of goods and services on a global or near-global basis to increasingly differentiated local and particular markets. . . . [But it also] involves the construction of increasingly differentiated consumers, the ‘invention’ of ‘consumer traditions’. . . . From the consumer’s point of view it can be a significant basis of cultural capital formation. (28-9)

In this context identity under the influence of local capitalist ventures is another form of hyper reality and points to the all-encompassing sway of simulacrum (Baudrillard, *Simulation and Simulacrum*) in the current system of identity and its practice.

What further accentuates the hyper reality of identity is its dependence upon the objects that are consumed from the capitalist market. The culture of capitalism rests upon the destruction of ‘use values’ of objects and the imposition of ‘exchange values’ on them instead. The substitution of demand as ‘a mysterious emanation of human needs . . . [to] a mechanical response to social manipulation’ leads to the consumption of goods merely by popular availability and not by choice (Appadurai, ‘Commodities’ 419). This consumption is also not for its own sake but rather to establish a political value through commodities. This ‘commodity fetishism’ provides the hegemonic means with which objects can be raised to becoming determiners of identity and factors of controlling cultural imperialism (Ahmad, ‘Culture, Nationalism’ 413). Due to this,

the consumer has been transformed, through commodity flows . . . into a sign, both in Baudrillard’s sense of a simulacrum which only asymptomatically approaches the form of a real social agent, and in the sense of a mask for the real seat of agency, which is not the consumer but the producer and the many forces that constitute production. [my emphasis] (Appadurai, ‘Disjuncture and Difference’ 307)

The myth that consumption leads to the creation of agency points towards the simulated sense and practice of identity and its lack of reality. It also highlights the blinding exaggeration of the simulated identity and its significance in the current scenario.

Through active advertising methods and marketing strategies, the discursive relation between consumption and the practice of identity is so far informed in the collective psyche that consumers are forced to ‘conform’ (Baudrillard, *Consumer Society*)
92) to the principle of consumption for assertion of individuality. The system of consumption is seen as a means to emphasize one’s identity and a sense of difference from the others. The ironic universal ‘conformism’ so as to achieve a sense of ‘distinction or difference’ (Baudrillard, Consumer Society 92) is similar to Durkheim’s social thesis regarding ‘collective consumption’ (qtd. in Baudrillard, Consumer Society 4-5). The general attempt towards preserving individuality by following the same pattern is depictive of a sense of homogeneity in hybridization in terms of methodology but the variety of objects consumed by each individual being different, identity remains heterogeneous in nature. However, it can be argued that in the space of simulation and hyper identity achieved through ‘metaconsumption’, all consumption pertains to the embodiment of empty signs or nothingness. In such a scenario, any combination of emptiness or nothingness would only point to a sense of empty identity which can be homogenous in its lack of content and uniqueness.

What is more, in the current scenario, consumption is carried out through the mode of capital transactions. Capitalism has the tendency of quantifying everything and converting all to the denominations of trade and exchange. This homogenization of the units of observation to a single system results in a basic dilution of heterogeneity and difference (Yurick 211). Such a state of affairs leads to the creation of what Yurick calls the ‘Metastate’, that is, the space of transnationalism where it is necessary to ‘render all borders and cultures porous’ (212). The idea of the Metastate develops in a state of polarity against the nation-state which is defined by its compactness and cultural fixity: the traditional parameters of ascertaining identity. The Metastate then becomes a space where there is no cultural or national loyalty or identity to observe. The culture of capitalism and the Metastate rests on power and wealth.

Given the fact that those who inhabit the realm of the Metastate derive from diverse nationalities, what they have in common is the culture of wealth and power, which has its own mode of behavior and discourse. (Yurick 216)

Further, much like ethnic cultures and their persistence towards the maintenance of their individual characterizing codes, capitalism also insists upon the international boiling
down of differences in capital culture to resort to one global free-market dynamic. This international market space with its free-flow behavioural pattern and supervision by actors of trade develops a state of virtual existence, which seems to represent a numbing of the geopolitical system where everything is capitalized irrespective of borders and boundaries. The culture of capitalism demands a loyalty and conformism towards a state without any affiliations and flexible cultural codes. The discourse of capitalism and free trade necessitates the creation of a consumer identity which is alterable and compatible with change. The community of capitalism then points to an essentially empty space of identification which is virtually designed upon the lack of definition.

To add to this virtual behaviour of space, capital is also expressed in virtual codes in the Metastate. Capital transactions are carried on a virtual plane of credit cards and e-cash. This ‘fictional’ capital with its ‘veritable financial bubble-economic cyberspaces’ (Yurick 218) percolates into the identity of those consuming in the Metastate and creates a universal pseudo-identity expressed in terms of what Ritzer identifies as the ‘non-person’ (10). Ironically this ‘hyperbolic capital moving through relative hyperspace’ has its effects in the real world despite its fictional status (Yurick 218), and influences the imaginaries of identity through a process of denomination in the virtual codes of IP addresses, e-mail ids and credit card numbers, all exhibiting a homogeneity in nomenclature and a universal capitalization of identity in a state of virtual existence leading to a state of ‘metastasis in the Metastate’ (220).

The hybridization of identity in the hyperspace does not restrict itself to spatial referents alone but extends to the temporality of existence as well. Identity is not only hybridized across borders and nationalities to a state of metaexistence, but also across the temporal space of experience. The multiplicity of inhabiting various time frames simultaneously, leads to the absolute breakdown of location and causes the development of ‘schizo-culture’ where

[the] logic of meaning in the succession of signifiers is disrupted by an unrelated synchrony of signs [leading to the] scrambling of signifiers and images. (McGuigan 72)
The mall as a symbol of cultural market displays objects for consumption from the traditional past of uniqueness and specific community codes, the global free market of internationalism and consumer demand, and the future imaginaries of the virtual place of the Internet and its unchecked reach across every geo-political border and boundary. The schizo-identity created in this manner is imaginative about the past, the present and the future, unconscious or at best semi-conscious of reality and inhabits a commodified space of experience where temporality has lost all signification and ‘use value’.

At a more individual level, as Rekha Borgohain Dixit observes, the ‘Gen V’, that is a parallel population of virtual personae, live their lives on a plane that is quite different from the real life in the manner of its courtesies, its etiquettes, behaviors and rules, but similar in the manner of its expressions and responses: criminal as well as philanthropic. It is noteworthy that the virtual universe is borderless and more liberating as it allows its populace to lead various lives at one time and to vent out all those desires (harmless, most of the times) which their real life persona denies to them. Further, the title of ‘Gen’, does not suggest a generation by virtue of people born in the same time in the real world, but people inhabiting the virtual world at the same time. That makes the virtual world ageless in its criterion of inclusion.

But this agelessness also causes a disruption in the temporal flow of experience and leads to multiple splits in the identity of an individual in being various entities at various times. Each of these identities, whether cultural, or virtual, or capital or consumer, carries with it the anxiety of possibly paradoxical existence and contradictory experience. This ‘crack[ing]’ identity, much too similar to Rushdie’s description of Saleem Sinai’s disintegration symbolizes the alienation of “self” after an immense attempt at ‘pickling’ (Midnight’s Children 550) in the era of capitalist globalization.

What begins with the ambivalence of identity in its simultaneous evocation of ‘presence’ and ‘difference’ (Bhabha, Location 73; Easthope 344-345; Rutherford 21) and its ostensible productivity through devices of magic realism, pastiche, enigmatic and inscrutable experiences of extra local cultures, turns inwards in the era of globalization and capitalism and becomes a source of alienation. Stories of ‘the horror’ that Conrad fails to resolve (106) and the echo in the cave that is significant due to the opportunity it creates for interpretation (Forster, A Passage to India), give way to application in the life
and times of the consumer today who is not in the state of academic ambivalence to produce counter-narratives, but is forced by essentialist hybridization and liminality into a state of being 'alienated’ (Pieterse 56). Identity in the culture of globalization reaches a point where signification is not only impossible, but also not desired to quite an extent.
Notes

i. The forces of globalization create a culture of hybridization which includes certain cultures and excludes certain others. The culture of globalization is not inclusive of all strains, but a celebration of certain privileged cultures to the exclusion and at times even condemnation of others. Together, the systems of globalization create a standard form of acceptable hybridization, while other forms of hybridization are termed deviant.

ii. See Aijaz Ahmad’s ‘The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality’ in Race and Class No. 36, Vol.3, 1995, 1-20. Ahmad talks about the ‘postcolonial’ and what it signifies in the current context. Like the term postcolonial does not refer to nations that have faced colonialization alone but any part of the ‘Rest’ of the world, ‘whether or not any . . .[of it] was actually colonized’ (9), the term third-world has also magnified its scope to include whatever can be called the rest of the world vis-à-vis the west.