

# HOW GLOBALISED CULTURAL TRENDS AND INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS INFLUENCE THE CONSTRUCTION OF ETHNICITY IN COLOMBIA

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## ABSTRACT

In this presentation we will examine the presence of globalized ideas like the value of diversity, cultural heritage or the crisis of modern society, in the discourses of White elites in Colombia when they refer to local indigenous cultures or ethnicity in general. Those ideas that have actually changed interethnic relations (between Whites and indigenous peoples) exist in many other “westernized” countries and circulate world-wide via the various flux of information. They are present in cultural domains that are not necessarily directly related to the indigenous peoples (domains like marketing, spirituality, alternative medicine and tourism). They constitute a new conceptual structure and a new set of values which sustain a new, idealized image of indigenous cultures.

Some of those ideas are also actively promoted by international institutions like humanitarian NGOs and the UN, which not only act through campaigns and publicity, but also have an influence on local governments and social organizations. All those factors have generated some political and jurisdictional changes such as a new Constitution that declares the country pluri-ethnic and multicultural and a series of measures known as “positive discrimination” (similar to what they call “affirmative action” in the USA) with unexpected consequences which we will analyze.

## A Brief History of Ethnicity in National Discourses

To fully understand the new discourses on national identity and the place of ‘ethnicity’ in them, it seems indispensable to mention the old discourses as well. In this way we can grasp their evolution, the context in which they were born and some of their cultural meanings. For that reason, in this first part of this paper I will present a history of some of the main ideas or

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– ‘Idées globalisées et constructions locales. L’image valorisée de l’indianité dans la Colombie contemporaine’. In : *Autrepart*, N° 38 : 155-172. 2006.

discourses of the political and intellectual elites in a chronological order, to finally arrive to what we call nowadays, in a general way, ‘multiculturalism’.

As we know, most of the nationalist projects are founded on the idea of cultural homogeneity of the inhabitants of the Nation (cf. Smith 2000:17). Colombian nationalism was certainly not an exception to this rule. Nationalist discourses imagined a unified country with one culture, one language, one religion, etc.

One of the first measures taken by the government of the newly-born Republic of Colombia (back in the first half of the XIXth century) was to declare the equality of all men, including the natives (Constitution of 1821. Quoted by Pineda 2002). Colombian elites, influenced by French republican ideas, believed that the State could only flourish under a regime based on the notion of ‘citizenship’ (*ibid.*), a notion that is supposed to give equal rights to every person independently of the community to which he or she belongs. For that reason, indigenous communities and their lands (called the *resguardos*, a kind of reserve originally created by the Spanish colonial administration in which the land is supposed to belong to a community as a whole and not to an individual in particular) were to be divided and reduced as much as possible, as *resguardos* were considered an undesirable vestige of the colonial period, in contradiction with the ideals of equality of all men and in contradiction with the principle of private *individual* property (Pineda 2002). The *cabildos* (the political figure of the indigenous communities, which once served as an intermediary between the Crown and the native communities) were also to be reduced as much as possible under this new rule.

However, native peoples were present in the nationalistic discourses of local elites at the time. Briefly after independence in 1819, the liberal elites represented America as a young *indigenous* woman (Pineda 1997:112). In the 1850s, there were new attempts to use the images of the natives in the construction of national identity. Indeed, under the influence of romanticism, several local authors glorified the Indian’s ‘magnificent kingdoms’ of the past. Those romantic ideas existed even though the real Indians in flesh and bone, the ones they came in contact with, were despised (Pineda 1997:113).

After the Constitution of 1886 -written under a conservative regime-, the natives, considered as ‘savages’ or ‘half civilized’, were put under the tutelage of the Catholic missions, and from the point of view of the legislation they were considered as ‘minors’ (Pineda 2002). At

least until the 1950s, the Catholic missions –most of them coming from Spain– were the main actors in the project to ‘civilize’ the indigenous communities. Their main objective was, in theory, to teach the ‘savages’ the Christian values and to ‘westernize’ their culture.

Given the fact that cultural and racial diversity are particularly high in Latin America, ‘racial’ unification was a central issue for these republics. In this context, the presence of indigenous peoples within the national territory was a subject of intense debates amongst intellectuals and politicians in Latin America since the first half of the XXth century (Wade 2000). In Colombia, some people wondered how to integrate the natives into the modern Nation, but others thought that it was right to integrate some indigenous characteristics (imagined or not) into the Colombian identity (Pineda 2002). One of the reasons to take the Indian as a model for national identity, was that the Indians represented an original and unique identity. Other intellectuals, influenced by the socialist and communist ideologies that gained momentum in the world at the time, praised the social organization of the Indians in the *Resguardos*, considering it as a raw model of the socialist organization (*ibid.*).

The 1940s is a moment in which folklore and indigenous studies became very important in Colombia (a tendency seen in other Latin American countries and particularly promoted by the Mexican government at the time). Specialists looked for symbols of national identity and searched for the ‘origins’ of the nation, while considering the natives as one of the ‘original races’. The dream was to create a ‘Colombian race’ or a ‘*mestizo*’ country: a hybrid race resulting of the mixing of the Spaniards, the African-American and the Indians (Gros 2000:353). However, the project of the ‘*Mestizo Nation*’ did not eradicate the ideas according to which the ‘Colombian race’ was degenerated or inferior ‘because of the influence of the natives and negroes’ (*ibid.*). We can thus see a contradictory logic in which local elites praised the mixing of races, but, on the other hand, hoped for the ‘whitening’ of the population (this contradiction is found in the discourses of some people at present as well).

Already in the second half of the XXth century, politicians and the majority of people thought that modernization was the right (and usually the only) way to construct a prosperous Nation. In spite of the recognition of a ‘*mestizo race*’, ‘whitening’ of the population was actually the ideal (though often veiled) and cultural or racial characters associated with negro or indigenous ascent were considered as a sign of racial inferiority (Pineda 2002). Ethnic influence was to be erased little by little by modernization and biologic and cultural mixing.

In the 1960s, the idea of the Indians living according to their own norms, language, etc. (as it is the ideal today) was considered to be incompatible with the construction of a Nation (Gros 2000). Assimilation of the Indians into modernity *had* to be accomplished and one of the main ways to do it, was to educate them. In Colombia, to call someone an '*indio*' meant that person was rude, uneducated, a brute. Furthermore, people without western education, like the natives, were supposed to be stupid.

The native represented a past to be left behind. At that time, even pro-indigenous intellectuals thought that racial and ethnic identities were going to disappear sooner or later under the influence of modernization.

After the 1960s, applied anthropology became more and more important. As some intellectuals searched for the means for a successful integration of the natives into the Nation, other intellectuals did not consider that integration as a good thing because it could be a cause of 'acculturation' (in the sense of 'loss of one's culture'), unequal political and economic relations, and misery for the natives. The presence of western institutions (such as schools) would presumably 'destroy' their culture.

As some people denounced the problems caused by western culture in indigenous societies, some left-wing thinkers thought it was necessary to 'instruct' the natives (into a very western way of thinking) so that they would protest and fight to get education and health services from the State; in this current of thought one tended to classify the Indian either as a peasant or as a member of the proletariat, oppressed by the capitalist system (Wade 2000). Indeed, Gros (2000) shows that left-wing partisans contributed to the project of 'westernization' of the Indian in order to integrate it to modernity and make it contribute to the emancipation social movement (p. 356).

In the 1970s, intellectual tendencies were very much influenced by Marxism. Theories on the economic dependence denounced unequal commercial relations between Latin America and the economic powers of the North. The focus was on socioeconomic inequalities and on the mechanisms of exploitation (Wade 2000). As in other parts of the world, the 1960s and especially the 1970s is a period for the creation and development of many social movements which included the participation of peasants and natives (Pineda 1997:114). In these movements, the Indian was a social category that should emancipate and a vulnerable social

group which had to be protected. Research on social differences in this period used the concept of 'class' instead of the more recent and trendy concepts of 'race' and 'ethnicity'.

These theories were combined with colonialist and the post-colonialist theories. The natives were considered the victims of a new form of colonialism taking place inside the country: 'whites' or the descendants of the Europeans and the elites dominated and exploited the natives. These ideas served as a major argument in the defense of the natives against the 'capitalist invasion' and 'imperialism'. Anti-colonialist thought began to criticize strongly those who treated indigenous peoples as 'backward' (Wade 2000:94).

Major reforms, cultural and political, came into place in the 1960s. In 1967 Colombia signs the 107 Convention of the *International Work Organization* on the 'rights of the tribal minorities', a convention that provides a legal foundation for the protection of some *resguardos* and for a certain degree of autonomy of indigenous communities (Pineda 2002). Signing for this type of conventions came along with the increasing presence of international NGOs and the strengthening of global institutions such as the UN. The rise of this type of organizations is obviously not independent from economic treaties favoring transnational commerce.

During the 1970s, State policies concerning the indigenous communities changed considerably. For instance, new lands were officially given to them and the State declared that the education programs in these communities should be bilingual (in Spanish and in the native language) (Pineda 1997:114). In the same way, the national government conceived a 'ethno-education' program in which official education imparted in indigenous communities should incorporate many aspects of local cultures (religion, traditions, etc.). Likewise, local institutions began to consider changing State health care programs in native communities in order to adapt them to traditional native practices.

Moreover, in the 80s, official discourses began to use the concept of 'interculturality' or the exchange of knowledge between modern culture and indigenous cultures. 'Interculturality, they said, offers the possibility to know other cultures and, thus, the possibility to enrich our own culture' (*Ministerio of Educación Nacional of Colombia* 1987:81). A government employee in the late 1980s said that the ethno-education program 'promotes cultural

relativism and [...] shows that no culture is superior to another' (words cited by Jackson 1995a:308).

As Wade (2000) points it out, modern 'rationalism' enters a period of crisis in the 1980s. Western intellectuals begin to lose faith in rational science as a way to explain everything and to control everything. Moreover, people begin to criticize the modern means of production and exploitation that seemed to seriously endanger the environment. Social sciences were also very criticized as people started to recognize that social policies were failing, inequality increased and misery rose, especially in the urban areas.

The almost 200 year-old ideal of building a culturally homogenous Nation is practically dead in the 1980s. Latin American countries begin to recognize their diversity (Gros 2000) and there is an outburst of social and identity movements based on issues such as ethnicity, gender or sexuality (Wade 2000). Discourses on recognition, respect and preservation of the indigenous cultures became important at the same time as people from all over the world (particularly intellectual elites and middle classes) started to praise several types of cultural differences ('ethnic', 'oriental', 'traditional', 'local' etc.).

It is the beginning of the 'politics of recognition' (cf. Taylor 1993) as it is manifested in Latin America. The right to be different spreads in all social sectors, it becomes a general cultural trend, it becomes the foundation for many social movements, and it begins to be officially approved. Intellectual elites, following globalised trends, encouraged and inspired minority groups, such as Indians, to speak up and fight to (re)build their identities and to demand the respect from the dominant 'white' population. In this way, ethnic communities become 'visible'" and claim their rights to be culturally different. Indeed, in the 1980s and 1990s, social movements based on such concepts as 'identity" or 'culture' begin to replace organizations based on the concept of 'class' –such as the worker unions- (Wade 2000). The indigenous movements started to be considered as ideal examples of identity movements, representing cultural resistance against modernity coming from the power centers of the world and representing 'authentic' identity. Indeed, in Latin America and all over the world one can observe at the time a revivalism of the different local or ethnic identities. The indigenous movements increase, frequently guided by pro-indigenous 'white' elites who speak about the importance to preserve the traditions and the 'indigenusness' of those communities (Gros 1997).

In a democratic context and after a long process of negotiations, a new political Constitution is born in 1991. After decades of having declared itself a '*mestizo*' country, and after more than a century of trying to make the Indian and the Negro become like a European peasant through 'Christianization' and 'civilization', Colombia proudly declared itself a 'pluri-ethnic and multicultural' country, as one can read on the first page of the actual Constitution. 'The State recognizes the equality and the dignity of all [cultural forms] living together in the country' (Art. 70). In the official discourses and in the new legislation, the State recognizes and respects all forms of diversity, not only the cultural diversity (which usually refers to the different ethnic 'cultures' of the country) but also, for example, the religious diversity. 'The State recognizes and protects all ethnic and cultural diversity living in the Nation' (Art. 7). This is a manifestation of a tendency toward more liberal principles than in the past. A new national identity was thus being constructed: 'Culture, in its various manifestations, is the foundation of the nationality' (Art. 70). The country no longer perceives itself as a unified culture. Moreover, even though Spanish is the official national language, the languages and dialects of the ethnic groups are official in their territories (Art. 10 of the Constitution).

Participation of natives in political and cultural life is officially promoted: 'In the past we created policies *for* the Indians, now we design policies *with them* (Báez-Jorge 2001). Sometimes we even ask their advice! As the president of the Republic said at the time: 'There is an official and institutional recognition of the fact that these [indigenous] cultures must be respected and their knowledge must be taken into consideration' (Gaviria 1993).

Legislation now grants a certain degree of political autonomy to the indigenous communities inside their territories to manage their internal affairs (as far as they do not violate national law). The new laws have secured the collective property of lands for indigenous peoples. This does not mean, of course, that the Indians are completely safe within their lands, but it is an improvement and they can claim their rights if their lands are invaded (mostly by settlers). Even though ethnicity or multiculturalist policies have encountered many practical problems, we cannot deny that the new legislation is an important step towards the recognition of ethnic groups as political actors and because of it they have greater possibilities to interact with the State and demand what they want. All that implies obvious economic and political advantages. For instance, 'communities can stop the execution of certain economic projects [...], those which could be opposed to their interests or those which could harm their cultural

integrity' (Sánchez *et al.* 2000:368-9). As we can see, identity becomes an issue that is combined with political and economic interests. Communities can utilize their newly given political power to strengthen their 'cultural identity' and, on the other hand, they can utilize the identity argument to justify political action. In the same way, they can use ecological arguments ('we are going to protect our Mother-earth') to justify their actions.

At least since 1980, the State and its intellectual elites speak of the negative consequences that can arise when some forms of western cultures are introduced in some indigenous communities (Jackson 1995a:305). This awareness is certainly due to the opinions of western specialists, notably of anthropologists.

The idea of the 'preservation of the cultures' becomes an issue and, with it, the controversy on authenticity and 'purity' of cultures is raised. However, when one analyzes real cases of intervention to save or preserve indigenous cultures (see for example Jackson 1995a), one realizes that is 'authentic' and the ideal to preserve it are defined by intellectual elites and largely diffused by international organizations with western funding.

Moreover, we must be aware of the fact that the multiculturalist logic praises only some *Others*, namely some 'ethnic' groups. Multiculturalism recognizes only some social groups or social categories that exist in the minds of elites. For instance, as Cunin (2000) shows it, researchers have found that Afro-American communities in Colombia are much less 'visible' than the Indians and one of the reasons for this is that the image of indigenous cultures fits well into the 'ethnic' category of western thought.

### **General Factors Related to the Rise of Multiculturalism**

Amongst other structural changes taking place in the 1980s, we have to consider decentralization policies. Decentralization implies an administrative reorganization according to regional or local specificities. The State grants more political autonomy to local communities, including, of course, the indigenous communities.

Another factor that comes along towards the end of the 1980 is the development of democracy in the region. As hard and authoritarian regimes are more and more criticized, there is also a transition from representative democracy towards 'participative' democracy.



According to this model, every sector of national society, even the smallest minorities (there are 84 ethnic groups in Colombia, representing only 1,3% of the national population) should be able to participate in the politics that affect them. This system actually gives a more important, political role to minority movements. Moreover, ethnic groups are supported by public opinion and by national and international NGOs (Gros 2000).

During the 1980-90s the circulation of goods and information increases. Globalised neoliberalism plays an important role in the establishment of the new multiculturalist ideology because it encourages the opening of borders so that markets could be as free as possible. Local populations have to adapt to the arrival of new objects, images and information coming from very distant and various places. Markets impose the acceptance of goods and information coming from other countries and other 'cultures'.

As communication and transportation technologies improve, local groups are influenced more and more by global tendencies, which are mostly created in the rich countries. Some of these tendencies are, for example, the values of 'open-mindedness', tolerance, respect of Human Rights, protection of minorities, conservation of traditional patrimony, environmentalism, or the preservation of biological and cultural diversity. The indigenous and pro-indigenous movements take advantage of those tendencies and receive aids of different sorts (money, information, lobbying) from international organizations working on those topics (human rights, environment, etc). Besides, indigenous communities can now have access to new communication technologies in order to let the (western) world know about their situation and their demands. Identity construction of ethnic groups happens thus on a global arena and international organizations as well as transnational media are very important actors in this construction.

In this way, toward the beginning of the 1990s, indigenous elites (or those who were most in contact with 'white' intellectuals and familiar with western values) begin to present their communities to the national and the international community as 'cultures' which preserve the environment and which can propose models of sustainable development quite different from the destructive means utilized by capitalism (Gros 2000, Ulloa 2004). They are also presented as 'traditional' and 'ancestral' cultures with spiritual and alternative ways of thinking that fascinate the westerners (Sarrazin 2006).

As we can see, cultural factors must also be taken into consideration. As we know, cultural and political changes are always interrelated. The new multiculturalist policies and definitions of national identity come along with cultural changes which withhold them and legitimize them. It is not a coincidence if the praise of the 'ethnic' alterity by the upper classes takes place in the same period as New Age-type ideas gain popularity, especially in those upper classes.

New Age ideology is as globalised as environmentalism. It is a perfect example of globalisation because it is basically a western invention, very much a North-American invention that has spread all over the world and has been reinterpreted and adapted to local realities in every country. In this paper I've been talking about intellectual elites and their discourses on nationalism and ethnicity. The idea I'd like to add here is that the elites who define the new official national identity and the construction of ethnic images belong to the social group that is most influenced by New Age-type thinking.

During my fieldwork in Colombia, when I have interviewed members of the elites and analyzed public discourses on 'indigenous cultures' I have been surprised to see the similarity between what the elites say, their multiple references to typical New Age-type ideas and some of the main principles on which multiculturalism is based. For instance, people I came across with talk about subjects like 'cultural diversity', 'open-mindedness', the need to go back to traditional life or to be in contact with nature 'like Indians do', the importance of respecting ethnic minorities and of listening to what they can tell us, etc. The globalised version of New Age is a set of beliefs where multiculturalism is praised (although the word 'multiculturalism' is rarely mentioned). According to New Age, different cultures and religions should be respected and preserved, and 'we', as 'westerners' (yes, Colombian elites consider themselves as 'westerners'), should be open to everything the Indians can say because they can teach us important things. Colombian New Agers (the term 'New Agers' is just a general denomination I use for convenience) are also very aware of the fact that ethnic minorities have suffered from racism, discrimination and genocide. Some of them think that we must support those 'ill-treated cultures'. New Agers also criticize very often 'modernity and the western culture', calling it a materialist and destructive culture that creates all sorts of illness and sadness and made us forget our 'inner-self' (Sarrazin 2008). 'Other cultures', on the other hand, are supposed to be kind and spiritual.

Moreover, we know how important environmental issues have been in deciding national and ethnicity policies. New Agers are typically environmentalists, almost nature worshipers, who tend to think that indigenous cultures are ‘natural-born environmentalists’ who live in harmony with nature without destroying it. According to intellectual elites (in Colombia and elsewhere) indigenous cultures are supposed to have a set of (spiritual) beliefs that lead to them to have ‘environmentalist’ practices.

The praise of diversity, as we saw, is fundamental to the new ‘politics of recognition’. As Taylor (1993) showed, this is very much related to individualism, as people claim their right to be different, to have a unique identity, at a personal or a collective level. It is not surprising that individualism is also fundamental in New Age thinking. New Agers define themselves as unique individuals, claiming their right to construct their own identity, and searching for their own happiness and for the answers to their spiritual questions. They are not supposed to follow a sect (believing without belonging, as Davie [1990] said); as individuals, they take bits and pieces of ‘different cultures’ to construct their own temporal credos. Thus, for New Agers, diversity is very important as a source of teachings and personal identity. That resembles closely to national identity discourses that I mentioned before such ‘indigenous cultures must be respected and their knowledge must be taken in consideration’ or ‘there should be more intercultural exchanges because that is a way to enrich our own culture’.

The fact of having a diverse country with many traditional ethnic groups from which ‘we’ can learn and enrich ourselves is now seen as an important source of wealth and national pride. As some one told me: ‘the Europeans, they have to go to the museums or abroad to be in contact with ethnic groups. But us, we have them right here, in our country, that’s a good thing for us!’. Actual nationalist discourses say that cultural diversity is a source of wealth for the country. Likewise, for New Agers, cultural diversity is a source of wealth for them as ‘western’ individuals.

‘Tribal’ or ‘ethnic cultures’ are supposed to have sophisticated belief systems that are worth studying and preserving. The diffusion of such ideas about ‘ethnic cultures’ is partly due to the activism of some anthropologists and pro-indigenous intellectuals (foreigners and local elites). However, in their logic, it is implicitly or explicitly said that what is praised is the ‘pure native culture’. Let’s recall that the ideal subject for traditional anthropologist was

generally a 'tribe' or a 'culture' as far from western culture as possible, a culture as *something* separated from 'other cultures'. Moreover, that ideal 'indigenous culture' is supposed to be 'traditional', meaning that it should be as it was supposed to be *in the past* (archeological accounts are important guides for that matter. See for example Galinier and Molinié, 2006). New Agers have taken many of those ideas from the anthropological literature, mixing it environmentalist and other types of discourses, to construct their image of the 'indigenous culture'.

### **The Idealized Other. Some Conclusions**

To summarize the striking difference between discourses in the past and discourses today: If cultural and racial difference was considered a problem for the unity of the Nation, it is now a source of national pride. If being different from 'western civilization' was to be avoided in the past, now that difference is enhanced. If the project before was to civilize and westernize those 'tribes', now westernization is supposed to be a bad thing as it means 'contamination' and thus destruction of those 'ancestral cultures'.

In the discourses that have been analyzed, there are usually expressions such as 'real' or 'authentic' versus 'contaminated' Indians. Local elites praise indigenous cultures only as long as they are 'authentic', meaning, as long as they correspond to ideal western categories, such as 'pacific', 'ecological', 'spiritual', 'traditional', etc. What is praised is what an Indian *should be*. Likewise, as we saw, the new Constitution grants several advantages for indigenous communities (a principle called 'positive discrimination'), but these advantages are only given as long as the communities or the individuals are *really* indigenous. The State has had to decide who is a 'real, authentic Indian' and who is not based on some criteria which, in the end, come from western thinking. Anthropologists are deeply responsible for this phenomenon as the State relies on their expertise to take such decisions.

The category 'indigenous culture (which is central in the multiculturalist logic), actually imposes a mould that Indians are supposed to fit in in order to be recognized, respected and appreciated, and in order to benefit from multiculturalist policies. This has the consequence of excluding all those Indians who do not fit into the mould, even though multiculturalist policies pretend to be the antithesis of exclusion.

What I have observed during my fieldwork is that middle and upper class people actually despise all those Indians who have been ‘contaminated’, which means, probable, the majority of them. In Colombia, the ideal Indian is very clearly a construction in the minds of the elites who are the first ones to have access to globalised trends coming notably from the North. Indeed, the people who are most in contact with western trends are the ones who have the most positive images of native cultures and who speak most frequently about the modernity crisis. This is a phenomenon observed in many other ‘third-world’ countries (see Amselle 2008, Deliège 2008). It is those ‘westernized’ elites, as agents of the State or as simple consumers with New Age-type interests, who have the right to judge and decide who the real Indian is.

In this logic, the ‘real Indian’ is frequently related to the ‘traditional and ancestral’ culture. This traditional culture, needless to say, is actually an invented tradition (Handler et Linnekin 1984, Haley & Wilcoxon 1997, Jackson 1995b). This logic exists in many other countries, particularly in Latin America: ‘real indigenous cultures’ are the ones that stay as they were in the past. This is a process which has been named by some authors, such as Baez-Jorge (2001), as the ‘archaeologisation’ of indigenous cultures.

Whether it be New Age-type thinking (which is now diffused everywhere, in everyday life), government agents or NGOs, they all look for the ‘authentic’ Indian, the one that has not been ‘contaminated’ by western culture, the one that stays traditional.

This also implies that the ‘intercultural exchanges’ and the ‘enrichment’ from other cultures can only go in a single way. It is the ‘whites’ who can ‘enrich themselves’ by learning from ‘other cultures’, but the Indians must not change their traditions through cultural exchanges, nor be ‘contaminated’ by ‘white culture’. If westerners can change and evolve (it is, in fact, one of our fundamental values), the multiculturalist logic forbids indigenous peoples to do the same.

We saw that new national identity discourses actually imagine the country as ‘diverse’, an image that conforms to *à la mode* globalised, western trends. This implies a somewhat disregarded construction of social and cultural boundaries (taking the concept of ‘boundaries’ in the sense that Barth [1998] proposed it). Indeed, people now imagine many cultural or ethnic boundaries within the country. In this new configuration, the ‘whites’ have the right to

trespass those boundaries. The trespassing of old social and cultural boundaries is nowadays one of the main principles of globalisation and a major theme in contemporary culture, as we can see, for instance, in advertising ('beyond boundaries', 'break away from...'). But for ethnic communities, those boundaries are not to be trespassed; on the contrary, those boundaries are there to 'contain' or to 'confine' them because they define how the indigenous culture should be and where it should remain in time. Any trespassing behaviour of the ideal cultural border will be punished with scorn and exclusion from social advantages.

Boundaries that separate indigenous from non-indigenous become boundaries that separate the authentic from the spurious, the pure from the contaminated, thus generating the exclusion of all those who do not conform to the western-globalised 'ethnic' category.

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