

Introduction

HOW MANY TIMES, since I left Lebanon in 1976 to live in France, have people asked me, with the best intentions in the world, whether I felt “more French” or “more Lebanese”? And I always give the same answer: “Both!” I say that not in the interests of fairness or balance, but because any other answer would be a lie. What makes me myself rather than anyone else is the very fact that I am poised between two countries, two or three languages and several cultural traditions. It is precisely this that defines my identity. Would I exist more authentically if I cut off a part of myself?

To those who ask the question, I patiently explain that I was born in Lebanon and lived there until I was 27; that Arabic is my mother tongue; that it was in Arabic translation that I first read Dumas and Dickens and *Gulliver's Travels*; and that it was in my native village, the village of my ancestors, that I experienced the pleasures of childhood and heard some of the stories that were later to inspire my novels. How could I

forget all that? How could I cast it aside? On the other hand, I have lived for 22 years on the soil of France; I drink her water and wine; every day my hands touch her ancient stones; I write my books in her language; never again will she be a foreign country to me.

So am I half French and half Lebanese? Of course not. Identity can't be compartmentalised. You can't divide it up into halves or thirds or any other separate segments. I haven't got several identities: I've got just one, made up of many components in a mixture that is unique to me, just as other people's identity is unique to them as individuals.

Sometimes, after I've been giving a detailed account of exactly why I lay claim to all my affiliations, someone comes and pats me on the shoulder and says "Of course, of course — but what do you really feel, deep down inside?"

For a long time I found this oft-repeated question amusing, but it no longer makes me smile. It seems to reflect a view of humanity which, though it is widespread, is also in my opinion dangerous. It presupposes that "deep down inside" everyone there is just one affiliation that really matters, a kind of "fundamental truth" about each individual, an "essence" determined once and for all at birth, never to change thereafter. As if the rest, all the rest — a person's whole journey through time as a free agent; the beliefs he acquires in the course of that journey; his own individual tastes, sensibilities and affinities; in short his life itself — counted for nothing. And when, as happens so often nowadays, our contemporaries are exhorted to "assert their identity," they are meant to seek within themselves that same alleged fundamental allegiance, which is often religious,

national, racial or ethnic, and having located it they are supposed to flaunt it proudly in the face of others.

Anyone who claims a more complex identity is marginalised. But a young man born in France of Algerian parents clearly carries within him two different allegiances or "belongings," and he ought to be allowed to use both. For the sake of argument I refer to two "belongings," but in fact such a youth's personality is made up of many more ingredients. Within him, French, European and other western influences mingle with Arab, Berber, African, Muslim and other sources, whether with regard to language, beliefs, family relationships or to tastes in cooking and the arts. This represents an enriching and fertile experience if the young man in question feels free to live it fully — if he is encouraged to accept it in all its diversity. But it can be traumatic if whenever he claims to be French other people look on him as a traitor or renegade, and if every time he emphasises his ties with Algeria and its history, culture and religion he meets with incomprehension, mistrust or even outright hostility.

The situation is even more difficult on the other side of the Rhine. I'm thinking of the case of a Turk who might have been born near Frankfurt 30 years ago and who has always lived in Germany. He speaks and writes German better than the language of his ancestors. Yet for the society of his adopted country he isn't a German, while for that of his origins he is no longer completely a Turk. Common sense dictates that he should be able to claim both allegiances. But at present neither the law nor people's attitudes allows him to accept his composite identity tranquilly.

I have quoted the first examples that came to mind, but I could have used many others. For instance, that of someone born in Belgrade of a Serbian mother and a Croatian father. That of a Hutu woman married to a Tutsi, or vice versa. Or that of an American with a black father and a Jewish mother.

It may be said that these are special cases. I don't agree. The handful of people I've cited are not the only ones with a complex identity. Every individual is a meeting ground for many different allegiances, and sometimes these loyalties conflict with one another and confront the person who harbours them with difficult choices. In some cases the situation is obvious at a glance; others need to be looked at more closely.

Is there any citizen of present-day Europe who doesn't sense a kind of tug-of-war, an inevitably ever-increasing conflict between on the one hand his affiliation to an ancient country like France, Spain, Denmark or England, and, on the other, his allegiance to the continental entity that is in the process of forming? And there are many dedicated "Europeans," from the Basque country to Scotland, who at the same time feel a strong and fundamental attachment to a particular region and its people, its history and its language. Can anyone in the United States even today assess his place in society without reference to his earlier connections, whether they be African, Hispanic, Irish, Jewish, Italian, Polish or other?

That said, I'm prepared to admit that the first examples I cited are to a certain extent special. All the people concerned in them are arenas for allegiances currently in violent conflict with one another: they live in a sort of frontier zone criss-crossed by ethnic, religious and other fault lines. But by virtue

of this situation — peculiar rather than privileged — they have a special role to play in forging links, eliminating misunderstandings, making some parties more reasonable and others less belligerent, smoothing out difficulties, seeking compromise. Their role is to act as bridges, go-betweens, mediators between the various communities and cultures. And that is precisely why their dilemma is so significant: if they themselves cannot sustain their multiple allegiances, if they are continually being pressed to take sides or ordered to stay within their own tribe, then all of us have reason to be uneasy about the way the world is going.

I talk of their being "pressed" and "ordered" — but by whom? Not just by fanatics and xenophobes of all kinds, but also by you and me, by each and all of us. And we do so precisely because of habits of thought and expression deeply rooted in us all; because of a narrow, exclusive, bigoted, simplistic attitude that reduces identity in all its many aspects to one single affiliation, and one that is proclaimed in anger.

I feel like shouting aloud that this is how murderers are made — it's a recipe for massacres! That may sound somewhat extreme, but in the pages that follow I shall try to explain what I mean.

IN THE NAME OF IDENTITY

calmly, patiently and fairly as possible, without resorting to jargon or unwarranted shortcuts.

What's known as an identity card carries the holder's family name, given name, date and place of birth, photograph, a list of certain physical features, the holder's signature and sometimes also his fingerprints — a whole array of details designed to prove without a shadow of doubt or confusion that the bearer of the document is so-and-so, and that amongst all the millions of other human beings there isn't one — not even his double or his twin brother — for whom he could be mistaken.

My identity is what prevents me from being identical to anybody else.

Defined in this way the word identity reflects a fairly precise idea — one which in theory should not give rise to confusion. Do we really need lengthy arguments to prove that there are not and cannot be two identical individuals? Even if in the near future someone manages, as we fear they may, to "clone" human beings, the clones would at best be identical only at the time of their "birth"; as soon as they started to live they would start being different.

Each individual's identity is made up of a number of elements, and these are clearly not restricted to the particulars set down in official records. Of course, for the great majority these factors include allegiance to a religious tradition; to a nationality — sometimes two; to a profession, an institution, or a particular social milieu. But the list is much longer than that; it is virtually unlimited. A person may feel a more or less strong attachment to a province, a village, a neighbourhood, a

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clan, a professional team or one connected with sport, a group of friends, a union, a company, a parish, a community of people with the same passions, the same sexual preferences, the same physical handicaps, or who have to deal with the same kind of pollution or other nuisance.

Of course, not all these allegiances are equally strong, at least at any given moment. But none is entirely insignificant, either. All are components of personality — we might almost call them "genes of the soul" so long as we remember that most of them are not innate.

While each of these elements may be found separately in many individuals, the same combination of them is never encountered in different people, and it's this that gives every individual richness and value and makes each human being unique and irreplaceable.

It can happen that some incident, a fortunate or unfortunate accident, even a chance encounter, influences our sense of identity more strongly than any ancient affiliation. Take the case of a Serbian man and a Muslim woman who met 20 years ago in a café in Sarajevo, fell in love and got married. They can never perceive their identity in the same way as does a couple that is entirely Serbian or entirely Muslim; their view of religion and mother country will never again be what it was before. Both partners will always carry within them the ties their parents handed down at birth, but these ties will henceforth be perceived differently and accorded a different importance.

Let us stay in Sarajevo and carry out an imaginary survey there. Let us observe a man of about 50 whom we see in the street.

In 1980 or thereabouts he might have said proudly and without hesitation, "I'm a Yugoslavian!" Questioned more closely, he could have said he was a citizen of the Federal Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and, incidentally, that he came from a traditionally Muslim family.

If you had met the same man twelve years later, when the war was at its height, he might have answered automatically and emphatically, "I'm a Muslim!" He might even have grown the statutory beard. He would quickly have added that he was a Bosnian, and he would not have been pleased to be reminded of how proudly he once called himself a Yugoslavian.

If he was stopped and questioned now, he would say first of all that he was a Bosnian, then that he was a Muslim. He'd tell you he was just on his way to the mosque, but he'd also want you to know that his country is part of Europe and that he hopes it will one day be a member of the Union.

How will this same person want to define himself if we meet him in the same place 20 years hence? Which of his affiliations will he put first? The European? The Islamic? The Bosnian? Something else again? The Balkan connection, perhaps?

I shan't risk trying to predict. All these factors are part of his identity. He was born to a family that was traditionally Muslim; the language he speaks links him to the Southern Slavs, who were once joined together in a single state, but are so no longer; he lives on land which belonged sometimes to the Ottoman and sometimes to the Austrian Empire, and which played a part in the major dramas of European history. In every era one or other of his affiliations swelled up, so to speak, in

such a way as to eclipse all the others and to appear to represent his whole identity. In the course of his life he'll have heard all kinds of fables. He'll have been told he was a proletarian pure and simple. Or a Yugoslavian through and through. Or, more recently, a Muslim. For a few difficult months he'll even have been made to think he had more in common with the inhabitants of Kabul than with those of Trieste!

In every age there have been people who considered that an individual had one overriding affiliation so much more important in every circumstance to all others that it might legitimately be called his "identity." For some it was the nation, for others religion or class. But one has only to look at the various conflicts being fought out all over the world today to realise that no one allegiance has absolute supremacy. Where people feel their faith is threatened, it is their religious affiliation that seems to reflect their whole identity. But if their mother tongue or their ethnic group is in danger, then they fight ferociously against their own co-religionists. Both the Turks and the Kurds are Muslims, though they speak different languages; but does that make the war between them any less bloody? Hutus and Tutsis alike are Catholics, and they speak the same language, but has that stopped them slaughtering one another? Czechs and Slovaks are all Catholics too, but does that help them live together?

I cite all these examples to underline the fact that while there is always a certain hierarchy among the elements that go to make up individual identities, that hierarchy is not immutable; it changes with time, and in so doing brings about fundamental changes in behaviour.

Moreover, the ties that count in people's lives are not always the allegedly major allegiances arising out of language, complexion, nationality, class or religion. Take the case of an Italian homosexual in the days of fascism. I imagine that for the man himself that particular aspect of his personality had up till then been important, but not more so than his professional activity, his political choices or his religious beliefs. But suddenly state repression swoops down on him and he feels threatened with humiliation, deportation or death. It's the recollection of certain books I've read and films I've seen that leads me to choose this example. This man, who a few years earlier was a patriot, perhaps even a nationalist, was no longer able to exult at the sight of the Italian army marching by; he may even have come to wish for its defeat. Because of the persecution to which he was subjected, his sexual preferences came to outweigh his other affiliations, among them even the nationalism which at that time was at its height. Only after the war, in a more tolerant Italy, would our man have felt entirely Italian once more.

The identity a person lays claim to is often based, in reverse, on that of his enemy. An Irish Catholic differentiates himself from Englishmen in the first place in terms of religion, but vis-à-vis the monarchy he will declare himself a republican; and while he may not know much Gaelic, at least he will speak his own form of English. A Catholic leader who spoke with an Oxford accent might seem almost a traitor.

One could find dozens of other examples to show how complex is the mechanism of identity: a complexity sometimes benign, but sometimes tragic. I shall quote various instances in the pages that follow, some briefly and others in

more detail. Most of them relate to the region I myself come from — the Middle East, the Mediterranean, the Arab world, and first and foremost Lebanon. For that is a country where you are constantly having to question yourself about your affiliations, your origins, your relationships with others, and your possible place in the sun or in the shade.

or otherwise, like collective crimes of passion, regrettable but comprehensible, and anyway inevitable because they are "inherent in human nature."

The *laissez-tuer* attitude has already done great harm, and the realism invoked to justify it is in my opinion a misnomer. Unfortunately the "tribal" notion of identity is still the one most commonly accepted everywhere, not only amongst fanatics. But many ideas that have been commonly accepted for centuries are no longer admissible today, among them the "natural" ascendancy of men over women, the hierarchy between races, and even, closer to home, apartheid and the various other kinds of segregation. Torture, too, was for a long time regarded as a "normal" element in the execution of justice. For centuries, slavery seemed like a fact of life, and great minds of the past took care not to call it into question.

Then new ideas gradually managed to establish themselves: that every man had rights that must be defined and respected; that women should have the same rights as men; that nature too deserved to be protected; that the whole human race has interests in common in more and more areas — the environment, peace, international exchanges, the battle against the great scourges of disease and natural disaster; that others might and even should interfere in the internal affairs of countries where fundamental human rights are abused. And so on.

In other words, ideas that have hitherto prevailed throughout history are not necessarily those that ought to prevail in times to come. When new facts emerge we need to reconsider our attitudes and habits. Sometimes, when such facts emerge too rapidly, our mental attitudes can't keep up

with them and we find ourselves trying to fight fires by pouring oil on them.

But in the age of globalisation and of the ever-accelerating intermingling of elements in which we are all caught up, a new concept of identity is needed, and needed urgently. We cannot be satisfied with forcing billions of bewildered human beings to choose between excessive assertion of their identity and the loss of their identity altogether, between fundamentalism and disintegration. But that is the logical consequence of the prevailing attitude on the subject. If our contemporaries are not encouraged to accept their multiple affiliations and allegiances; if they cannot reconcile their need for identity with an open and unprejudiced tolerance of other cultures; if they feel they have to choose between denial of the self and denial of the other — then we shall be bringing into being legions of the lost and hordes of bloodthirsty madmen.

But let us return for a moment to some examples I quoted at the beginning of this book. A man with a Serbian mother and a Croatian father, and who manages to accept his dual affiliation, will never take part in any form of ethnic "cleansing." A man with a Hutu mother and a Tutsi father, if he can accept the two "tributaries" that brought him into the world, will never be a party to butchery or genocide. And neither the Franco-Algerian lad, nor the young man of mixed German and Turkish origin whom I mentioned earlier, will ever be on the side of the fanatics if they succeed in living peacefully in the context of their own complex identity.

Here again it would be a mistake to see such examples as extreme or unusual. Wherever there are groups of human

beings living side by side who differ from one another in religion, colour, language, ethnic origin or nationality; wherever there are tensions, more or less longstanding, more or less violent, between immigrants and local populations, Blacks and Whites, Catholics and Protestants, Jews and Arabs, Hindus and Sikhs, Lithuanians and Russians, Serbs and Albanians, Greeks and Turks, English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians, Flemings and Walloons, Chinese and Malays — yes, wherever there is a divided society, there are men and women bearing within them contradictory allegiances, people who live on the frontier between opposed communities, and whose very being might be said to be traversed by ethnic or religious or other fault lines.

We are not dealing with a handful of marginal people. There are thousands, millions of such men and women, and there will be more and more of them. They are frontier-dwellers by birth, or through the changes and chances of life, or by deliberate choice, and they can influence events and affect their course one way or the other. Those who can accept their diversity fully will hand on the torch between communities and cultures, will be a kind of mortar joining together and strengthening the societies in which they live. On the other hand, those who cannot accept their own diversity may be among the most virulent of those prepared to kill for the sake of identity, attacking those who embody that part of themselves which they would like to see forgotten. History contains many examples of such self-hatred.

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NO DOUBT I SPEAK like a migrant and a member of a minority. But I think what I say reflects a sensibility that is more and more widely shared by our contemporaries. Isn't it a characteristic of the age we live in that it has made everyone in a way a migrant and a member of a minority? We all have to live in a universe bearing little resemblance to the place where we were born: we must all learn other languages, other modes of speech, other codes; and we all have the feeling that our own identity, as we have conceived of it since we were children, is threatened.

Many have left their native land, and many, though they haven't left it, can no longer recognise it. This may be partly due to the natural homesickness that is a permanent feature of the human soul; but it is also caused by an accelerated process of evolution which has made us travel further in 30 years than people used to go in many generations.

So to be a migrant no longer means merely belonging to a category of people who have been forced out of their

modernise themselves the more completely in harmony they feel with their culture. Only those among them who reject modernity find themselves out of touch.

For the rest of the world's inhabitants, all those born in the failed cultures, openness to change and modernity presents itself differently. For the Chinese, Africans, Japanese, Indians and American Indians, as for Greeks, Russians, Iranians, Arabs, Jews and Turks, modernisation has constantly meant the abandoning of part of themselves. Even though it has sometimes been embraced with enthusiasm, it has never been adopted without a certain bitterness, without a feeling of humiliation and defection. Without a piercing doubt about the dangers of assimilation. Without a profound identity crisis.

5

WHEN MODERNITY BEARS THE MARK OF "THE OTHER" it is not surprising if some people confronting it brandish symbols of atavism to assert their difference. This reaction may be seen today among some Muslims, men and women, but the phenomenon is not peculiar to one culture or religion.

For example, it wasn't until the Bolshevik revolution that Russia managed at last to abandon the old Julian calendar. Changing to the Gregorian calendar made people feel they were accepting the fact that in the almost immemorial war between Orthodoxy and Catholicism, the latter had had the last word.

That was only a symbol, you say? Everything in history is expressed in symbols — greatness and degradation, victory and defeat, happiness, prosperity, want. And above all identity. For a change to be accepted it isn't enough that it accords with the spirit of the age. It must also pass muster on the symbolic plane, without making those who are being asked to change feel they are betraying themselves.

In recent years, in France, I've noticed some of my closest friends tending to speak of globalisation as if it were a catastrophe. They are not as thrilled as they used to be at the idea of the "global village"; they are cool about the Internet and the latest advances in communications. This is because they now see globalisation as synonymous with Americanisation, and they wonder what future there will be for France in an increasingly standardised world, and what will become of France's language, culture, prestige, influence and way of life. They are vexed when a fast food store opens in their neighbourhood, they inveigh against Hollywood, CNN, Disney and Microsoft, and comb the newspapers for anything resembling an Anglicism.

I use this example because I think it shows how even in the West, even in a developed country universally respected and with a flourishing culture, modernisation becomes suspect as soon as it is perceived as a Trojan horse introduced by another culture that is both alien and overbearing.

It is all the easier to imagine the reactions of the various non-Western peoples whose every step, for many generations, has already been accompanied by a sense of defeat and self-betrayal. They have had to admit that their ways were out of date, that everything they produced was worthless compared with what was produced by the West, that their attachment to traditional medicine was superstitious, their military glory just a memory, the great men they had been brought up to revere — the poets, scholars, soldiers, saints and travellers — disregarded by the rest of the world, their religion suspected of barbarism, their language now studied only by a handful of specialists, while they had to learn other people's languages if they wanted to survive and work and remain in contact with

the rest of mankind. Whenever they speak with a Westerner it is always in his language, almost never in their own. There are millions of people south and east of the Mediterranean who can speak English, French, Spanish and Italian. How many Englishmen, Frenchmen, Spaniards or Italians have thought it worthwhile to study Arabic or Turkish?

Yes, at every turn they meet with disappointment, disillusion or humiliation. How can their personalities fail to be damaged? How can they not feel their identities are threatened? That they are living in a world which belongs to others and obeys rules made by others, a world where they are orphans, strangers, intruders or pariahs? What can be done to prevent some of them feeling they have been bereft of everything and have nothing more to lose, so that they come, like Samson, to pray to God for the temple to collapse on top of them and their enemies alike?

I don't know if many hard-liners argue like this consciously. But they don't really need to. A wound doesn't have to be described in order to be felt.

It was towards the end of the eighteenth century that the Muslims living around the Mediterranean began to realise they were being marginalised and that there was a growing gulf between them and the West. It's never easy to date something as vague as a realisation, but it is generally accepted that it was after Napoleon's Egyptian campaign in 1799 that a number of people, men of letters and politicians alike, began asking themselves questions such as: Why have we got so left behind? Why is the West so advanced? How did they do it? What must we do to catch up?

WHAT THE CASE OF MOHAMMED ALI SHOWS is that in the Arab world modernisation was soon regarded as necessary, perhaps even a matter of urgency. But it has never been seen as something to be embarked upon calmly and without undue haste. Not only had the process to be carried out at top speed, whereas Europe was able to take into account its own cultural, social and religious hang-ups, but it also had to be brought about in the face of an insatiable and often contemptuous West that was itself expanding rapidly.

I have referred to Egypt, but I might just as easily have cited China, which at the same period was suffering under the infamous "Opium Wars," fought in the name of free trade because China refused to open itself up to the lucrative traffic in drugs. The fact is that the rise of the West, which made an incomparable contribution to the good of all mankind, also had its more shady aspects. The event that created the modern world was also an agent of destruction. The West, brimming over with energy, conscious of its new

strength, convinced of its own superiority, had set out to conquer the world in all directions and in every field at once, spreading the benefits of medicine and new techniques as well as ideals of liberty. But at the same time it looted, massacred and brought people into subjection, arousing as much resentment as fascination everywhere.

I have briefly recalled these truths in order to underline the fact that it has never been easy for an Arab — or an Indian, a Madagascan or an Indochinese — to subscribe fully, without reservations, anguish or regrets, to the culture of the West. Many apprehensions and grievances have had to be overcome; sometimes pride has had to be swallowed or subtle compromises invented. It soon became impossible to wonder merely, as in the days of Mohammed Ali, "How can we modernise ourselves?" More complicated questions inevitably arose: "How can we modernise ourselves without losing our identity?"; "How can we assimilate Western culture without denying our own?"; "How can we acquire the West's knowledge without leaving ourselves at its mercy?"

The time had passed for the systematic and relatively unself-conscious westernisation practised by the ruler of Egypt. He was a man of another age. As in seventeenth-century France, where they had no hesitation about entrusting the government to the Italian Giulio Mazarini, or in eighteenth-century Russia, where a German woman could mount the throne of the Tsars, the generation of Mohammed Ali had thought not in terms of nationality but in terms of dynasties and states. He was himself of Albanian origin and there was no more reason why he should entrust the command of the Egyptian army to an Arab than to a Bosnian or a

would gradually converge, the former becoming ever more social, the latter ever less interventionist, until they finally fused into one. Similarly it was predicted that religions would eventually all come together in one great cosy syncretism.

We know now that history never follows the path we predict. This is not because history is by nature erratic, unfathomable or indecipherable, or because human reason cannot comprehend it. It is precisely because history is not just what men make of it but rather the sum of all their individual and collective acts, all their words, communications, confrontations, sufferings, hatreds and affinities. The more numerous and free the humans who make history, the more complex and difficult to understand is the total result of all their actions, and the less amenable to simplistic explanations.

History is continually advancing along an infinite number of paths. Does some meaning nevertheless emerge? Until we reach "The End" — if *that* means anything — we shall probably never know.

Will the future be that of our hopes or that of our nightmares? Will it consist of freedom or slavery? Will science ultimately be the means of our redemption or the instrument of our destruction? Will we have been the inspired assistants of a Creator or no more than mere sorcerers' apprentices? Are we moving towards a better world or towards "the best of all possible worlds"?

And, to begin with, what do the coming decades have in store for us? A "war of civilisations" or the peace of the "global village"?

I firmly believe that the future is not written down anywhere. The future will be what we make it.

"But what about fate?" some will ask, alluding to the fact that I'm an oriental. My usual reply is that fate is to man as the wind is to a sailing boat. The helmsman cannot decide the direction or the force of the wind, but he can manipulate his own sails. And that can make an enormous difference. The same wind that may kill a mariner who is inexperienced, rash or merely unlucky will bring another safe to harbour.

Almost the same can be said of the "wind" of globalisation that is now sweeping the world. It would be absurd to try to stop it, but if we navigate skilfully, steering a steady course and avoiding reefs, we can reach haven safe and sound.

But the marine metaphor is too limited. I want to express myself more clearly. There is no point in asking ourselves whether the great technological progress that has been accelerating in recent years and that has profoundly changed our lives, especially in the field of communications and access to knowledge, is a good thing or a bad thing as far as we are concerned. It isn't the subject of a referendum. It's a fact. But the way it affects our future depends largely upon ourselves.

Some people might be tempted to reject it all out of hand, taking refuge in their "identity" and anathematising in one and the same breath globalisation, the hegemony of the West and the intolerable United States. Others, conversely, would be ready to accept everything, to swallow it all so indiscriminately that they end up not knowing where they are, where they are going or what the world is coming to! The two attitudes are diametrically opposite, but both end up in resignation. Both of them — the bitter and the cloying, the surly and the silly — are based on the premise that the

world moves forward like a train on its rails and that nothing can make it alter its course.

I think differently. It seems to me that the wind of globalisation, while it certainly could lead us to disaster, could also lead us to success. While the new means of communication that all too swiftly bring us close to one another may bring us by way of reaction to stress our differences, they also make us aware of our common fate. This makes me think that current developments might in the long run favour the emergence of a new approach to the idea of identity. Identity would then be seen as the sum of all our allegiances, and, within it, allegiance to the human community itself would become increasingly important, until one day it would become the chief allegiance, though without destroying our many individual affiliations. Of course I wouldn't go as far as to say that the wind of globalisation *must* blow us in that direction, but it seems to me it makes such an attitude less difficult to imagine. And, at the same time, necessary.

3

"**M**EN ARE MORE THE SONS OF THEIR TIME than of their fathers," wrote the historian Marc Bloch. The maxim has probably always been true, but never more so than now. There is no need to insist further on how, in the last few decades, things have been moving ever faster. Which of our contemporaries has not sometimes felt he has witnessed in a couple of years changes that in the past would have been spread over a century? The oldest among us even have to make an effort to recall what their outlook was like in their childhood, and to do so they have to set aside the habits they have acquired since, together with new products and tools they cannot now do without. As for the young, they often haven't the slightest idea what their grandparents' way of life was like, let alone that of earlier generations.

In fact, we are all infinitely closer to our contemporaries than to our ancestors. Would it be an exaggeration to say I have much more in common with a random passerby in a street in Prague or Seoul or San Francisco than with my own