

5 The Individual in the Global Field

5.1 Questions for *A Small Place*

1. Why does Kincaid use second person narration? Who is the implied audience?
2. What is the relationship of the narrator to the place she is describing?
3. What kind of book is this? Is it a novel? A travelogue? How is its meaning shaped by the generic category in which it is placed?
4. What is the significance of the title?
5. How does this story of “a small place” represent and/or critique the process of globalization?

5.2 Defining Identity

Identity is people's source of meaning and experience. For individuals or communities, it involves a process of construction of meaning based on a cultural attribute or a set of cultural attributes that are given priority over other sources of meaning.

Meaning refers to symbolic identification of the purpose of her or his action by an individual or a group, presumably anchored in one of these attributes

Three forms of identity building.

Legitimizing identity >> *civil society*

Resistance Identity. Some actors may be in positions or living in conditions that are devalued or stigmatized by the logic of the dominant institutions in society.

Accordingly, they try to build trenches of resistance and survival on the basis of principles different from those permeating society.

Project Identity. Some individuals on the basis of whatever cultural materials are available to them try to build a new identity that redefines their position in society and they use this act to try to redefine the overall social structure

5.3 Globalization and Identity

The growing importance of communal identity?

5.3.1 Religious Fundamentalism: the construction of a collective identity by identifying individual behaviour and society's institutions to norms derived from God's law, interpreted by a particular authority that intermediates between Good and humanity.

5.3.2 Ethnic nationalism

Kosaku Yoshino: *Cultural nationalism aims to regenerate the national community by creating, preserving, or strengthening a people's cultural identity when it is felt to be lacking or threatened.*

Some facts about Québec nationalism

- Has been present since early in the 19th century
- Contemporary forms of nationalism are usually understood to develop in the 1950s and 1960s.
- Independence parties contested elections first in 1966
- 1968 *Parti québécois* was formed
- PQ obtained 23% of the vote in the 1970 election, 31% in the 1973 election and first came to power on November 15, 1976 where it remained until 1985
- First referendum was held on May 20, 1980, with the *Non* winning 59% to 41%
- PQ returned to power in 1994 with the second referendum occurring on October 30, 1995 with the *Non* winning by 50.4% to 49.6%

5.3.4 Transnationalism and Identity

1. Migration is not particularly unique to the most recent phase of globalization.
2. An increase in the diversity of peoples living together as a consequence of more recent migration trends.

Chambers writes: “When the ‘Third World’ is no longer maintained at a distance ‘out there’ but begins to appear ‘in here’, when the encounter between diverse cultures, histories, religions and languages no longer occurs along the peripheries, in the ‘contact zones’ . . . but emerges at the center of our daily lives, in the cities and cultures of the so-called ‘advanced’ or ‘First’ World, then we can perhaps begin to talk of a significant interruption in the preceding sense of our own lives, cultures, languages and futures.’ (P. 2).

What then is the impact on the self and on identity, on how one gives meaning to the world?

1. Identity is less solid, less definite, and less continuous.
2. Identities can be adopted and discarded more easily than in the past. Identity is formed on the move.
3. Identities adopted should not be too tight. They are chosen on the basis of “keeping the game short” and of avoiding long-term commitments.
4. Perhaps the potential for conflicting identities increases.

Chambers: “Our sense of belonging, our language and the myths we carry in us remain, but no longer as ‘origins’ or signs of ‘authenticity’ capable of guaranteeing the sense of our lives. They now linger on as traces, voices, memories and murmurs that are mixed in with other histories, episodes, encounters.”