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Contested Identities, Shifting Publics in a Globalized World

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*I*dentity may be one of the most contentious words of the new millennium. An Internet search produces the following modifiers for *identity: corporate, sexual, digital, public, racial, national, brand,* and even *Christian* (a U.S.-based white supremacist group). The same search finds *identity* used as a modifier for *theft, management*, and *theory.* Is it any wonder we talk about an identity crisis?

Particularly in an age of globalization and the concurrent mixing of peoples and cultures, identities and their attendant meanings and connotations have become contested at levels ranging from individual to international. Yet in this increasingly fractured world of identity formation, public relations practitioners must function as cultural intermediaries to create shared identities between products or issues and publics. For this reason, perhaps no single moment of the circuit of culture so epitomizes the challenges of international practice as the moment of identity.

This chapter examines many levels of identity—individual, group, organizational, cultural, and national—and how they interrelate. What

becomes readily apparent from this examination is how the moment of identity is inextricably intertwined with the other four moments of the circuit: You can't discuss identity without discussing how it

- Shapes and is shaped by regulation
- Is formed and maintained in representations
- Is created to achieve strategic goals
- Is consumed in a variety of ways, resulting in a wide variety of new meanings and identities

Of particular import are the consequences of multicultural and global identities on international public relations practice. But first, it's necessary to outline what we mean by identity as a constructed, rather than an essentialist, notion.

❖ CONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES

Some aspects of identity are based in physical reality, such as motherhood. For some women, motherhood is an essential part of who they are; it's a basic biological fact of their existences. But even this simple notion becomes complicated when we consider in vitro fertilization, surrogate mothers, and adoption. What does "being a mother" mean in these cases? The issue becomes more complicated yet when we step beyond essentialist considerations and examine the concept in discursive terms. Supermom, stay-at-home mom, and soccer mom are just a few of the different meanings and behavioral expectations that have grown around the concept of motherhood.

In turn, these identities inform the larger cultural construction of family. We often struggle to categorize blended families, families headed by a lesbian or gay couple, single moms, or couples who choose not to have children. These constructions don't fit the dominant discourse of family in many countries as a heterosexual couple with biologically related children.

Identities, then, are not just essentialist notions, existing as scientific, biological facts. They are also *social constructions emerging from discursive practices, and they form in relationship to something else.* Derrida (1974) proposed that identities are constructed through what they aren't, through difference and exclusion. We know what female is because it's part of a binary opposition; it's not male. In every such binary opposition, one pole has more relative power. In this case, for many societies, it's the male. But without male, female would cease to

have meaning because it exists only in relation to the other. Identity "is not the opposite of, but *depends on,* difference" (Woodward, 1997a, p. 29), or in Hall's terms, "identities are constructed through, not outside, difference" (1996, p. 4).

Identities emerge from cultural classification systems. They're marked by similarity, by placing something with a family of things, and by difference, by distinguishing something from the other members of the family. Male and female are both part of gender, but they're constituted within dominant discourse as mutually exclusive. Relational power includes the power to define who is included and who is excluded. **Binary oppositions** *provide the strongest demarcations of difference, which can lead to stereotyping as the oppositions become ultimately reductionist, ignoring the many degrees of relationship that exist between the poles.*

Within certain articulations, differences can have more relative importance, such as racial polarity during apartheid or the Rwandan genocide. Gender polarity is evident in many regulatory environments, such as certain parental leave policies in the United States that do not recognize fathers' rights or by the Japanese legislature's quick approval of Viagra, while approval for birth control pills languished until 1999, when only partial approval was granted.

In these examples difference has a negative connotation, highlighting issues of marginalization and oppression, but difference can be enabling and constructive, celebrated and enriching, as well. From travel along maritime routes, diverse musical traditions collided and created vibrant new forms, such as Brazil's Afro-reggae and New Orleans jazz. Diverse voices can create an enriched climate of discussion and support, as in India's Rural Institute for Developmental Education (RIDE) program. Bringing together village women of differing, and often mutually exclusive, castes and religious backgrounds into self-help groups, the RIDE staff empowers them to work together toward common goals, challenging the gender, caste, and religious identities and inequalities that have been imposed on them.

Subjectivity and Individual Identities

Our identity gives us our place in society; it informs us "of who we are and of how we relate to others in the world in which we live" (Woodward, 1997b, p. 1). Because we interact within a number of social systems, however, our identities are necessarily multifaceted; we assume different roles, in sociological terms. Identities stem from a number of cultural classifications, such as ethnicity, nationality, social

class, gender, and sexuality. The result is that the whole is seldom unified but remains fragmented and even conflicted.

Because identities emerge from relationships, they're always contingent, always in flux. No identity is ever fixed for all time, nor is it a process of simple linear unfolding. The identities we assume and that are assigned to us have concrete effects as identities are created and maintained in both the symbolic (i.e., how we make sense of our world) and social (i.e., how we operate in relationship to others) spheres. We choose to invest in certain identities through which we want to represent ourselves. However, such choice always operates within the socially constructed world of identities that are thrust on us. With new technology it's easier to construct new identities in cyber-space that break some of these bounds and to adopt group identities unbounded by geographic restrictions, but these identities often lack discursive power outside e-space.

Active Publics, Fluid Identities

All public relations campaigns begin by assigning an identity to target publics through segmentation. Typically, practitioners divide publics in terms of demographic and psychographic data. Weber Shandwick Scotland, representing a consortium of research, corporate, nonprofit, and government groups in Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, the United Kingdom, Germany, Belgium, and Denmark, divided publics in its Save the North Sea campaign along demographic lines:

- Commercial fishers
- Other professional mariners
- Educators and students
- Recreational boaters
- Researchers

In this case, publics were picked for their relevance to organizational goals and segmented by occupation or avocation.

SRI International, a U.S.-based nonprofit research organization with an office in Tokyo, specializes in psychographic segmentation. Their Values, Attitudes, and Lifestyles (VALS) survey segments Japanese consumers into 10 psychographic categories, such as Ryoshiki Adapters, who are concerned about both personal advancement and family and social status, and Traditional Innovators, who tend to be socially conservative, holding traditional religious beliefs. Practitioners

use these psychographic categories to determine which groups they should target for particular products or issues of concern to their organizations.

But if identity is constructed and fluid, not an essential part of physical being, then how we define publics for any campaign becomes problematic. The usual approach assumes that publics are undifferentiated individuals just waiting for organizations to group them into meaningful units—a target waiting to be hit. It supposes a transmission model of communication, in which an organization imposes identities on publics by segmenting them according to criteria important to the organization. The organization targets messages to the publics deemed of greater importance and assumes that if the targeting is based on research, results will follow. If that were the case, however, New Coke® shouldn't have failed. In the words of two public relations scholars, "This approach to publics has generated little work acknowledging publics as reflecting the will, aspirations, intentions, or relationships of human beings" (Botan & Soto, 1998, p. 25).

Publics actively create identities; they're self-actuated and self-defined. Publics are dynamic, "constructed and reconstructed through the discourses in which they participate" (Leitch & Neilson, 2001, p. 138). Because identities are constantly unfolding, publics are never concretely formed into static units: "There is no point in time at which the public is definitely constituted" (Botan & Soto, 1998, p. 38). We cannot assume that an individual fits into a single category of public, be it based on activity levels, lifestyles, or even demographics.

The consequence for organizations is that the relationships between organizations and publics are better characterized as ongoing processes of trying to find shared zones of meaning (Heath, 1993). Publics are fully vested partners in the creation of meaning, not the end point of message transmission. In practical terms, as practitioners we must be open to a more fluid construction of publics, realizing that individuals may elect to join in multiple relationships with others that form possibly conflicting opinions on an issue. We shouldn't ignore demographics, which provide some basic essentialist aspects of identity, or psychographics, which provide somewhat stereotypic measures, as long as we remember that they represent reductionist and static simplifications of a complex process. But we must also examine the situational particulars, often using qualitative methods of inquiry, such as talking to and observing publics throughout a campaign, to determine how audience members self-identify and the multiple identifications they hold of our organization. Working to ascertain the identities of publics is an ongoing campaign process, not simply a starting point.

❖ ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTITIES

Everything we've outlined concerning individual identities holds for corporate identities as well. Organizations also accumulate different, fluid identities: "Organizations create meaning through every action or inaction, every statement or silence. These multiple meanings constitute identity—not as an object, but as a mutable and dynamic process" (Motion & Leitch, 2002, p. 52). Since the 1980s, the dominant identity of IBM has gone from personal computer leader to no longer even a bit player in the PC market, from "Big Blue," which took almost paternal care of its employees over the course of their careers, to just another employer experiencing downsizing and restructuring.

An organization's identity, like an individual's, varies by context. Every interaction that an organization has with any public, internal or external, contributes to its multiple identities. Different identities for Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders) emerge from patient groups and countries where it operates, from governments and pharmaceutical companies it lobbies to improve access to healthcare, from donors it solicits for support, from employees, and from potential volunteers.

Even single individuals often hold conflicting organizational identities. For example, in a case study of State Farm Insurance, Moffitt (1994) found that depending on whether a person was referring to the company as an area employer, a claim processor, or any number of other roles, the same person could hold both positive and negative identities of the company simultaneously. Because of the importance of context, however, a crisis may crystallize a dominant identity for an organization for a period of time, such as the vilification of Enron following reports of financial wrongdoing and the heroic mold cast for New York City firefighters after the events of September 11.

Fractured Identities, Activist Publics

The identity presented by an organization is less contested and fractured by publics if it's consonant with organizational actions. IKEA has created an identity based on small-town values: practicality and egalitarianism. Company actions reinforce the identity. Headquarters of the 35-nation company remain in the same small town in a rural area of Sweden where it was founded, company executives fly budget airlines and stay in low-cost hotels, and product design is simple and practical and represents value for the money. Little wonder that in 2003 Swedes voted IKEA the second most trusted national institution,

behind only universities (Brown, 2003). Conversely, multinational corporations that work to establish a narrative of themselves as social movements, such as the Body Shop, Starbucks, and Apple, often find themselves the target of activist groups that carefully scrutinize their actions to point out any disjunctures with corporate narrative.

Activist publics are themselves organizations with fluid, conflicting identities. Although they may stand in opposition to other organizations, it's simplistic and reductionist to assume that they exist only in bipolar opposition to organizations. Their complex narratives of identity provide multiple meanings, some to gain organizational legitimacy, some to leverage power by adopting the identity of the victim, some as defenders of issues of concern that present a multitude of meanings.

The goal for practitioners becomes not to achieve consensus of meaning by dominating discourse but to manage dissensus and conflict—to realize how to adapt to diversity and difference and turn it into a strength, respecting competing systems of meaning rather than trying to co-opt them. The implications for practice deriving from this notion of relational identity are discussed more fully in chapter 11, which examines the ethical basis of international public relations.

Forging New Organizational Identities

In a world of mergers, acquisitions, partnerships, subsidiaries, sponsorships, and multinational reach, organizational identity is easily fragmented. The almost 300-year history of GlaxoSmithKline pharmaceutical company encompasses at least 17 acquisitions, three mergers, and numerous reorganizations, joint ventures, collaborations, and divestitures. Each of these new formations required internal and external communications to establish a new, unified identity to which stakeholders could relate. Substantial resources often are necessary to present a unified corporate image, as when German-based multinational Adidas corporation recently partnered with the New Zealand All Blacks rugby team. Marketing personnel had to disarticulate the old identity that existed between the All Blacks and their former sponsor and rearticulate a new identity that encompassed the international relationship (Motion, Leitch, & Brodie, 2003). Because people often hold on to old, familiar patterns of thought, creating a new, unified identity that will resonate with publics can be problematic if the old identity is not deconstructed, as demonstrated by the case of New Coke®.

Changing relationships create new articulations, and the complexity of organizational identity may be best visualized as a three-dimensional

web (Leitch & Richardson, 2003). Change reverberates along the entire web of relationships, making unified discourse difficult, but it can have a synergistic strength. Weber Shandwick Scotland, for the Save the North Sea campaign, combined the individual research, corporate, nonprofit, and government member identities to leverage the power of scientific discourse with the formal regulatory power of government control and the informal regulatory power of environmental causes. The result was a larger, unified identity with the power to dominate discourse and action. To successfully partner, however, individual organizations have to be willing to cede some of their power to the other groups. Organizational history is full of partnerships that failed because one or both organizations were unwilling to relinquish the power necessary for a new identity to emerge and dominate.

This power dynamic can be particularly problematic for public relations firms or organizations looking to operate internationally. Often companies expand internationally, claiming that they're making use of local talent while being sensitive to local cultural differences. Too often, however, headquarters remains the locus of control, and international training consists of telling the home country majority how to adjust to "the other" (Banks, 2000), disempowering the local office and undermining the ability of the organization to effectively address local issues and markets.

Business analyst Kenichi Ohmae (1989) points to Honda Corporation as a model of the decentered, equidistant organization, which has equally empowered units operating on different continents. Although some critics hold that a truly equal sharing of power is impossible, it's telling that the head of *Adweek*'s 2003 Public Relations Agency of the Year believes it's not only possible but necessary. CEO Adehmar Hynes of Text 100 says the company philosophy isn't to buy foreign agencies and "bolt them on to the side" ("2003 PR Agency," 2003, p. 27). The firm's international reach is successful, she says, because they put the local before the global "to ensure that we are not becoming European-centric, Asian-centric, or American-centric" (p. 27). New technology aids the effort, creating a nongeographic space in which team members from around the world meet. Although "no one person or perspective can fully know 'the world' and no company can ever actually be global in anything but a partial way" (du Gay et al., 1997, p. 78), some organizations do a better job of decentering themselves and working to create shared spaces and identities that share power.

❖ DEFINING NATIONAL IDENTITIES

Although organizational identities formed through diverse partner-
ships and consortia can be a rich source of strength, national identities
often are constructed in one-dimensional terms. Kenneth Boulding
noted in 1959 that national images were "the last great stronghold[s] of
unsophistication" (p. 131), and the insight appears equally apt today.
National identities often spring from a shared, reductionist history,
such as the reconstruction of the takeover of lands from Native
Americans in the developing United States as Manifest Destiny, that is,
territorial expansion as an inevitable right.

Theory demonstrates that tapping into these shared myths can be a
powerful persuasion tool because they resonate with people's deep-
seated emotions and beliefs. National identities develop through the
concept of internationalism, through relationships of one of "us" among
many of "them." In Anderson's (1991) terms, a nation is, in fact, an
imagined community, constructed and maintained by those who claim
membership. The first challenge of a new nation is to gain international
recognition, to demonstrate how it's both similar to and different from
other nations. The national flag becomes symbolic of this difference
(Billig, 1995), as in 1994 when South Africa adopted a new flag after
abolishing apartheid to symbolize its definition as a nation (Figure 8.1).
Conversely, national identities become fractured when the historical
narrative is ruptured, as when British colonizers brought troops from
India into regions of Africa and Indonesia to serve as security forces.

Despite the inherent simplicity of national identity discourse, how-
ever, the actuality is far more complex. Yet it's these simplifications that
dominate, reverting to the binary oppositions of identity. All of Africa
becomes "the Dark Continent," a land of white explorers on safari
viewing animals, not a rich mixture of ancient civilizations, diverse
tribal groups, and philosophies and religions. This dominant reduc-
tionist discourse is evidenced in remarks by U.S. President George
Bush at a 2001 European news conference when he referred to the
whole continent of Africa as "a nation that suffers from incredible
disease" (in Von Bormann, 2003, ¶ 1). Similarly, during the Cold War,
communism became the basis of identification and polarization.

Now, religion dominates, leading to a Middle East–West split in
which each side constructs the other as a monolithic binary opposite.
For the West, the Middle East has become an exotic world of terrorists,
oil, and Islam as a single, unifying force rather than a complex and rich

(a)

(b)
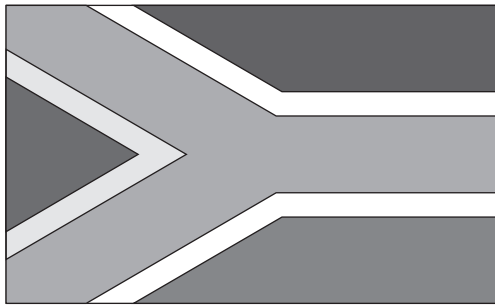
At top is South Africa's flag from 1927 until 1994. To the Dutch flag were
added three small flags, representing the other colonizing and emerging
national groups. The flag adopted after the end of apartheid is shown below
it. Although officials said at the time the design possessed no symbolism, it's
generally understood now that both the Y design and the colors represent
unification.

Figure 8.1   South African Flags

religion comprising diverse forms (Said, 1979, 1981). Conversely, the
Middle East has constructed the West as amoral and imperialistic.
The resulting bipolarity is hauntingly obvious in the September 11
attacks and the war that the U.S. government dubbed Operation Iraqi
Freedom.

At other times, the results are more subtle, as in the case of Turkey.
In today's discourse, what is of the West cannot, by definition, be Islamic.
Turkey, which has historically fallen within European geopolitical

boundaries, is now finding its bid for European Union membership blocked. Although it is blocked on ostensibly economic grounds, the underlying discourse revolves around Turkey's Islamic identity. The question becomes, What does it mean to be European? The answer has been, in part, "not Islamic."

Cultural Identity and Authenticity

Similar to individuals and organizations, nations have essentialist characteristics such as geopolitical boundaries, governments, and physical infrastructures. As Salman Rushdie (1991) wryly noted in regard to questions of nationalism, "Does India exist? If it doesn't what's keeping Pakistan and Bangladesh apart?" But national identities are more than their geographic outlines, economies, technologies, and industries, with culture as an additional characteristic. National culture is the site of contested meanings, with the groups who wield more relative power able to define national identities and affect national regulatory bodies, which means national identity becomes closely linked to the notion of cultural identity.

One of the most common ways in which companies and individuals are referred to during everyday discussions is through the discourse of national identity, the idea that people and things from and within specific national borders have very particular, idiosyncratic, national characteristics. When one is attempting to make sense of practices or sounds and images from other places in the world, one of the most common tactics is to attribute an identity in terms of national distinctiveness (du Gay et al., 1997, p. 48).

Hofstede's cultural variables, discussed in chapter 4, are examples of this essentialist form of discourse and its prominence. Hofstede surveyed workers of different nationalities to determine average national values on four scales:

- Power distance
- Uncertainty avoidance
- Individualism
- Masculinity

When the results for members of each nation are compared, a unique cultural identity is declared. Members of Eastern European countries, for example, value hierarchy and formality, but these same power distance values are of almost no consequence to those from Scandinavian countries. But these average values for each nation

obtained in surveys don't capture the context or the fluidity of identi-ties, causing Edward Said, among many others, to question this approach: "The notion that there are geographic spaces with indige-nous, radically 'different' inhabitants who can be defined on the basis of some religion, culture or racial essence proper to that geographic space is a highly debatable idea" (in Clifford, 1988, p. 274).

From such essentialist approaches to national identities, cultural stereotypes form, including what it means to be an authentic represen-tation of the culture. In terms of the links between national and cul-tural identity, authenticity often is bound to a mythical past, a constructed heritage viewed nostalgically. In the United States, people of Scottish ancestry, or supposed Scottish ancestry, gather at Scottish festivals, where they dress in tartans assigned to them by tracing their genealogy, real or imagined, to clan membership and celebrate "tradi-tional" arts and sports. The culture exhibited is far more aggressively and nostalgically "Scottish" than anything found in contemporary Scotland itself, but by faithfully recreating and representing the her-itage vision, it acquires authenticity; it becomes the essence of Scotland in a way that Scotland itself isn't. In Baudrillard's (1981/1994) terms, it forms a **simulacrum,** *in which the simulation of reality becomes the reality.* Photo 8.1 shows a typical Scottish festival activity—the parade of tartans—in which "clan members" dressed in tartans associated with the clan march in solidarity with their newly constructed families and heritage.

This felt need on the part of some U.S. citizens to reclaim an authentic heritage based elsewhere may arise from the belief often found in Europe that the United States is too young as a nation to pos-sess its own "authentic" culture. As with many postcolonial societies, the search for a cultural identity becomes carried on the back of com-bined identities such as Irish American, Italian American, Asian American, and African American.

The rooting of these identities in a constructed history and nostal-gic past doesn't allow for modern intrusions. One Semester at Sea student was despondent after leaving Kenya because she had received e-mail from a Masai tribesman she had befriended there. In her view, his use of modern technology had removed any chance of his being a "true native"; he obviously couldn't be "authentic." Her experience had lost its luster of legitimacy; she felt cheated. Such encounters have led Chow (1993, p. 27) to sardonically ask, "Where have all the natives gone?"

At the U.S. Grandfather Mountain Highland Games, representatives from each clan in attendance march in the Parade of Tartans. The tartan has become an iconic symbol of Scottish heritage despite the fact that it wasn't a particularly common form of dress until the English outlawed its wearing in 1746 and Scots adopted it as a sign of rebellion.

Photo 8.1   Parade of Tartans

SOURCE: Photo courtesy of Hugh Morton.

Nation Building and Branding

The import of national identity can be evidenced in nation-building efforts and the growing practice of nation branding. Postcolonial nations must create a national identity where often unity doesn't exist along ethnic, religious, or other lines. Kenya, with its seven major tribal groups and division between the predominantly Muslim coastal areas, a relic of Arab colonization, and Christian inland areas, a relic of British colonization, is a good example. Many tribal members were uprooted and "repatriated" during British rule, breaking cultural ties with the land and undermining self-sufficiency and tribal membership. After many years of corrupt political rule, another legacy of the colonial system, the country suffers today from an average life expectancy

of less than 48 years because of the growing AIDS epidemic. Additionally, regulatory sanctions taken by the United States and other Western nations have hurt its tourist-dependent economy. The gross domestic product per capita is $1,100, and 50% of the population lives below the poverty line.

In many such countries, the media are at least partially government controlled and often work in conjunction with the government on nation-building efforts. In these countries, the lines between government affairs, media, and public relations often are more blurred because of their shared mission. The Media Institute in Kenya, for example, is a press freedom organization that brings together practicing journalists and professionals in law, human rights, corporate communications, and human development. Although such partnerships seem antithetical in many Western nations, they play a crucial nation-building role in much of the developing world.

Previously, national images were constructed through diplomatic processes in times of peace and military propaganda in times of war. Now, part of the public relations function in many countries is the formation of a unified national brand that can attract foreign investment and tourists (Chong & Valencic, 2001). A government-backed public–private partnership in South Africa, including marketing, public relations, and media companies, funds a national branding campaign to reposition the country on the basis of its peaceful democracy and eco-tourism as "Alive with Possibility" (Von Bormann, 2003). The recent Brand Estonia project resulted in a successful campaign to promote the former Soviet republic as "a Nordic country with a twist" and a "small economic tiger" (in Gardner & Standaert, 2003).

A consortium in Nigeria is working without government support, in large part because the Nigerian brand to date has been one of government corruption (e.g., Transparency International rated the country the most corrupt in Africa for 2005). The thrust of this joint public relations and media effort isn't so much a unified brand as constructing a way for the world to deal directly with Nigerian companies, bypassing the corrupt government structure ("We Can Re-brand," 2004). As a senior research fellow in international relations noted, "Having a bad reputation or none at all is a serious handicap for a state seeking to remain competitive in the international arena. . . . Image and reputation are thus becoming essential parts of the state's strategic equity" (van Ham, 2001, pp. 2–3). National brands are supplanting nationalism, removing some of the inherent bipolarity of nationalism and replacing it with a "unique one among many" view, a trend that arises, in part, from globalization.

National and Cultural Identities in a Hybrid World

In a globalized world, geographic place no longer provides a strong sense of cultural identity, and conflating national and cultural identities becomes particularly problematic. For example, the second largest Spanish-speaking population in the world lives in Los Angeles, California (Katz, 2005). And what does the "Buy American" campaign mean when cars are produced by Japanese-owned companies in the United States from parts manufactured in Latin America? Combined with geographic displacement is the flow of ideas through new communication technologies, forming "a new communications geography" (Morley & Robins, 1995, p. 1), which brings issues of the relationship between culture and identity to the fore. When cultural communication is no longer based on shared history or space, it becomes difficult to define who constitutes the "other" in networked societies (Castells, 1996).

The term *multicultural* has acquired a wide range of meanings. It's become synonymous both with *diversity,* as developed countries are increasingly identified in terms of narrow market niches, and with *identification,* as a single world culture and globalized market segments emerge (Bhabha, 1996). Those who hang on to nostalgic notions of the authentic are appalled by the latter, as found in world music, fusion cuisine, and Masai tribesmen with e-mail accounts; for others, it represents the brave new world of emerging hybrid identities. Either way, the fact remains that lovers of Bob Marley's music form a global culture that is much more tangible in some ways than any national culture (Gilroy, 1997; Morley & Robins, 1995). Marley has become more than a deceased Jamaican reggae singer; he's become the living symbol of pan-African unity.

At the heart of these differing discourses surrounding multiculturalism is the global–local nexus, which we discussed in chapter 6. The global traditionally has been viewed as the more empowered of the bipolar pair, with the local the inevitable loser in any meeting. Following the reductionist logic common to national images, the concept of globalization has been reduced to Westernization, which has been ultimately reduced to Americanization and the fear that a monolithic, culturally bereft, materialistic, fast food nation was overtaking the world in a process of coca-colonization (Morley & Robins, 1995).

These concerns gave rise to the global imperialism thesis, which states that Western, and particularly U.S., media and influence are wiping out local cultures. But the thesis presumes that audiences are inactive, and, as we discussed in the last chapter, audiences are active

partners in the production of meaning. Additionally, the rise of Japanese popular culture and its influence first in Asia and then throughout the West has also problematized the notion of Western-only domination.

In place of global imperialism, the circuit of culture suggests that what's happening is a concurrent development of a transglobal identity and resistance to it, which is strengthening localized identities. The rise of a transglobal identity has led companies such as Saatchi and Saatchi to define market segments in global terms: "Globalisation does not mean the end of segments. It means, instead, their expansion to worldwide proportions" (Morley & Robins, 1995, p. 113). Yet, to date, what appear to have worldwide appeal without concomitant localization are the high-end brands that globally convey a sense of belonging to the elite, such as Gucci, Prada, and Mercedes (Ohmae, 1989). For most products and issues, the key to global success is **polysemy:** *Products and issues can generate numerous possible meanings that can be interpreted and used locally.*

McDonald's is a case in point. Although it is a global brand, the experience of going to McDonald's is polysemic and locally interpreted. In the United States, the restaurant often is associated with children: Happy Meals® and playgrounds give parents a chance to eat out in a relaxed atmosphere with their children. In many Asian countries, the restaurant represents the American Dream and is a favorite place to take a date, particularly on Valentine's Day. As we noted earlier, in some Asian countries McDonald's is a place to spread out and get work done. In Europe, where the United States is often associated with a lack of social class, McDonald's often signifies a "there goes the neighborhood" identity with older citizens, which appeals to the rebellious sense of the younger.

As consumers appropriate global culture in local ways, identity is arising not within particular national boundaries but in the relationships between cultures and identities, forming an infinite variety of hybrid identities. Geographic space is no longer the defining element, which raises the question of difference and how we are to define identities without falling back on national boundaries or a constructed organizing dichotomy, such as East versus West.

Also noteworthy in this chapter is that much of the discussion references points made in earlier chapters. It reminds us that the moments are inextricably intertwined, and each informs the others. Examining the moment of identity as found in WHO's smallpox eradication campaign reinforces this point while allowing us to see the interplay of individual, group, organizational, cultural, and national identities.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Identities emerge from social constructions of meaning and in relation to what they are not.

- Identities are multiple, fluid, and both assumed and imposed.

- Stereotypes are a shorthand cultural classification system that depends on reductionist binary differences.

- New organizational identities cannot be assumed unless old identities are first disarticulated.

- Organizational identities are less fragmented when organizational actions are consistent with the identity constructed.

- National identities are both gaining in importance as a way to attract foreign investment and losing relevance as globalization brings an increasing mix of cultures across national boundaries.

- Globalization results in the formation of a transglobal identity and the creation of infinite hybrid identities.

Smallpox Eradication Campaign

The last case of smallpox outside the laboratory was reported in Somalia in 1977. For the next 2.5 years, WHO retained an independent commission to certify that smallpox was gone except for laboratory specimens. At the 33rd World Health Assembly in 1980, WHO's director general made the official announcement: Smallpox had been eradicated (Photo 8.2). From the original Soviet proposal at the 11th World Health Assembly in 1958 to the start of the intensified campaign in 1967 to the realization of campaign success, many identities of smallpox, of the campaign workers, and of the victims emerged.

We've touched on some of these identities in previous chapters. In the early years of the campaign, WHO created an identity of smallpox as an expensive nuisance to the developed world, which led these countries

Case Study
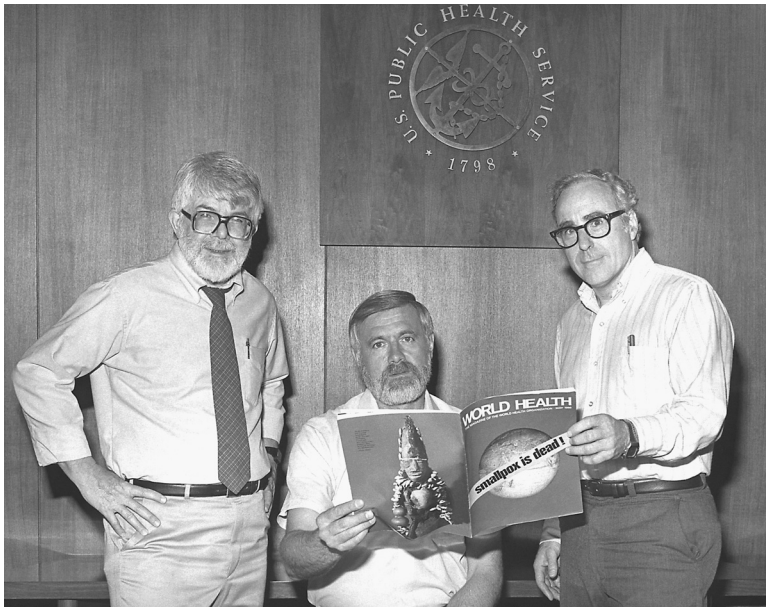
Three former directors of the smallpox eradication program, Dr. J. Donald Millar, Dr. William H. Foege, and Dr. J. Michael Lane, look over the May 1980 issue of WHO's *World Health* magazine, which was devoted to coverage of smallpox eradication.

Photo 8.2   Three Former Directors of the Smallpox Eradication Program

SOURCE: Photo courtesy of CDC.

to contribute resources to the eradication campaign. Within WHO, many officials imposed an identity on the smallpox eradication unit under Dr. D. A. Henderson's direction as a bunch of mavericks who bucked the system. Although this identity led to internal bickering and a lack of cooperation, Henderson's flexible management style also empowered field workers, which was crucial to campaign success. On the consumption side, many peoples of the world worshiped smallpox as a deity, an identity that had large implications for how they responded to campaign messages and actions.

In this section, we further examine the identities that the campaign produced and imposed, and those that emerged and were adopted, over the course of the campaign. Because identities are defined by difference, we outline the major dichotomies that emerged, beginning with the national identity of the smallpox eradication unit.

NEGOTIATING NATIONAL VERSUS INTERNATIONAL IDENTITIES

As we mentioned in the regulatory discussion of the case, the United States, working through the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), took an early lead in eradication efforts in western Africa as part of a Cold War effort to gain influence over developing countries and thwart growing Soviet influence. Around the same time, the World Health Assembly voted to support the intensified effort, at which point WHO's director general placed Dr. D. A. Henderson of the CDC in charge, hoping to blame Henderson and the United States if the effort failed. Henderson was reluctant to take the post, in part because he was afraid his nationality would alienate the Soviets, who were crucial to the effort. The confluence of Henderson's leadership and the U.S. role in western Africa caused many international leaders and some of those in the WHO hierarchy to identify the campaign as a U.S. effort, despite the fact that the initial eradication proposal was a Soviet one and the body that ratified it was an international consortium. This U.S. identity was bolstered by the fact that a number of the high-profile public health doctors involved in the campaign were also from the United States.

Henderson actively fought this identity because he realized it could inhibit international cooperation (Hopkins, 1989). He worked to cultivate the Soviets, stressing the ultimate campaign goal and actively acknowledging their key contributions to the campaign. He surrendered control and gave the Pan American Health Organization autonomy to run the eradication campaign in Brazil because he knew it would not welcome aid linked to the United States. Within the overarching Cold War context, Henderson often had to prove to international leaders that he wasn't a CIA operative, a move that often proved difficult (Hopkins, 1989) given the discursive nature of identity.

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Despite the perceived U.S. identity, the public health doctors who led the campaign came from many nations, including the Soviet Union, Japan, and France, although they shared notions of what constituted the identity of a public health doctor. For example, Dr. Lawrence Brilliant, age 29, had been living and studying in a Hindu temple in India with his Indian wife when the intensified campaign began there. Brilliant's religious instructor told him to leave the temple and use his skills to help the Indian people. When he applied for a position at the WHO office in New Delhi, however, Dr. Nicole Grasset of France repeatedly turned him down because of his youth, long hair, bushy beard, and indigenous clothing. After repeated applications, during which his appearance became increasingly more conservative, his persistence and ability to speak Hindi won out. Grasset hired him as an administrative assistant. Eventually he was able to step into a medical role, and he became one of the most successful members of the leadership team (Tucker, 2001; Photo 8.3).

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Photo 8.3   Dr. Lawrence Brilliant Working in India

SOURCE: Photo courtesy of Dr. Lawrence Brilliant.

FIRST WORLD VERSUS THIRD WORLD VALUES

Just as Western notions determined what image was appropriate for a public health doctor, Western notions of science and medicine guided the campaign. For Western scientists, smallpox was a known entity and a scientific fact. WHO publications devoted pages to the exact scientific description of the disease: its specific size in nanometers, genetic structure, etiology, taxonomy (genus *Orthopoxvirus,* subfamily Chordopoxvirinae, family Poxviridae), and two major forms, variola major and variola minor. It was this very identity of smallpox that made an eradication campaign possible in the first place: Although modern medicine could not cure the disease, it had developed a vaccine. Because of this identity, the dominant discourse used throughout the campaign was one of scientific rigor and authority bolstered by technology, such as the development of freeze-dried vaccine and the bifurcated needle. Science was the strategy and technology the weapon in the war on smallpox.

For many consumers of the campaign, however, smallpox was not a scientific fact but a spiritual being. Vaccination wasn't a preventive but an abomination; it defied the deity's will. Faced with this competing discourse, Western scientists dismissed it as ignorant and an impediment to progress. Anthropologists and public health specialists blamed "fear and superstition" (Morgan, 1969, p. 80) for "hav[ing] substantially retarded the progress and success of the . . . smallpox eradication programme" (Mather & John, 1973, p. 195). An official WHO account of the campaign in Bangladesh blames vaccination refusal on "ignorance of its benefits" (Joarder et al., 1980, p. 179). Within the prevailing scientific discourse, the answer to ignorance was education, leading WHO to prepare numerous educational materials for campaign use.

As the campaign progressed, however, many workers found that educational approaches sometimes failed to achieve campaign objectives because they didn't create a shared identity between producers and consumers; the language of Western science didn't address the spiritual issues of audience members. As noted in chapter 7, workers were more successful when they co-opted the religion and put campaign objectives in terms of religious values and language. However, many workers remained dismissive of these measures, seeing them only as means to an end. Some observed rather paternalistically that a spiritual cause demanded a spiritual cure, even if it was an inherently "pre-scientific" and "irrational" approach (Imperato & Traoré, 1968, p. 228; Mather & John, 1973, p. 195). The authors of this book found only one instance in which a Western scientist acknowledged the legitimacy of the people's closely held religious views, suggesting that attributing vaccination resistance to ignorance was incorrect and that a more holistic approach to medicine and spirituality was needed to connect with the attitudes and beliefs of worshippers (Morinis, 1978).

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Concurrent with the dominant discourse that labeled many potential victims ignorant, an emergent identity was that of smallpox as a disease of the poor. Although smallpox crossed all race, class, and income lines, as mentioned earlier, India's prime minister Indira Gandhi called it a "disease of economic backwardness" (in Brilliant, 1985, p. 87). Early technical reports stressed the possibility of spreading infection through bedding and clothing, making the disease more likely among lower socioeconomic groups, such as chambermaids and laundry workers. These same reports warned that mild ambulatory cases were likely among "tramps and other itinerants" (WHO, 1964, p. 11). In India, workers developed separate strategies to target the lower castes, namely "beggars, hawkers, rickshaw and handcart pullers, daily laborers, cobblers, scrap pickers and domestic servants" (Basu et al., 1979, p. 173). From these representations, small-pox's identity became that of a disease of the poor, despite all evidence to the contrary. Victims became disempowered and disenfranchised because their disease equated them with indigence and ignorance.

In turn, potential victims often rejected foreign intrusion in their personal lives, distrusting vaccinators as colonizers and construing vaccination as a threat (Thaung & Ko Ko, 2002). The situation was similar to that of the 19th-century United States, when many Native Americans declined vaccination because they believed that anything the white invaders were pushing on them must, by definition, constitute another means of subjugation (Hopkins, 2002). Many people distrusted government officials because they were often associated with tax collection, military conscription, or, in the case of India, family planning campaigns. WHO field workers there had to dispel rumors that they were performing vasectomies (Hopkins, 1989). The inherent power difference between government health officials and target publics led to distrust and vaccination resistance, threatening the success of the campaign. WHO workers had to find a way to overcome lingering resistance if the campaign was to be successful.

HOLY WARRIORS VERSUS THE ENEMY

Most WHO workers did not self-identify as colonizers or subjugators, although one Western worker in India candidly reported that "I was a white man in that society, and I could do things that others couldn't do . . . and get away with it" (T. Stephen Jones, in Greenough, 1995, pp. 637–638). However, most workers self-identified as saviors, expressing an almost religious devotion to the cause. They endured the harsh field conditions because they were true believers in the righteousness of their work.

In 1974, for example, Henderson met with a team that had been in the field in India for 4 months straight. Besides being clinically

underweight and exhausted, they were variously suffering from severe kidney and fungal infections, shingles, and pneumonia. But they refused to quit, saying, "We've considered the question and have decided that things can't get worse therefore they must get better" (in Fenner et al., 1988, p. 764). Dr. Lawrence Brilliant described this religious fervor toward eradication as becoming caught up in the "infection of zeropox": the belief in the need to achieve eradication at all costs (1985, p. 71).

Although the workers' zeal resulted in a strong esprit de corps remarked on by many campaign observers, when it was combined with the key campaign message of a global war on smallpox, the workers became holy warriors united against a dehumanized enemy. Potential victims in developing countries, disempowered through their identification as poor and ignorant, became collateral damage in the war as workers used force to subdue the enemy. As one worker recalled,

> I was doing good. I was religiously fervid. I was a crusader. . . . There was a clear commitment to working on something that was for the benefit of people. . . . I became so convinced of that, that I did some very excessive things in the name of righteousness. (T. Stephen Jones, in Greenough, 1995, p. 637)

Or as a Peace Corps volunteer with the campaign simply stated, "I just did not take no for an answer when looking for smallpox" (in Andersson, 1996, p. 2).

The use of force to achieve eradication took many forms. Workers withheld food ration cards from the poor in India and relief supplies from east Pakistani refugees unless they agreed to vaccination. They used military escorts, roadblocks, and police cordons throughout Africa to force vaccination acceptance. People in endemic areas were forcibly restrained and vaccinated regardless of age, nutritional status, or medical condition, even though in nonendemic countries WHO (1972) advised that vaccination was contraindicated in cases of compromised immune system and pregnancy. When workers discovered active cases, they isolated the victims, posting four to eight watch guards around the isolation house or hut to prevent the victim's escape. The guards were not paid until the end of the quarantine period, and if one was ever found missing, all were dismissed without pay. The victim became an involuntary prisoner; the watch guards were imprisoned by their conditions of employment.

As the number of endemic countries grew fewer and success seemed imminent, workers used increasing degrees of force. Before the start of the intensified campaign, workers in India avoided force because it was contrary to the basic tenet of Indian society of respect for the individual (Basu et al., 1979). One CDC epidemiologist working in India recalled that when "Operation Zeropox" went into effect, however, it was

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marked by an almost military style attack on infected villages. . . . In the hit-and-run excitement of such a campaign, women and children were often pulled out from under beds, from behind doors, from within latrines, etc. People were chased and, when caught, vacci-nated. . . . We considered the villagers to have an understandable though irrational fear of vaccination. . . . We just couldn't let people get smallpox needlessly. We went from door to door and vaccinated. When they ran, we chased. When they locked their doors, we broke down their doors and vaccinated them. (S. Music, in Greenough, 1995, pp. 635–636)

When an outbreak occurred in the state of Bihar in northern India, Dr. Lawrence Brilliant barricaded all roads surrounding a major city, and no one was allowed to pass without being vaccinated. When an outbreak occurred at a pilgrimage site for the Jain religion, a nonviolent sect who refused smallpox vaccination because of its animal origins, Bihar military police surrounded the village and placed 24-hour watch guards on duty. Pilgrims, who had gathered to mark the anniversary of the death of the religion's founder, could enter the sacred site only if they agreed to be vaccinated. Some agreed, but many didn't, resulting in workers forcefully vaccinating pacifist worshippers on one of their holiest days.

Brilliant recalls that during this outbreak "zealous epidemiologists occasionally made night raids to vaccinate a whole village at a time" (1985, p. 57). In one instance, a district magistrate authorized a late-night raid on a family compound because the residents had refused vaccina-tion for religious reasons. Workers scaled the walls and vaccinated family members after a protracted struggle during which the male head of household bit the doctor. As soon as the struggle was over, the man qui-etly offered the workers food. He explained that he understood the work-ers had been conscientiously following their beliefs just as he had been following his, which included offering anyone in his house, no matter the circumstances, the hospitality of food (Brilliant, 1985; Tucker, 2001). He explained his actions this way:

My dharma [moral duty] is to surrender to God's will. Only God can decide who gets sickness and who does not. It is my duty to resist your needles. We must resist your needles. We would die resisting if that is necessary. My family and I have not yielded. We have done our duty. We can be proud of having been firm in our faith. It is not a sin to be overpowered by so many strangers in the middle of the night. Daily you have come to me and told me it is *your* dharma to prevent this disease with your needles. We have sent you away. Tonight you have broken down my door and used force. You say you act in accordance with *your* duty. I have acted according to mine. It is over. God will decide. (Brilliant & Brilliant, 1978, p. 5)

The shamefaced work-ers retreated. WHO's official campaign record observes that many of the "workers were suffering at one time from human bites" (Fenner et al., 1988, p. 1017).

Not all workers used force. Some decried it, such as Dr. David Greaves (2001), who worked on the campaign in Bangladesh in 1975. He blames the "battlefield mentality" and "jingoistic fervor" gener-ated for spawning colonial attitudes in many workers and a feeling of success at any cost at WHO headquar-ters (p. 1190). However, campaign leaders retro-spectively concluded that coercion, such as withhold-ing food and supplies from war refugees, was effective in some circumstances. By not condemning its use, they implicitly condoned physical violence. For them, the ends of the campaign justified the means, and force became a strategic campaign tactic.
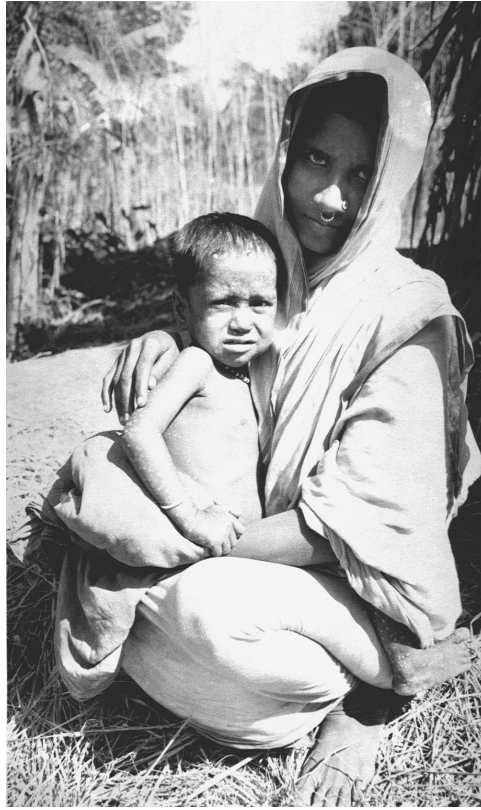

Photo 8.4   Media Gathered to Photograph 3-Year-Old Rahima Banu, the Last Variola Major Case

SOURCE: Photo courtesy of CDC, WHO, and Stanley O. Foster, M.D., M.P.H.

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CREATING CAMPAIGN ICONS

As campaign success appeared imminent, WHO worked to achieve max-imum publicity for the last case in each of the remaining endemic coun-tries. They ferried media to remote areas to record the last case for posterity and made stock photographs available to media who couldn't, or didn't, make the trek. In Bangladesh, 3-year-old Rahima Banu, living on a remote island, was the last case of variola major, the more virulent strain of smallpox (Photo 8.4). In India, 30-year-old Saiban Bibi, an itin-erant woman living by begging on a rail station platform, was the last

recorded case. WHO workers placed her in isolation in a hospital, surrounded by watch guards, and shut down the whole hospital except for emergencies, strictly limiting and controlling staff activity.

The last endemic area encompassed the disputed Ogaden Desert area between Ethiopia and Somalia. Despite ongoing border skirmishes, officials from both countries met to discuss eradication strategy, but each side exaggerated the measures it was taking to appear superior to the other. These meetings became increasingly acrimonious, with each side disparaging the other's program. When WHO finally declared one—Ethiopia—free of the disease, the Somali WHO representative reported large repercussions for international relations:

> Government authorities have resented the fact that Ethiopia has been declared free of smallpox almost at the same time as Somalia was declared as the last known infected focus in the world. This is viewed as some kind of international conspiracy and the influx of WHO smallpox experts as adverse publicity for Somalia. (Fenner et al., 1988, pp. 1046–1047)

The stigma of being the last fell on Somalia when Ali Maalin, a 28-year-old part-time hospital cook, went into the history books as the last recorded case of smallpox outside the laboratory. Maalin, who had been misdiagnosed with chicken pox, was a former temporary vaccinator with WHO, and he was fairly sure he had smallpox. He didn't report himself because he wanted to avoid isolation, but a hospital coworker turned him in for the reward. As a hospital worker he had been in contact with many people, and WHO workers rushed to vaccinate his entire ward, put up a roadblock into town, established checkpoints along footpaths, widely publicized the reward for reports of any new cases, and held their breath.

When no new cases appeared, WHO invited media in to record the event, and Maalin found himself the center of a global media circus (Photo 8.5). Typical of the resulting coverage was a *New York Times* article that called him "a living, contagious threat to one of the world's great public health accomplishments," as if he were personally responsible for the near demise of "humanity's first successful war of annihilation against an infectious disease" (Schmeck, 1978, p. E9).

In each of the three last cases, ordinary people who otherwise would never be known to the outside world became the center of global media attention. A 3-year-old girl, a beggar, and a part-time cook, living in relative obscurity in developing countries, became involuntary war heroes in a global battle not of their choosing. Their private lives became public fodder. WHO publicity made them iconic figures, and their images became synonymous with the triumph of Western science and technology over the ignorance of the developing world.

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WHO held a ceremony marking the 10-year anniversary of eradication, during which a WHO representative presented Maalin with a bouquet of roses, an event also recorded for posterity (Bazin, 2000). One can only imagine what Maalin thought of the occasion and what he did with the flowers, especially because his little sister died of measles, another disease preventable by vaccination and the focus of earlier U.S. efforts to gain support on the African continent.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL PRACTICE

One implication for any "international" public relations campaign is that publics often don't view the campaign as truly international, even when it stems from an international body such as the World Health

Pockmarks are readily visible on his chest and abdomen.

Photo 8.5   Somalian Hospital Worker Ali Maalin, the Last Documented Case of the Campaign

SOURCE: Photo courtesy of WHO.

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Assembly. Publics imposed a U.S. identity on the eradication campaign, which proved hard to shake. Almost invariably, publics define groups, organizations, and causes by assigning them to certain geopolitical units: Toyota is Japanese, even when the cars are assembled in the United States; Nikes are American, despite being made in Asia. Although companies such as Honda have actively worked to avoid geocentricism and assume an international identity, consumers in the United States who subscribe to "Buy American" campaigns boycott the company's products based on an identification of the company as Japanese.

Power differentials, which draw attention to the political aspects of identity, are inherent in both assumed and imposed identities. In the case of the eradication campaign, "encounters with government vaccinators

are never about immunization alone. Public health measures derive their authority from the police powers of the state" (Greenough, 1995, p. 635). Given WHO's organizational mission of "the attainment by all peoples of the highest possible level of health" and the feasibility of ridding the world of a deadly disease, smallpox eradication was an inherently worthy goal. But the political ramifications of the campaign extended well beyond the organization and its mission, and the campaign accumulated new meanings among consumers from national to local levels as new identities formed.

Another lesson of the campaign is that short-term objectives must be weighed against long-term consequences. Although the architects of the campaign believed coercion was effective in some instances, many disagreed. Just a few months after eradication was announced, the eradication program was criticized at a major public health conference as "anachronistic, authoritarian, [and] 'top down'" (Henderson, 1998, p. 17). It's a criticism that continues to haunt WHO today.

When working cross-culturally with populations who have limited and infrequent contact with an organization, memories can be long and missteps continue to resonate many years later. In 1988, WHO launched another eradication campaign, this one against polio (Photo 8.6).

Photo 8.6   Polio Eradication Campaign Workers in Sierra Leone Encouraging People to Have Their Children Vaccinated During National Immunization Day

SOURCE: Photo courtesy of WHO.

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In northern Nigeria, however, vaccinators have met with strong resistance from Muslims, who are skeptical of Western motives in sponsoring the campaign. As in India about 40 years previously, rumors are flying that the campaign is really an attempt to render Muslims infertile ("Nigeria Polio Vaccine," 2003, ¶ 4). In Java, 62% of parents in one village refused to let their children be vaccinated because of fears over the safety of the vaccine and rumors that it violates Islamic law because it was produced from monkeys (Casey, 2005).

As history repeats itself, WHO has pledged it won't administer polio vaccine without consent, but it cannot escape the legacy of the smallpox campaign, which is fueling resistance. Once again, the organization is turning to education as the answer, relying on the expert power of science and on laboratory tests to assure citizens of the vaccine's purity ("Nigeria Polio Vaccine," 2003). But Western, scientific discourse is not creating a shared identity with the religious beliefs of the public, and campaign workers are encountering heavy resistance as villagers set their dogs on them (MacKenzie, 2004).

Although the political context has changed from that of the Cold War to that of West versus East, dichotomies of identity are once again contributing to campaign failure, and the lessons of the past do not seem to be informing the decisions of the present. This example demonstrates how the moment of identity is a crucial, and often overlooked, component of international public relations campaigns. Establishing identities with which both producers and consumers can resonate should be a major goal of any public relations effort.

In chapter 9 we come full circle, bringing the five moments of the circuit together to provide a more synergistic look at how they function as whole.

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