Cultural Diversity and Democracy

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1. The Undecidable Field of Multiculturalism

There is now a rich established discourse on multiculturalism in Canada that has begun to exert an influence in other countries. The possible relevance of Canadian multiculturalism to other social and national contexts depends primarily upon whether the specific conditions that brought it into being in Canada, and which often enter into the debate as unspoken assumptions, can be separated from the common issues of cultural politics in an international arena and made relevant in circumstances where different background assumptions pertain. For example, two recent Mexican philosophical arguments for multiculturalism by León Olivé[1] and Fernando Salmerón,[2] in which key reference is made to texts of Charles Taylor[3] and Will Kymlicka[4] that are also virtually canonical for Canadian debates, use the term almost entirely in relation to Aboriginal claims against its exclusion from the *mestizo* national identity, wheras such a use is extremely controversial in Canada and is often taken as a denial of Aboriginal claims to be founding nations, as will be explained subsequently. Such contextual points are important because Canadian debates concerning multiculturalism have begun to play a role in countries with very different histories.

Canadian multiculturalism developed from the Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission of the 1960's which was the Federal government's, and English Canada's, response to the Quiet Revolution in Québec. In this genesis lies concealed the problematic field of application to which multiculturalism is directed. Is it a policy

pertaining exclusively to constituted groups within an established nation(s)-state or does it pertain also to the legitimacy of the nation-state itself?[5]

Let us consider first the possibility that the genesis of multiculturalism is taken necessarily to tie it to the internal workings of a nation-state, multi-national state, or to a fragment of such a nations-state such as English Canada.[6] In such an understanding, it refers to relations between citizens of a constituted state and not directly to the act of founding a state. It considers citizens not as individuals but as members of ethno-cultural groups that have a certain weight within the practices and policies of the nation-state. This is not to say that citizens are *only* members of ethnic groups. As individuals they may claim certain civil rights from the state, including the right to leave their ethnic groups. The “right to exit” from an ethnic group is an important case where liberal individual rights intersect with communal or group rights, but multiculturalism itself is about group rights which are reducible neither to the rights of individuals nor co-extensive with the nation-state as a whole. That is to say, multiculturalism demands a legitimation that is based neither on individual rights nor on the fusing of the nation-state with a single ethnic group—as in the case of ethnic nationalism. In this case, multiculturalism is not applicable to the relations between Québec and Canada, nor to the politics of First Nations and Canada. In both of these, conquest is the historical cause of the situation which present politics seek to address. It thus pertains to the violence inherent in the founding of any state and the colonial relations that such a state establishes with its component groups.

Limiting multiculturalism to intra-state relations bars it from addressing this issue. However, this limitation can seldom be rigorously ahered to. Multicultural politics within

English Canada, for example, surpasses this limitation insofar as it becomes a model for relations between English Canada and the other constituent groups of the nations-state: First Nations and Québec. It is for this reason that both Québecois and Aboriginal thinkers protest against their inclusion into Canada through multiculturalism.[7] It excludes them from being founding nations and treats them like immigrant groups. In this context, multicultural policy can act ideologically to confuse issues oriented to the legitimacy of the nations-state itself. Moreover, the reputed success of Canada in addressing the issues of minority groups through multicultural policies is often taken as a sign of its legitimacy as a state. In short, the difference between being 'a founding group' and being 'an ethno-cultural minority group' cannot be consistently maintained without assuming the legitimacy of the Canadian nations-state and the processes through which it was founded.

The difference between being a founding group and being a minority group is the crux of the matter. Here, as elsewhere, categorization is not innocent but compacts the history and politics that enters into the background assumptions of multiculturalism. As we will see later, it is a major state-managerial tendency of multicultural writers to treat this difference as if it could be definitively decided or, even worse, stipulated prior to debate. I raise the issues surrounding this difference not to decide them arbitrarily at the outset nor, indeed, to decide them at all, but to point thereby to the role of background assumptions and the possibility of their being used to prejudge the question of the legitimacy of the constituted nations-state. My discussion of multiculturalism will attempt to avoid this apologetic tendency by maintaining the undecidability inherent in the origin of Canadian multiculturalism as both a response to Québec sovereigntism and as an inclusion of a wider degree of participation by ethno-cultural minorities into

English Canadian institutions.[8] Whether the issue pertains internally to inclusion into the Canadian nations-state or externally to a group claiming equal sovereignty must remain an open question. Its undecidability rests uncomfortably upon the history of conquests by the British Empire that forged a problematic unity between English Canada and the Canadian nations-state. The unity is problematic because English Canada is the only component that has entered this compact willingly. For English Canada, patriation of the legacy of Empire—in patriating the Constitution, for example—appears as decolonization. Replacing the Empire with the Canadian nations-state cannot appear in such a fashion to those who were violently included into Empire in the first place.

The plurality and mixing of legitimating traditions is a feature of life in the early 21st century which can be expected to continue and accelerate; thus, this teleology must be conceptualized within democratic theory. Moreover, it must be conceptualized in a manner that does not take the existing nation-state as defining the limits of legitimacy, even, or better, especially when such politics takes place within the domain of the nation-state. To the extent that a plurality of legitimate cultural traditions can be legitimated as a social ideal it may be generalized beyond the specific conditions that generated it in Canada. In Canada, thinking concerning cultural plurality has been generated by multiculturalism and it is here that thinking concerning the implications of cultural plurality for democracy can begin. However, in determining to keep the question of the legitimacy of the constituted nations-state an open question, thinking concerning cultural plurality intrudes upon the legitimacy of the nations-state itself. Cultural plurality refuses to remain within Canada and pertains outside to the founding of Canada itself. For this reason, while beginning with multiculturalism, I will argue that the teleology of

multiculturalism requires that it be supplemented with postcolonialism. The necessity of this supplement corresponds to the undecidability of whether the field of application of multiculturalism is within Canada, within English Canada, or pertains to the founding and/or legitimacy of the nations-state itself.

2. Multiculturalism as a Component of National Identity

The most common objection to multiculturalism is that it fragments the nation, that ethno-cultural allegiances *compete with* allegiance to the nation-state. Critics of multiculturalism suggest that we should all be just Canadians—that we should focus on what unites us, not what divides us. This is also true of critics of multiculturalism in Australia, Argentina, and, indeed, probably everywhere. Multiculturalism is seen as a policy of division which competes with national identity. Equality, it is claimed, consists in all citizens, considered individually, being treated similarly, which is taken to mean that the nation-state should stay entirely out of promoting ethno-cultural identification.

Let us look at this criticism a bit more closely. For ethnic identity to compete with national identity it must refer to the same domain of relevance. It is possible for me to be a husband and father, for example, and still to be a Canadian. As identifications, they do not compete. As even critics of multiculturalism would acknowledge, I can be born in England and be a Canadian—as someone else can be born in Japan and be Canadian. And, of course, one can be born in Canada within a family that has ties to another country because of emigration by one's ancestors. Thus, ethnic identification and a national one do not *necessarily* conflict. It is the multicultural promotion of ethno-cultural identification that is claimed to conflict with national identity, say the critics. It is

supposed that *either* one identifies with a group that is defined by its *difference* from other Canadians *or* one identifies with what we all have in common. Thus, a polarization has been set up—*either* national identity *or* multiculturalism—such that it is almost impossible to argue for multiculturalism and national identity simultaneously.[9] Yet that is the argument of this essay. In so doing, I attempt to provide a justification for multiculturalism that pertains to its application as a key component of democracy for the conditions of cultural diversity which will predominate in the 21st century.

To get around this unfortunate polarization, the issue can be better defined in this way: "How can ethno-cultural identity be understood as a *key content* of national identity"? In order for one to experience his/her ethno-cultural belonging as not competing with his/her national identity, it must be seen as a component of national identity. That is, national identity is *experienced in a certain way through the specific ethno-cultural identification*. Most descriptions of the multicultural encounter fail to capture it and reduce multiculturalism to inter-cultural encounter by describing it as an us-them relationship. In contrast, this essay argues that the multicultural encounter should be understood as an us-we relationship. That is, as member of an ethno-cultural group one is a member of an "us" that is different from others, but as a member of a multicultural society one is a member of a "we" that includes both the "us" and also other similar "us" groups of which one is not a member. Instead of posing the issue as a question of belonging to one constituted collectivity versus another—which implies that they are within the same domain of relevance—it should be posed as two levels of identification for the same individual—one level at which my membership in an ethno-cultural group defines my *difference* from other groups within the nation-state and

another level at which my *common* membership in the national group which I share with others of different ethnic groups *allows for and validates* my membership in a specific group. Ethno-cultural belonging is a *way in which* one participates in nationality. So defined, multiculturalism is an interplay of identity and difference and not a choice between them. Multiculturalism understood in this way sets up a unique relationship between the particular aspects of ethno-cultural belonging and the universal aspects of citizenship such that the right to ethno-cultural belonging can be sustained as a universal right. I have previously made this argument in the context of a critique of Charles Taylor's hermeneutic conception of multiculturalism. [10] The current chapter attempts to sustain the argument for the political recognition of cultural diversity in a philosophically more rigorous fashion through an application of speech act theory, to argue that the issues of cultural diversity require a connection of multiculturalism to postcolonialism, and to extend its implications for democratic theory.

3. A Contemporary Concept of Culture

Until recent years, the nation-state provided a hegemonic framework within which the relationships between culture, economy and politics were stabilized. A relatively homogenous national political culture combined with a significant role for national politics in economic development allowed the nation-state to partition and harmonize cultural concerns. Cultural "differences" were seen as a matter for familial relations or voluntary (ethnic, artistic) organizations, on the one hand, or as driven by the requisites of work and commerce on the other. This division was held together by a dominant national culture assumed to be equally shared by all citizens which could therefore be

presupposed in political decisions. This retrospective view is, of course, an ideal type and perhaps even a caricature, but it may provide a useful background for clarifying the shifting boundaries and new issues we face today.

National cultures can no longer be seen as equally shared by all citizens. They are often redefined by critical voices as the imposition of a homogenizing force. Therefore national cultures must now be thematized in their relations to minority cultures within the nation-state, to emergent (often international) cultural formations brought into being by social movements, and to the cultural presuppositions of national political institutions and debate—which can no longer be regarded as either a-cultural universals or universally shared cultural assumptions. This weakening of the mediating and stabilizing role played by the nation-state corresponds to the expansion of cultural concerns from familial relations and voluntary organizations, on the one hand, and the globalization of the economy, on the other. Both of these tendencies have their horrific side: the subsumption of politics and economy into ethnic exclusivism and the reduction of cultural values to global commercial imperatives. Tribalism and commercialism are signs of our historical moment which emerge from within the current unsettling situation and are not likely simply to abate. But they are tendencies, not fates, and a major goal in the present context must be to keep them in check. Beyond this important task of avoiding the worst, democratic theory can also attempt to provide some guidelines for thinking about how cultural plurality can itself lead toward a new universalizing, civilizing democratic compact.

Culture is a concept which necessarily implies a plural in the sense that one's own culture would be invisible as such unless it were to encounter another culture. The

us-them formulation is thus built into the instituting moment of the concept of culture.[11] It corresponds to the moment of the discovery of the concept through a going-out from one's own culture and encountering another. Another way of living that initially might seem merely non-sensical, or even not quite human (and thereby understood through the contrast of civilization with barbarism, or savagery), is grasped as *another* culture when its internal sense is discovered. It is from this instituting moment of travel, or intercultural communication (perhaps clearest in the imperial origins of anthropology), that the notion of culture as an enclosed and internally coherent way of life has developed. There are two main responses to this discovery of an alien culture: The alien culture can be denigrated as less human, or less civilized, issuing in the hierarchical relation characteristic of colonialism. Also, it can reflexively generate a conception of the specificity of one's own culture, in contrast to the other, and one might come to see one's own activities, thoughts and beliefs as enveloped within a cultural form. While the concept of culture at this instituting stage of its development suggests that culture is a self-enclosed vessel, nevertheless the condition for the emergence of the concept of culture is that cultures do indeed interact and that a relation between them, often a colonial hierarchical one, is established.

In our own time—characterized by world-wide immigration, international cultural industries, ethnic violence, and the decline of the nation-state—the concept of culture developed from this instituting moment is no longer adequate. Indeed, it often tends to reinforce exclusivist and colonial tendencies. A contemporary concept of culture must thus take its departure from a critique of the basic components of this first-level concept: 1] the idea of intercultural communication, or contact, as accomplished through travel, or

movement between cultures already subsisting independently, 2] the idea of culture as an enclosed vessel based on an internal-external duality, where one is either inside or outside, and 3] the consequent notion of cultural contact as a relation between “us” and “them” groups. A contemporary concept of culture would thus take its departure from three basic ideas: One, the identities of cultures are formed, and exist as such, through their inter-relation—through an encounter with their limits; two, the cultural condition is, from the first, multicultural—that is to say, characterized by the interplay of diverse cultures—and, three, that consequently cultural interchange is, or ought to be, understood to occur between “us” and “we” groups. This latter point is the basis for the contribution that a theory of cultural plurality may make to democracy.

4. A Normative Approach to Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism in Canada may refer to either the sociological fact of the existence of a plurality of ethnic groups with their own organizations and identities, to government policies that intend to preserve such identities, or to the “social ideal” of multiculturalism—the normative argument that multicultural society, with its attendant ethics and institutions, is a positive good that should be promoted. Richard Day has recently argued that “the Canadian government is attempting to confound the descriptive and prescriptive senses of multiculturalism in order to provide its policy with an unearned history and reality … as an *already achieved ideal*. … Scholarly writing has also contributed to the origin myth of Canadian multiculturalism as an already achieved ideal, through its invocation of a history of diversity and tolerance marred only by occasional ‘exceptional’ events which, upon reflection, are seen as rationally motivated and

therefore 'understandable'."[12] This should stand as an important challenge to the critical thinker. The nation-building project of white settler culture in Canada did not proceed by erasure of "others"—Aboriginal people, French-Canadians, immigrants, ethnic groups, etc.—but through the management or schematization of them which was made possible by their relationship to an unstated norm that continues to underlie and structure all forms of multiculturalist policy discourse. Eva Mackey has made this point also. "Pluralist amalgamation functions through the making of a conceptual distinction between definitions of culture used for national core culture and for the cultures of 'others'."[13] This distinction between normative national culture and the so-called folk survivals of others operates through the unmarked, non-ethnic, white, "*Canadian*-Canadian" identity. In being *unmarked*, and thus taken as simply Canadian without hyphenization, this assumed identity normatively structures the whole discourse of multiculturalism.[14]

It is clear that the Foucauldian style of critique used by Day and Mackey is not misplaced. Michael Ignatieff, in his Massey Lectures entitled *The Rights Revolution*, performs the trick of the "already-achieved ideal," or, more accurately, "nearly achieved, achieved in principle, there's a little left to do" when he describes "what we already are" as "a peaceable kingdom, a place where all languages, cultures, and peoples shelter together under the arch of justice" [15] without doubting for a second that the existing Canadian state has not only the power, but the legitimacy, to define the limits of multiculturalism and the rules of treaty negotiations with Aboriginal people and Québec.[16] Both Ignatieff and Will Kymlicka assume that the recognition of a plurality of identities within a nations-state solves the problem of the non-recognition of sub-national groups by a homogeneous, individualist, rights-regime.[17] But the recognition of three

groups (English Canada, Québec, First Nations)—which is indeed a necessary step—does not address the problem of the colonial monopolization by the nations-state of the rules of interaction between these groups. Recognition given in this fashion by an apparently benevolent state cannot confer sovereignty nor displace the unmarked, structuring category, which requires de-centring the assumption of the cultural neutrality of the state.[18]

Both Day and Mackey refer positively to an early (1983) incisive essay by Kogila Moodley which similarly pointed to the separation and inequality of cultures presupposed by multiculturalism.[19] Moodley's argument concluded by suggesting that "to be authentic, genuine multiculturalism would have to preclude a cultural hierarchy as well as mere parallelism of cultural traditions in isolated compartments and represent a mutual learning process in contrast to the one-sided effort at present."[20] The assumed Canadian-ness against which the ethnic is measured must be de-centred, which means that "ordinary" Canadians must be re-cast as ethnics. If one takes this possibility seriously as a guide to political thinking and, possibly public policy, one has to enter the ethico-political territory of valuations that is inhabited by political actors. But both Day and Mackey refuse to enter such a normative discourse which is suggested but not explored by Moodley. This refusal can be attributed to the influence of Michel Foucault on the concept of criticism that drives their analyses.

Day argues explicitly that the structuring exclusion from which the project of multiculturalism derives vitiates the project of a democratic multicultural theory outright. "The perennially problematic and excluded Other is in fact *required* in order to create a simulation of wholeness for the Self. In the Canadian context, this means that

multiculturalism as problem of diversity not only 'prohibits' multiculturalism as social ideal, it also provides its condition of possibility, through the very failure of its attempts at hegemonic suture [closure] of the social space which would achieve 'full' inclusion."[21] The ideal of an inclusion of all ethno-cultural minorities within the nation is thus described as a fantasy.[22] The trick whereby the state and its policy discourse presents multiculturalism as an "already achieved ideal" is thus taken necessarily to apply to all attempts at a normative discourse of multiculturalism—even the post-colonial one for which I argue below. This seems to be a version of the myth of origins whereby the compromised and even bloody beginnings of a human practice are taken to vitiate all subsequent attempts to mitigate it or turn it to other ends. Moodley's search for an "authentic, genuine multiculturalism" is thus abandoned, not because it has not been achieved, but because it is supposed to be in principle unachievable.

Mackey describes Foucault's model of criticism as designed to show "on what kinds of assumptions, what kinds of familiar, unchallenged, unconsidered modes of thought the practices we accept rest."[23] Similarly, Day quotes Foucault's claim that genealogy is "dissociative, directed against identity, and opposes history given as continuity or representative of a tradition."[24] This is a very partial conception of critique which abandons any relationship between the activity of the critical intellectual and the perspectives necessary to political actors. Foucault himself, of course, was politically active, but that is not the point. He operated with a conception of critique that rendered political action entirely external to critical intellectual activity. In a discussion with political activists who were organizing "people's courts" to judge mine owners who had allowed dangerous conditions that led to "accidents," Foucault stated that the concept of

justice could not be used in the struggle. The activists responded that the people were attached to the concept of justice and that it provided an entry into a larger debate about justice and class domination. Foucault was not convinced. He replied that in his view the *history* of justice as a bourgeois concept crucial to class domination meant that it could not be used against the bourgeoisie.[25] A Foucauldian perspective is very good at showing how ethical-political ideas are formed through a history of disciplinary practices, but it does not consider important the palpable fact that the popular interpretation and use of these ideas is not (always) confined within the space of this history. Moreover, political action will always have to engage with this history in some way. It renounces its effectiveness if it attempts to act in a manner entirely external to the concepts used in popular accounts and "critiques" of the system.

This is not the first time that a Foucauldian perspective—or, sometimes, an Althusserian one, which is the same on this point—has affected the telling of the history of multiculturalism. It is commonplace at conferences, and at universities, to hear the claim that multiculturalism was, or is, a strategy of the Federal government for maintaining their control. This account requires that one ignore all the places in the history of multiculturalism where ethnic groups entered into the fray and affected the outcome. The Foucauldian-style critique has been around in ethnic-political circles in Canada at least since the early 1980's, though in more colourful language. "The government's idea of multiculturalism is like Disneyland" I recall someone saying to general assent at a conference organized by the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies in 1984. But the Foucauldian perspective confuses the machinations of government with the actual outcome of the struggle. I think that most people involved in ethnic politics would

agree that, for all its problems, multicultural policy in its actual functioning has left them more openings than its absence would have done. To understand multiculturalism as political site of struggle over colonial and de-colonizing forces requires that one understand not only government policy and intentions, but also the interventions that swerve them from their aims, and require compromises to get agreement. This is a politics of *hegemony* not of omnipotent state agencies. The process of gaining assent to policy involves other actors, their intentions and efforts, which mitigate the "original intention" of government. In short, Gramscian nuance is needed here. What becomes important for critical intervention is not so much the "taming of difference" but the moments at which such taming is diverted, when other possibilities arise. The politics whereby a mitigation of the taming intention of the state has been (partly) achieved is the important core of the story of multiculturalism. If it is told this way, the critical intellectual comes much closer to the needs of political actors.

Thus, while the interventions of Day and Mackey make an important cautionary point—the critical intellectual must not reproduce the discourse of staging difference inherent in state power—they cannot be said effectively to dispense with the necessity of a normative discourse concerning multiculturalism. To the extent that a theoretical discourse about multiculturalism confounds the ideal of democratic relations between ethno-cultural groups such that a national role is not exclusively monopolized by one, or a few, groups it fails in its task of becoming, in Moodely's words again, an "authentic, genuine multiculturalism." In short, a contemporary normative multiculturalism must also be post-colonial. Against the Foucauldian argument, I want to suggest that the normative question cannot be evaded and that Canadian multiculturalism is one fertile

ground for thinking about future political relationships of mutual respect in an increasingly mixed world. It shouldn't be used as a model of perfection, nor of travesty, but of a story whose mitigations of the taming management intention tell us something about what is necessary to get beyond them.

5. A Normative Multicultural Theory

In its classic versions democratic theory assumed the homogeneity of the people in all senses relevant to public deliberation. It is fairly clear in our present world that this assumption is no longer valid, that 'the people' that deliberates is subject to cultural, linguistic, race, class and gender divisions. These divisions, which are usually pursued under the heading of the 'politics of identity,' pose the question for democracy of how public debate can recognize such differences without utterly destroying the commonality upon which the substantive ethical life of democracy depends.

The multicultural context can be defined by the interaction between ethno-cultural groups such that it produces a context of justification that applies to each of the plurality of groups and demands of each group that it recognize the legitimacy of other groups by means of providing a justification *in its own terms* for the multicultural context. The archaic and exclusivist aspects of ethnicity that have recently resurfaced in ethnic nationalism are removed by a multicultural civic context which puts ethnic belonging into a discourse of universal rights. The multicultural context is not just a context of a plurality of cultures, it is a context of *interaction between cultures* in which legitimation points in two directions. Back, as it were, to legitimate particularity—or the relevance of ethno-cultural belonging in a public context—and forward to propose a universalizing

claim that requires critical translation into other cultures. The multicultural context thus requires that democratic speech embody both a defence of one's own particularity and a universalizing claim to the defence of particularity as such.

While multicultural society is, in an obvious sense, the context for particular ethno-cultural traditions, it is important to note that the reverse may also be the case. Particular ethno-cultural traditions are also the context for the legitimation of multicultural society. This point may be explained succinctly with reference to speech act theory. The concept of a speech act, as explained by J. L. Austin, refers to statements which do not describe an action, nor state something about an action, but rather *perform*, or actually *do*, the action itself.[26] A classic example of a performative statement is 'I now pronounce you husband and wife.' Considering speech as action has the advantage of shifting attention from the internal truth or falsity of a statement towards what is done, or accomplished, by the statement. My interest is not in the classification of statements as such but in the role of speech acts in democratic debate.

The multicultural speech act embodies a relation between content and context in which the two terms may shift such that either may become context for the other. Generally speaking, we may say that such a situation arises when a reflexive statement cannot be stabilized by a hierarchization of levels of discourse. Self-reference takes a paradoxical form in the absence of an established hierarchy of meaning. An ethical claim, since it is made from within a cultural tradition, always involves two levels of meaning. In the multicultural context, no cultural tradition can claim unquestioned legitimation, thus the relation between statement and tradition cannot be definitively hierarchized. The speech act thus comes to encompass the two levels of meaning in a reflexive relationship.

Since the claim is made in a multicultural context, it cannot be stabilized as subordinate to the cultural tradition from which it emerged. It may thus become the context for judging the cultural tradition itself. For example, a tradition that is capable of legitimating a strong claim to individual rights may motivate the respect of other traditions and may influence them to develop those aspects of their tradition that tend in this direction. The multicultural speech act is thus constitutively paradoxical.[27] A paradox, of course, is not a contradiction but a mutual imbrication of levels that requires a working out of complex relations between particular and universal claims.

We may thus refer to the *multicultural speech act* in order to explain the way in which an utterance and the field of discourse within which it normally takes on meaning may shift their relationship. Such a paradoxical relationship brings a tradition of thought into question in the context of a specific debate. The multiculturalism of the multicultural speech act consists in the inter-connected plurality of traditions of legitimation within which a given speech act makes sense and takes effect. The plurality of traditions of legitimation has the consequence that a given act no longer is straightforwardly dependent, as it were, on the discursive context provided by a tradition. A given act can also become the site for a critical interrogation of a tradition as a whole, since it does not depend on a single tradition for its meaning and effect, but upon a multicultural context constituted by the inter-relation and mutual translation of traditions.

For example, a speech act which draws upon a tradition in which the commitment to the rights of the individual is weak, or even non-existent, is, in the multicultural context, required to respond to other traditions in which such a commitment is strong. Similarly, a tradition in which commitment to communal rights is strong may legitimate a speech act

which can have the effect of strengthening the commitment to communal rights in other traditions. In both cases, it is the debate across ethical traditions that strengthens, or weakens, strains in other traditions. Thus, my argument relies upon a conception of tradition that regards it as necessary to the formulation of the ethical import of a given statement—that no statement is meaningful simply by itself and requires a context of meaning to become so. However, neither is a tradition simply monolithic. It contains different strains, arguments and commitments that can be strengthened, or weakened, in the context of a specific application of the tradition to debate concerning a contemporary issue. It is the debate across traditions that enables the multicultural speech act to contain an expanded notion of critique that can extend to cultural traditions as a whole—unlike the restriction of critique to the extension of a tradition which, as hermeneutic philosophy has taught us, is inevitable if the legitimating tradition is singular. In this sense, an "authentic, genuine multiculturalism" could emerge that is not limited to government policy, sociological fact or academic apologies for these as a "realized ideal" but, rather, refers to the legitimacy of a plurality of traditions in public discourse.

In order to do this, the concept of multiculturalism must be expanded to include the somewhat distinct notion of a *post-colonial* speech act in order to clarify a certain component of the plurality of legitimating traditions. This plurality—which has been present in Canada since its colonial inception and has, at least to some degree, always found official recognition—can be domesticated through the colonial assumption that one discourse is the only *legitimate* basis for the adjudication of competing claims. The post-coloniality of a speech act thus consists in the recognition that the plurality of traditions is legitimate. It therefore legitimates a plurality of traditions to which a speech act may refer

to provide a meaningful context in intervening in public discourse. Post-coloniality thus refers to the impossibility of hierarchizing the plurality of traditions. Highlighting this component of contemporary democratic theory justifies a certain interpretation of Canadian Federalism as the history of processes of inclusion of particularities into a proposed universality. [28] Thus, as a tradition of diverse accomodations rather than subsumption under a homogeneous set of institutional arrangements. It is upon this tradition of accomodation of particularities that a post-colonial democratic practice can orient itself.

A discourse can be said to be multicultural insofar as the cultural tradition upon which a given speech act draws for its legitimation is not the only relevant cultural tradition upon which a responding speech act can draw. A discourse can be said to be post-colonial insofar as the institutional tradition within which a speech act occurs is open to debate about the rules on which it is based, not only the practices that refer to the rules. My argument is that a multicultural and postcolonial discourse decentres the hierarchy between a speech act and its context in a way that widens the concept of critique. This expanded notion of critique decentres public deliberation such as to turn it towards a democracy that can sustain a plural but still substantive conception of ethical life.

The centring legacy of Canadian Federalism due to its origin in the British Empire, and its continuing imperial relation to internal nationalities through conquest, has been dis-placed—though certainly not overcome—through the history of specific acts of accomodation to particularities. Empire allows the other to speak but controls the rules of interaction between speakers such that the context, or the rules of interaction, is itself

monopolized. Democratic theory must therefore not only address the question of 'the right of the other to speak' but also the question of the 'legitimate tradition(s)' within which such speech will be interpreted. Aboriginal speech, for example, has been present in Canada since its inception, but the Canadian nations-state has never ceded it an equal right of interpretation. Speech that is barred from touching the rules of interaction becomes a 'minority' speech precisely through this bar. It is relegated to being a content, whereas imperial speech not only provided content but also a tradition which decided the definitive interpretation of the speech act in question. In principle, post-coloniality thus refers not only to the presence of a plurality of traditions in a given context but primarily to the inability of any one of these traditions to monopolize the rules. If no single tradition 'owns' the context, then every speech act functions in a double fashion: as a statement in a given debate and as a 'representative' of the tradition which gives it meaning, such that this representation constitutes a claim to interpret the context of interaction.

A key feature of the concept of democracy is thus that the multicultural and post-colonial subject is constituted by two 'levels' of identifications. Instead of identifying directly with the nation, the subject identifies with a sub-national group such as a linguistic, ethnic, gender or regional identity, and *through this identification* identifies also *in a particular way* with the nation. The nation is thus constituted by its internal plurality. The political subject is consequently in an us-we relation with other groups, not an us-them relation.

6. De-centring as Democracy

Critiques of mono-culturalism and the legacy of colonialism converge on a critique of all ‘centrisms’ that would attempt to insulate democratic debate from the decentring consequences of the interaction between cultures and the loss of a stabilizing imperial context. ‘Centring’ is understood as the monopolizing, or attempted monopolizing, of the rules of discourse whereby those statements whose traditions are excluded from pertaining to the context of interaction become ‘minority’ or ‘marginalized.’ A contemporary democratic theory depends upon an *in principle* critique of centrism that, in two distinct senses, de-centres the hierarchization of discourse and speech act which has confined democratic speech within the limitations established by dominant powers acting through the nation-state and the capitalist economy. The multicultural context implies the inadequacy of any “centrism”—Euro or otherwise. Insofar as a “centrism” arises when particular features of a cultural tradition are carried over into the universal claims made on its basis through the stabilization of a context of interpretation, only the constitutive paradox of the multicultural speech act can thoroughly undermine centrism. This it does, not by making a statement immune to criticism through cultural translation, but by requiring a working out precisely through such translations. It is a beginning statement, rather than a final one, which attempts to define the particularity of the relevant context by necessarily invoking universalizing concepts which themselves will demand particularizing criticism.

The clarification of a decentring speech act can avoid the false alternative of a mere particularism or a homogenizing, rule-bound universalism in favour of the accomodation of particularities into a proposed universalization by way of the recognition of a legitimate plurality of traditions. A discourse can be said to be multicultural insofar as the

cultural tradition upon which a given speech act draws for its legitimation is not the only relevant cultural tradition upon which a responding speech act can draw. A discourse can be said to be postcolonial insofar as the institutional tradition within which a speech act occurs is open to debate about the rules on which it is based, not only the practices that refer to the rules. A multicultural and postcolonial discourse thus decentres hierarchy in two senses. It decentres the hierarchy between cultural tradition and speech act by pluralizing the cultural traditions to which a speech act may refer in establishing its meaningfulness. It decentres the legitimacy of the institutional arrangements that have allowed the nation-state to address sub-groups within the nation, or potentially sovereign groups, from 'above,' as it were, by dictating the rules of discourse. In short, the 'multiculturality' of the speech act refers to the plurality of traditions within which a given statement takes on meaning. The 'postcoloniality' of the speech act refers to the absence of a definitive hierarchy between traditions. Any concept of democracy that responds adequately to conditions of cultural plurality needs to incorporate these two dimensions.

Notes:

[1] León Olivé, *Multicultualismo y Pluralismo* (Mexico: Paidós, 1999).

[2] Fernando Salmerón, *Diversidad Cultural y Tolerancia* (Mexico: Paidós, 1998).

[3] Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition" in *Multiculturalism and 'The Politics of Recognition'* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

[4] Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[5] A note on terminology: Canada is probably in transition from being a nation-state to being a nations-state. That is to say, that the Aboriginal and French-speaking minorities are entering—slowly, of course, and through political struggles—into the 'foundation' of the nation-state, thus transforming it into a state made through the union of several nations such as the United Kingdom. This would solve some of the problems of conquest, but not the violent unity through an 'unmarked centre' that is inherent in the modern state as such—which my post-colonial rendering here seeks to address. I thus use the term nation-state to refer to the untransformed historical foundation through conquest in which the 'minorities' do not partake as such in the nation ruling the state. Nations-state refers to the (probably) emerging tripartite foundation in which 'minorities' are transformed into 'founding peoples.' This distinction, while clear conceptually, is however difficult to deploy consistently in specific examples without considerable circumlocutions, though I have attempted to do so to the greatest extent possible.

[6] This was the conscious limitation of scope in Ian Angus, *A Border Within: National Identity, Cultural Plurality and Wilderness* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997) chapter 6 *passim*, especially p. 146. I am now arguing that such a limitation of scope is more problematic than I perceived at the time, that such a limitation is not innocent but contains theoretical consequences for removing the nations-state from consideration, that is to say, making thebackground assumption that it is legitimate. I have Richard Day to thank for problematizing this apsect of my previous work.

[7] Regarding Aboriginal refusal, see Marianne Boelscher Ignace and Ronald E. Ignace, "The Old Wolf in Sheep's Clothing? Canadian Aboriginal Peoples and Multiculturalism" in Dieter Haselbach (ed.) *Multiculturalism in a World of Leaking Boundaries* (Münster: Lit Verlag, 1998) and Richard J. F. Day and Tonio Sadik, "The BC Land Question, Liberal Multiculturalism,

and the Spectre of Aboriginal Nationhood" in *BC Studies*, 2002. Regarding Québec, see Daniel Latouche, "Canada: The New Country from within the Old Dominion," *Queen's Quarterly*, 98, 1991 and Pierre Fournier, *A Meech Lake Post-Mortem: Is Québec Sovereignty Inevitable?,* trans. Shiela Fischman (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1991) chapter 5.

[8] The question of how to refer to the non-Aboriginal, non-Québec institutional order of Canada is itself a terminological question that compacts many important historical and political issues. Suffice it to say that I refer here to English as the language of common everyday interaction and its institutional consequences not to the origin of individuals.

[9] I have documented this polarization in detail in *A Border Within*, pp. 135-46.

[10] *Ibid.* pp. 147-54.

[11] This concept of 'institution' is explicated in Ian Angus, *Primal Scenes of Communication: Communication, Consumerism and Social Movements* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).

[12] Richard Day, *Multiculturalism and the History of Canadian Diversity* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000) p. 6, 27.

[13] Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) p. 151.

[14] I have discussed the concept of the unmarked, organizing category in *Primal Scenes of Communication*, pp. 146ff.

[15] Michael Ignatieff, *The Rights Revolution* (Toronto: Anansi, 2000) p. 136. See also pp. 9-10, where he states that "Canada has been inventive in finding ways to enable a large multi-ethnic, multinational state to survive and even prosper." Though this possibility is, he admits

"never-quite-realized," it is nevertheless in principle in place such that one need only accept and further the "rights revolution" already long underway.

[16] Ibid, pp. 70, 9, 135, 121, 82.

[17] Ibid, pp. 10-3, 76, 130. Will Kymlicka, "Three Forms of Group-Differentiated Citizenship in Canada" in Seyla Benhabib (ed.) *Democracy and Difference: Contersting the Boundaries of the Political* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) pp. 164-5.

[18] I have not the space here to make the argument that procedural rights are always built upon, and cannot be severed from, cultural assumptions. This is, of course, a debated point in current political theory.

[19] Day, pp. 30-1; Mackey, pp. 2, 64, 66.

[20] Kogila Moodley, "Canadian Multiculturalism as Ideology" in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 6(3) 1983, p. 327.

[21] Day, p. 34.

[22] Ibid. The key reason that Day provides for this consequence is that multiculturalism is tied to the state, and thus, one supposes, is based on the claim that the modern state cannot be all-inclusive (42, 44). While this claim seems probable to me, it does not do the duty of dismissing multiculturalism outright unless it is argued that multiculturalism is necessarily tied to the state-form. That it has been so in Canada is unarguable; that it must be so seems to me rather to require extensive support. While Day does show the assumption of the ultimate legitimacy of the modern state in some authors that he discusses, this does not suffice as an argument that all authors committed to the social ideal of multiculturalism must make such an assumption.

[23] Michel Foucault, quoted in Eva Mackey, p. 4.

[24] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" quoted in Day, p. 17.

[25] Michel Foucault, "On Popular Justice: A Discussion with Maoists" in Colin Gordon (ed.) *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and other Writings 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon, 1980).

[26] J. L. Austin, *How to do things with words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975) p. 6.

[27] The concept of constitutive paradox has been developed in my *(Dis)figurations: Discourse/Critique/Ethics* (London and New York: Verso, 2000) chapter 2.

[28] See Ian Angus, "Post-Colonial Federalism: Social Citizenship and New Identities" in *Constitutional Issues*, Vol. 7, Special issue, edited by Claude Couture.