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Multicultural Nationalism and the Poetics of Inauguration

Minoo Moallem and Iain A. Boal

> . . . not because empire, like capital, is abstract, but because empire messes with identity.
>
> —Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,
> *Outside in the Teaching Machine,* 1993

The publication of *Systema Naturae* by Carl Linnaeus, the Swedish naturalist and physician, in the mid–eighteenth century was not only the founding act of modern biological science but a significant intervention in the sexual and racial politics of the emerging system of European nation-states. In his scandalous answer to what Thomas Huxley called "the question of all questions"—the place of humans in nature— Linnaeus coined the term "mammalia" in order to join *homo sapiens* to the animal kingdom. In choosing the breast (*mamma*) over other, more inclusive differentiating signifiers, he thereby struck a blow for republican motherhood and natalism by emphasizing how "natural" it was for bourgeois women to suckle their own infants rather than hire a wet nurse.[1] Linnaeus went on to encompass humanity within four quadrants of color—white, yellow, black, and red—systematically naturalizing northern European racism in his clockwise zoological taxonomy.[2] The embedding of race in scientific nomenclature continues to leave its traces in twentieth-century categories of U.S. immigration policy and quotas leading to citizenship. Carl Brigham's massively influential 1923 *Study of American Intelligence* deployed scientific data produced by the Eugenics Record Office to support both immigration restriction legislation and the preservation of segregation. He said that "we must face a possibility of racial admixture here that is infinitely worse than that faced by any European country today. . . . The really important steps are those looking toward the prevention of the continued propagation

of defective strains in the present population. . . . This . . . will determine the future course of our national life" (quoted in Chase 1980, 272).

The Linnaean quadratic division was expanded in the course of the twentieth century to include a "brown" race. More recently, in the complex linkages between race and ethnicity, ethnocultural categories— African American, Asian American, Native American, Hispanic, and so on—have been mapped onto the old racial taxonomy.[3] This culturalizing of the officially acknowledged classification conforms to a multicultural logic that is open-ended; there is in principle no limit to the potential ethnocultural groupings that may compose the nation. The limit is in effect the ability of groups with a self-ascribed identity to mount successful appeals to the state, which manages such negotiations as part of the procedures of "official nationalism" with its various bureaucracies and state rituals such as the presidential inauguration.[4] Despite, or perhaps because of, the ethnicization of the taxonomy of national identification, the old rhetorics of a racialized biology are by no means dead. *The Bell Curve* is only the most recent malignant outgrowth.[5] Moreover, within the U.S. polity, Native American identity continues to be defined by the colonizers exclusively in racial/familial terms (as "tribes") (Perry 1995).[6]
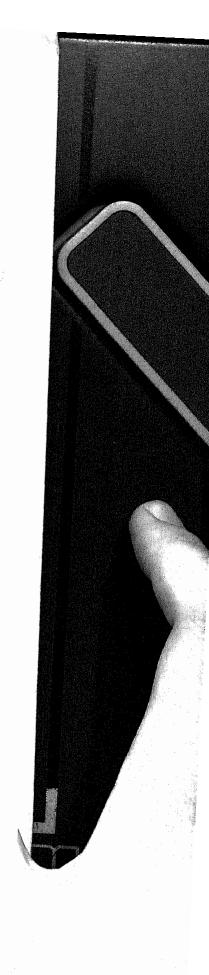
Racialization remains a deep current in the politics of inequality. It has generated severe historical contradictions to the point of crisis for liberal nation-state formations, which must reconcile racial logic with the universalistic aspirations of Enlightenment ideology. Multiculturalism has emerged as an emblematic discursive site—a "corrective" to this crisis. It is a discourse that, in cobbling together elements from a number of political positions, attempts to square liberal notions of citizenship with a radical critique of the liberal subject. By this means it seeks to transcend modern racial formations in the shift from colonialism to postcolonial regimes of inclusion and exclusion. This fundamental contradiction produces symptomatic effects on the way in which the discourse of multiculturalism consistently evades engagement with three pressing issues: the enduring heritage of Eurocentrism, the question of justice, and the connections between national and global domains. With respect to the contingencies of Eurocentrism, "multiculturalism" has become a shibboleth that contrives to efface all historicity in its consumption of the present. It masks the legacy of racism and its systematic connection to dominant definitions of culture and civilization.[7] With respect to justice, modern law's disinterest

is a sham. Equal legal rights inevitably presuppose the judgment of *some* particular collectivity; as a result, the expression of many collective forms of life is not even recognized. With respect to the process of globalization, multiculturalism has become an instrument of those economic and cultural forces working to perpetuate injustice and further intensify racial, ethnic, gender, and class divisions of labor by restructuring economies through deregulation and the recomposition of labor.

In this essay, we attempt to bring into sharper focus the question of multiculturalism's relation to the recent recoding of the American national imaginary, together with its legal and political implications. We see multiculturalism as a site where commodified global capitalism meshes with particular cultural and national formations. We draw on Berlant (1991) in the following discussion to locate multiculturalism at the meeting point of naturalization, normalization, and nationalization, the place where political estrangement and intimacy are linked. We examine in some detail the poetics of inauguration, when the state impresarios stage a significant, albeit banal, moment of convergence between the political regulation of the disembodied, abstract citizen and its popular reframing through the construction of a "national phantasy."[8] We argue that the making of a "multicultural nationalism" is an attempt by the liberal ideological apparatus to overcome the inadequacy of its existing institutions for the protection of freedom and cultural difference. Struggling with a crisis of legitimation—vide the 1992 Los Angeles insurrection—multicultural nationalism operates on the fault line between a universalism based on the notion of an abstract citizenship that at the same time systematically produces sexualized, gendered, and racialized bodies, and particularistic claims for recognition and justice by minoritized groups.

"Race," White Privilege, and U.S. National Identity

The national imaginary comes to be nourished by certain rituals and ceremonies through a historical process that Ranger and Hobsbawm (1983) have termed "the invention of tradition." Every four years the incoming president summons U.S. citizens to a fresh beginning, a new dawn. The post–cold war political context, the global expansion of communications media, and the crisis of the nation-state lent a certain significance to the inauguration of 1993. The transition from the Bush to the Clinton administration was notably marked by a politics of repre-

sentation that offered a new image of national identity. The rhetoric of the successful campaign registered an emerging form of U.S. identity, one that we are calling "multicultural nationalism." The sense of distinctiveness has typically not been discussed in terms of "nation" and "nationalism," though expressions such as "American identity," "American ethnicity," and "racial formation" significantly correlate with notions of national identity, national character, and the ideological origins of U.S. identity.

U.S. identity was forged from its beginnings in the twin discourses of "nation" and "race." The ideological foundation of this nationality was a commitment to certain principles—liberty, equality, and governance on the basis of consent and identification with those principles. National identity was constructed in terms of a break from an English colonial past and, in the postrevolutionary period, the establishment of a unified government. Hobsbawm remarks, "What characterized the nation-people as seen from below was precisely that it represented the common interest against particular interests, the common good against privilege, as indeed is suggested by the term Americans used before 1800 to indicate nationhood while avoiding the word itself" (1990, 20). Whatever its representation, the nation was in fact predicated on the superiority of the "white Englishman," bearer of the values informing the new republic. There was a profound continuity in the cultural, political, and economic spheres, since white supremacist oppression in the United States was a mirror of, and had its roots in, English rule in Ireland.[9]

The organization of official nationalism has historically pivoted around establishment of racial boundaries within the framework of the nation-state. In this respect, U.S. national identity from the start has been formed and reformed in the discourse of race.[10] The later trajectory of official nationalist discourse, from the assimilatory politics of the melting pot through pleas for tolerance and respect for difference to the recent anti-immigrant backlash, has mediated between a unitary notion of U.S. identity and the quest for a hegemonic position at the onset of the postwar "American century."

Dream Logic: "On the Pulse of Morning"

At President Clinton's first inauguration, the poet Maya Angelou read her *vers d'occasion*, entitled "On the Pulse of Morning." By way of satellite relays and the new global communications media, Angelou's recital

was heard by the largest poetry audience in history.[11] In American elementary and high schools, the poem achieved instant canonization, with vast sales in various editions. The poem rehearses stock themes—the "new dawn" motif, together with another quadrennial cliché, the rebirth of "the dream"—phantasies of infantile omnipotence and maternal fusion recently channeled through national networks with notorious success by Ronald Reagan.

The poem is, accordingly, constructed upon the old monument of state nationalism. Nevertheless, "On the Pulse of Morning" bears a reading not because of any poetic virtues, but because it inflects old tropes with the new discourse of multiculturalism. It officially registered, at a major ritual of state, the significant discursive shift from "melting pot" to "mosaic." Consider these verses:

There is a true yearning to respond to
The singing river and the wise Rock.
So say the Asian, the Hispanic, the Jew,
The African, the Native American, the Sioux,
The Catholic, the Muslim, the French, the Greek,
The Irish, the Rabbi, the Priest, the Sheikh,
The Gay, the Straight, the Preacher,
The privileged, the homeless, the Teacher . . .

Each of you, descendant of some passed
On traveller, has been paid for.
You, who gave me my first name, you
Pawnee, Apache, Seneca, you
Cherokee Nation, who rested with me, then
Forced on bloody feet, left me to the employment of
other seekers—desperate for gain,
Starving for gold.
You, the Turk, the Arab, the Swede, the German, the Eskimo,
    the Scot . . .
You the Ashanti, the Yoruba, the Kru, bought
Sold, stolen, arriving on a nightmare
praying for a dream.

The poem provokes questions about the implications of such a state-approved mutation in voice and subjectivity, one not readily imaginable at the Bush inauguration just four years before. Did this shift in politi-

cal discourse—many years in the making—portend change in the direction of civil society? Does multiculturalism have much—or, indeed, anything—to do with redistribution of wealth and the social politics of equality? The "Western Culture" debate, the struggle over the "rainbow curriculum" in schools, and the "P.C. wars" are, to be sure, reflections of changed conditions. The narrative of American identity embodied in Western Civilization courses originated in a 1917 propaganda course at Columbia College. The aim was to turn student cadets, training for the trenches of Flanders, into "thinking bayonets." The triumphalist Eurocentric curriculum lay undisturbed in its essential Aryan features until the late 1960s, at which time the imperialist, racist, and sexist presuppositions could no longer remain tacit. The pedagogical crisis rumbles on—over textbooks, curricula, and affirmative hiring—of course without resolution.[12]

What are the structural causes of these changed conditions? What accounts for the polytonality refracted through those inaugural verses? First, the palpable presence of women and of ethnic and racial minorities in different spheres of American life—as well as the continuing challenge that minority social movements represent—have made it impossible for the establishment to maintain the old assimilationist discourse. The struggles of feminists as well as ethnic and racial minorities confront conventional notions of American national identity, exposing the different ways in which it has been shaped by sexism and racism. In response, an effort is underway within dominant institutions to recuperate the advances painfully gained during the civil rights and women's struggles and to preempt deeper change by a narrowly culturalist understanding of pluralism. Second, the current economic restructuring—namely, segmentation of the labor market and recomposition of the labor force nationally and internationally, the growth of ethnic economies, and the changing patterns of consumption—exploit ethnicity as a form of exotic "otherness." The neoimperialist cosmopolitan cultural appropriation and its potential for summoning authentic ethnicities in its masculinist nationalist reinvention more than ever creates pressure to recognize the "other" at the level of culture. Third, the growing number of ethnic and racial minorities, the demographic changes, and the effective disenfranchisement and exclusion of certain groups from civil society have had a significant impact on public policies and the electoral process.[13] Social movements and the changing demographics of postwar America have caused a number of revisions to official taxon-

omy, especially with respect to affirmative action. State logic is in this matter profoundly contradictory, incoherent even, since the classification is based on discrepant criteria, namely, "race," language, geography, and "country of origin."[14]

Reducing these divisions to the issue of diversity, therefore, can only work to mystify the underside of social reality. It also distracts from an engagement with the kind of pluralism that takes seriously the questions of discrimination, inequality, and social justice. Avery Gordon (1994) explores the paradox of the liberal antiracist attitude that co-exists with support for racist outcomes; that is, there is a form of "liberal racism" governed by the law of an assimilationism that cannot do its work without diversity. Gordon notes the phenomenon of "diversity management," which characterizes liberal racism or neoracism; it is now a core component of the emerging "multicultural corporatism."[15]

At the same time, in a double movement, the logic of multiculturalism creates homogeneity within each culture or ethnicity, facilitating class alliances between whites and upper-class minorities to the neglect of internal complexities of identity as well as of their multiplicities (Grewal 1994). It deploys the myth of America as a nation of immigrants whose separateness can be mapped homogeneously onto their places of origin. Such a homogenized notion of community renders very problematic the matter of representation, authenticity, and exclusion. Who may speak in the name of whom? Spivak, in her discussion of this theme, notes, "Only the dominant self can be problematic; the self of the Other is authentic without a problem, naturally available to all kinds of complications. This is very frightening" (1990: 66).

Puritan Bearings: "The Gift Outright"

Notwithstanding the recuperation, it remains true that the voice of a "woman of color" at the presidential inauguration marked a sea change, not only in American political discourse but in political life. The poet's view of the "bruising darkness and wrenching pain" of American history and her inclusive vision of a nation embracing differences of ethnicity, "race," sexual preference, and religious faith signified a symbolic rupture at the level of political representation. The presence of Angelou, an African American woman, decked in a red ribbon of remembrance for those who have died of AIDS, and her multicultural America, broke from the dominant WASP ethnocentrism. Just how much of a break can

be gauged by comparing "On the Pulse of Morning" with the poem read on an earlier such occasion—Robert Frost's "The Gift Outright," delivered in January 1961 at Kennedy's inauguration:

> The land was ours before we were the land's.
> She was our land more than a hundred years
> Before we were her people. She was ours
> In Massachusetts, in Virginia,
> But we were England's, still colonials,
> Possessing what we still were unpossessed by,
> Possessed by what we now no more possessed.
> Something we were withholding made us weak
> Until we found out it was ourselves
> We were withholding from our land of living,
> And forthwith found salvation in surrender.
> Such as we were we gave ourselves outright
> (The deed of gift was many deeds of war)
> To the land vaguely realizing westward,
> But still unstoried, artless, unenhanced,
> Such as she was, such as she would become.[16]

This New England poet's imagination conjured a land without people, inducing a national act of amnesia, a savage forgetting of several millennia of indigenous inhabitancy. Frost then smoothly composes possession of the land—in reality, its brutal dispossession.[17] The structure of memory in "The Gift Outright" mirrors the construction of "whiteness" in America and the creation of a "people without history" resident in a land likewise without history.

The idea of an empty wilderness, free of inhabitants, was, of course, a very congenial myth to the invading Puritans.[18] Some gift, indeed. The structure of the Puritan wilderness myth conforms to the logic of a dichotomized, gendered opposition between nature and civilization. It has continued to structure contemporary ideologies of, and attitudes toward, the natural.[19] For example, Carleton Watkins's 1860s photographs of Yosemite coached the modern imagination of wilderness by figuring the valley as a pristine garden of Eden. Indeed, it *was* a garden, thanks to the horticulture of the Miwok, whose home it had been until lethally expropriated just before Watkins made his images.[20] The transformation of the land "such as she was . . . unstoried, artless, and unenhanced" into the land "such as she would become" takes the usurpa-

tion for granted. A poem, after all, of Western conquest. And a poem of nation making by a hegemonic "we," who only become a "people" after blood sacrifice, spilt on the soil of the new creation at its foundation.

Frost's use of the landscape memorializes an imperialist, monocultural claim over territory; Angelou depicts a landscape at once primordial and teeming with peoples. What binds together her multicultural Whitmanesque catalogue of tired travelers is a biblical invocation of rock, river, and tree and the familiar Romantic nationalist trope—"Plant yourself"—purged this time of the condition of racial purity.

In the literature of nationalism there is always implicit a poetics of territory. Poems, national anthems, and novels, among other literary forms, have played their part in the hegemonization of national culture in the process of nation building. The entanglement of politics and literary practices produce what Doris Sommer (1991) has called an erotics of politics.[21] The history of poetry in the service of political powers constitutes, need one say, a dismal chapter. Most, perhaps all such effusions reproduce official consciousness. Indeed, Hans Magnus Enzensberger comes close to arguing that the only possible political poetry is one of irony and protest, because poetry cannot, without grotesque results, affirm any social power, whether of leader, party, or state. Yet much nationalist poetry has in its time been unofficial and oppositional. Often, its inspiration is the experience of place or the memory of it. It is certainly possible for such poetry to create a resonant symbolism by restructuring collective perceptions. By choosing an affective field that carries heavy, if uncrystallized, cultural freight, there remains the possibility of engagé poetry beyond mock epics or nationalist propaganda that rhymes.[22]

National Phantasy and Political Memory

Nationalism, albeit in multicultural dress, is at the heart of Angelou's poetical finessing of the dilemma of racial and ethnic harmony in America. No surprise here, really. One of the crucial missions of nationalism is the creation of a "unified community" that transcends gender, sex, "race," ethnic, and class divisions. A shared real or imagined past thus defines the present in the trajectory toward a common future. Indeed, Cornel West asserts that "America has always been a nation that looked to the future. It is a prospective nation. That is one of the reasons why we have such a limited sense of history, that we are a forward-

looking nation rather than a backward-looking nation" (1993, 23). Not that there does not exist a countertradition of resistance to the national amnesia of dispossession, imperialism, and slavery; nor that the past— in the form of a fetishized constitution, the nation's ark of the covenant—is not endlessly deployed, often precisely to *foreclose* the future. The originary egalitarian mythos of the republic's foundation masks the continuity of the truly vast grants of land from the English crown. In 1700, for example, three-quarters of the territory of New York belonged to fewer than a dozen men (Parenti 1980, chap. 2).

The transcendent nature of nationalist discourse depends on a constant complementarity and reconciliation among groups with contradictory and even opposing interests and positions in society. The "unified community" of the nation requires unsleeping negotiation and renegotiation, construction and reconstruction, creation and re-creation. It works ceaselessly at the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion.[23] While Angelou's (1994) multicultural dream prompts a self-conscious awakening of America—

> But today, the Rock cries out to us, clearly, forcefully,
> come, you may stand upon my
> back and face your distant destiny,
> But seek no haven in my shadow.
> I will give you no hiding place down here

—its nationalism requires the reconstruction yet again of a transcending community, a "unity of contraries"—even, in the limiting case, as Angelou euphuistically has it, of "Midas" and the "mendicant." Underneath the romantic reconciliation of a community of brothers and sisters—

> Here on the pulse of this new day
> You may have the grace to look up and out
> and into your sister's eyes and into
> your brother's face

—dramatic class, racial/ethnic, and gender inequalities continue to determine different groups' destiny, undermining the hope of, this time, a "multicultural harmony."

The nation as an imagined community is a "cultural artefact" that keeps changing and taking new forms (Anderson 1983: 4). In the case of American nationalism, it is necessary to bear in mind the hegemonic

global "posture" of the United States in the post–World War II context, and the tight linkage between national discourse and its positioning internationally. In the postwar period, American national identity was defined and structured strongly by a Manichean logic and a rhetoric of "anticommunism." Since 1989, the bipolar ideological axis of nationalist discourse has been unhinged. Now there is a new America, unique and monopolar in its representation as the only imaginable social order. This new dreamland—transfiguration of the Puritans' "shining city on the hill"—promises diversity, free will, and market democracy. The need for a redefinition of American identity is occasioned not only by the absence of a communist alter ego but also by the visible presence and political significance of women, minorities, and new immigrants from third world and non-European countries. The neoconservative response to the changed conditions has been a defensive recourse to a homesickness for the familiar and secure Anglo conformity of the melting pot. One result has been direct attacks on the poor and on immigrants.

Liberal reaction, by contrast, has sought ways to reconstruct American identity by incorporating a certain discourse of pluralism and multiculturalism. The new American discourse of "color awareness" portrays a fair society that is no longer "color-blind" but conscious of the impact of "race" in the everyday life of America. This "color awareness" is problematic less in its attempt to register the cultural politics of difference vis-à-vis the historical construction of skin color as a signifier that condenses prior systems of marks into new categories, but rather in the comfortable "racialism" that accepts the ideological assumption that race is antecedent to racial differences.

This racialist form of color awareness conforms to a politics of inclusion based on the model of a solid core surrounded by a periphery of the marginalized and the minoritized. It enables disidentification with those thus horizontally categorized, by creating boundary effects such that a homogeneous "we" reproduces itself through the constant fabrication of "them." This double movement has allowed conservative intellectuals plausibly to claim that racism can be overcome while "race" is still in force.[24] In addition, it legitimizes anti-immigrant sentiments among those "racialized" groups who have been categorized as "citizens." The mythos of America as a land of opportunity has thus been reconstituted—the promissory society now offers not material plenty, but rather a hospitable adoptive home for all kinds of "otherness."[25]

America as "the land of diversity" imagines itself this time as tolerant of the "others," without, however, questioning the dynamic by which "othering" proceeds in American society. The recent deployment of the categories of documented/undocumented, a variant on the old alien/native division, is an example of this continuous process of hierarchical dichotomizing. A nationalized "land" mediates between the objective presence of the state and the subjective correlative of the nation. It represents both a context for action and a source of identity.[26] Multicultural nationality has a tense relation to the model of "consensual" citizenship, in which the nation is constructed through the intentionality of freely choosing subjects. The tension derives from the fact that "consensual" citizenship is in contradiction with "birthright" citizenship (traceable to English monarchical theory and a feudal system of "natural" allegiance), since the latter produces citizenship through blood and soil, in a conflation of *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli.*

Free choice and diversity—these are the contemporary shibboleths of the liberal discursive construction of "freedom," that lodestar of American nationalism, even as it facilitates the consolidation of the power structures of the state and its massive reliance on regimes of surveillance. The story, in fact, is one of continuing incorporation of new technologies that track citizens and noncitizens, together with corresponding redefinitions of privacy and personal freedoms (Grewal 1994). This redefinition is by no means confined to the state and its apparatuses; it is central to those modern institutions that constitute the regimes of control—drawing on wartime developments in cybernetics, computation, communications, and mass psychological warfare—now vital to the processes of capitalist production, distribution, and consumption.[27]

Cultural Pluralism and Diversity: Old Remedies, New Formulation

The American propagandists and psychological warriors of the 1940s used the postwar alliance between high-technology industry and the national security state to exploit the civil reconversion of military technics. They constructed a new field of "international communications," whose implicit strategy was to facilitate the export of progress—along with the capitalist cornucopia—to the rest of the world, via the apparatus of telecommunications. This diffusionist model operated under the rubrics of "modernization" and "development"; the new nations of the

postcolonial world, playing catch-up, were to be on the receiving end of the global process of democratic homogenization. Domestically, the war produced a crisis of legitimacy within the segregated military. Mutinies and other forms of resistance resulted in de jure integration at the end of World War II. At the same time, the war—because it was a global conflict—had forced recognition of the plurality of cultures and languages worldwide. American postwar diplomacy, as well as industrial and commercial corporations, had to negotiate this polycultural world. In fact, appreciation of the complexity of intercultural communication by certain anthropologists could be more or less ignored in the first flush of American cold war hegemony. Nevertheless, by the mid-1950s it had become clear that assimilationist remedies were foundering both nationally and internationally, and that "holistic" management would be needed to regulate ethnic and national identities (Mattelart 1994, 211).

During the pluralist turn, which took place at the moment of convergence between anticolonial movements and ethnic insurgency in the United States, assimilation and acculturation were problematized and rejected. A new national imaginary had to be recreated through the naturalization and normalization of ethnicity. Given the evident persistence of "ethnicity," the social process of group formation based on culture and descent was dressed in theoretical garb by liberal pluralists and applied in policy at state and federal levels.[28]

The shift from cultural pluralism to multiculturalism has roots in the emergence of the racial minority oppositional movements of the 1960s. Indeed, it is necessary to see the ways in which the new multiculturalism is continuous with the earlier discourse of cultural pluralism in dealing with what Balibar calls the "theoretical racism" of liberal democracy. The mobilizing power—of multiculturalism and its mood—has met recuperation by the state. Multiculturalism within a logic of nationalism is bound to be recuperated, and has become an important factor in politics at the national level.[29] Recuperation proceeds by using the language of the polycultural to create strategies of "coping with differences" rather than taking steps toward a radical deepening of democracy. A recuperative multiculturalism dissimulates the reality of economic inequality, political and institutional discrimination, and cultural exclusion, which cuts across the basic social divisions of gender, "race," and class. The key discursive tactic is to denature and reduce ex-

ploitation, oppression, and domination to "respect for differences." She does Hanukkah, he does Kwanza; I like sushi, you like pizza.[30] Create "diversity" and then homogenize it.

Not that liberal pluralism escaped challenge from theorists who revealed the deep connection between ethnic pluralism and "race" relations (Blauner 1972), class and systematic inequalities (Steinberg 1981), and state regulatory mechanisms and "racial formation" (Omi and Winant 1994). These political theorists rejected institutional inclusion, equality, and universality as well as an ethnicity paradigm in favor of a radical theory of politics based on both the historicity of race and ethnic relations—conquest, slavery, exploitation—and on marginality, subjectivity, and difference. The interesting linkage of historicity, marginality, and subjectivity has been explored by radical women of color in their challenge to multiple layers of oppression, in the defetishization of "community" and a constant problematization of rigid boundaries (Anzaldúa 1987; Alarcón 1990; hooks 1990). La mestiza, or the new subject of the "borderland," develops a tolerance for contradictions and ambiguity and "learns to be an Indian in Mexican culture, to be Mexican from an Anglo point of view. She learns to juggle cultures. She has a plural personality, she operates in a pluralistic mode" (Anzaldúa 1987, 79). Still, as Alarcón notes, crossing ethnic or racial boundaries does not necessarily free the subaltern or marginal woman from "violence against herself" nor from hegemonic feminist constructions of sisterhood (1989: 87–88).

Multiculturalism, Oppositional Agency, and the Politics of "Difference"

The discourse of multiculturalism and its call for political and cultural recognition and inclusion *in the framework of a nationalist ideology* therefore has fundamental limitations. It does not address the question of cultural politics and its implications for ethnic and racial minorities. It is a discourse that homogenizes ethnic groups; it refuses specificity and particularity among and within groups, dismissing the question of hybridity. The discourse of multiculturalism finesses the historicity of constructed differences globally and locally. It ignores the relationship between the construction of ethnicities in a context of colonial and postcolonial social relations, and economic and cultural imperialism.[31] Reducing unequal power relations to "tolerating others" smothers

the histories of colonialism and anti-imperialism (Bannerji 1993). The genealogy of domination as a global sociocultural formation is totally occluded, glossing over complexities and connections between the politics of recognition and the politics of redistribution, which do not necessarily complement each other. In fact, in many instances, they generate different logics with contradictory subliminal dynamics (Fraser 1995). For example, "race," "sexuality," and "gender" are sites of tension between the politics of recognition and the politics of redistribution. While recognizing social differences and group identifications based on those differences, the project of deconstruction of these marking systems and their historical contingency will remain at the heart of any process of social redistribution.

For many ethnic groups the politics of difference is an urgent matter of the relationships among culture, self-representation, and practice based on identity and subjectivity. The decentralization of politics—that is, the expansion of civil society and forms of nongovernmental control of groups' politics—cannot be reconciled with a caricatured version of ethnicity, which, even though supported by ethnic elites or state policies, is nonetheless recuperative in its interpretation of multiculturalism and cultural diversity. Official multiculturalism assumes that ethnic minority communities are homogeneous and somehow represent an authentic and unified culture. It trades on and reinforces the notion of cultures as static entities with fixed boundaries. Within such a framework, all transgression, singularity of experience, and multiplicity of identities are rendered "impure," even acts of betrayal.[32] It is a framework that effaces both the "hybrid" experience of many dislocated and diasporic populations, denying the ambiguity of belonging, and also what Homi Bhabha calls a "third space," which "displaces the histories that constitute it and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives" (1990b, 211). All ethnic and racial minorities are subsumed under one category, denying the significance of differentiated historical experiences—from slavery to immigration, from genocide of indigenous people, to exclusionary practices vis-à-vis new immigrants. This leads not only to a distorted view of the social relations of oppression, exploitation, and domination, which cut across as well as within different ethnic and racial minorities, but also to the assimilation of culture to "diversity," which takes for granted its universalist framework. In addition, feminist and lesbian theorists in ethnicized and racialized

locations have lodged persistent reminders of the impossibility of community in its masculinist notions of culture based on the desire to control women's bodies and subjectivities.

Still, there is *something* about cultural differences that is not captured by the politics of recognition. The questions of identity and difference are particularly important at this political conjuncture where the basic concepts of social democracy are being challenged as exclusionary and assimilationist. The contradictions of culture, politics, and economy were at the root of the emergence of an abstract bourgeois liberal subject disconnected from difference and positionality. It is not easy, therefore, to see how multiculturalism—produced anyway by interpellation—can oppose an uncritical and commercialized notion of culture, which uses identity and ethnicity to create subjects incessantly being reformed within market-centered ideas of empowerment and endless choice-making capacities. In this sense, multiculturalism cannot be dissociated from issues related to the right of citizenship and the process of subject formation at national and global levels. After all, both nationhood and membership in a nation-state continue to be crucial sites in the production of legitimation and hegemony. Even "global man" is a national subject.

Disturbing Harmonies: A Final Refrain

How, then, might multiculturalism be construed so as to carry it beyond the politics of recognition?[33] For a start, one would have to retain and take very seriously the concept of "difference" at all levels—individually and collectively as well as within, between, and across the cultures.[34] At the same time, reflexivity is required in order to disturb the complacency of normalized social meanings and practices. But above all, it is necessary to refuse the fork of culture, politics, and economics. Only through such a refusal is it possible to grasp the way in which multiculturalism can be both a site of nationalism and at the same time a challenge to it. Culturalist effacement of the economy or economistic erasure of culture in a climate of depoliticization leaves multiculturalism resting too easily between culture and economy.

In any working-through of the question of multiculturalism, the issues of global racism, Eurocentrism, and orientalism must be tackled head-on.[35] It would necessarily take a deconstructive direction, recognizing oppositional agency and in the same breath destabilizing the

very historical contingency that gave space to such agency. The complex regimes of knowledge, power, and desire associated with identity and subjectivity mean that the periphery is a place not only of domination but also of resistance, where one moves in solidarity to erase the category colonized/colonizer (hooks, 1990). To have to struggle by working strategically within vicious and oppressive categories that one is aiming to transcend—that is the tragedy of history. By not falling into the dissimulation of difference, it is possible to recognize the full range of lived experience as the ground of practical struggle and solidarity. It is rather in the impossibility of Angelou's dream—a multicultural happy nationalism—that a countervailing multiculturalism can take on life.

Oppositional agency is not only intimately connected to a strategic politics that simultaneously resists the assimilationist and homogenizing technologies of majority groups, but also struggles for more representative social institutions within and beyond the community. A differing multiculturalism could at least open up spaces in which identities, formed in the welter of political struggles, remain supple in repertoires, not frozen or cast in official molds. A politics of difference rooted in oppositional agency could retain the power to unsettle polarities and revoke assimilation. It might even inaugurate the disruption of all phantasies of cultural homogeneity and purity, not to say the truculent avowal of identities as relations, not things.

Notes

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1 We draw here on Londa Schiebinger's (1993) argument on the sexual politics of breastfeeding in the context of European nation building.

2 See George Stocking (1985) for a discussion of Linnaeus in relation to the ideological context of systematics and evolutionary biology.

3 See Hollinger (1995).

4 The founding inauguration, at which the incoming president addressed both houses of Congress in the Senate, was "consciously patterned" on Hanoverian England, where the king addressed both houses in the Lords' chamber. George Washington softened the monarchist cast of this state ritual by wearing a suit of brown broadcloth. See McDonald (1994, 215).

5 Harvard has been an especially congenial home to racist biologizing, as well as honorable dissent. Years before *The Bell Curve*, Herrnstein, the pigeon

behaviorist, taught a course on the biology of crime with James Q. Wilson. The history of biological determinism is critically examined in Kamin, Lewontin, and Rose (1984).

6   In 1990, George Bush signed the Indian Arts and Crafts Act, amending a law dating from 1935 that stated that "a person must be a member of an Indian tribe to be considered an Indian artist, or those who are not members must be certified as an Indian artisan by an Indian tribe" (cited in Walkingstick 1991: 20–21). For a general account, see Jaimes (1992).

7   Raymond Williams (1976) explores the nexus of the key terms "culture" and "civilization"; Martin Bernal (1987) excavates the historical construction of racist and Eurocentric theories of civilization. Edward Said (1978, 1993) reveals the connections between culture and domination, and Ashis Nandy (1983) illuminates the psychological dynamics of colonialism.

8   This is Lauren Berlant's phrase, deployed in her discussion of Hawthorne's comprehension of America, of how he adjudicates the "overlapping but differentially articulated positions: the official and the popular; the national and the local; the rule of law and the rule of men; the collective and the individual; the citizen as abstraction and the citizen as embodied, gendered; utopia and history; memory and amnesia" (1991, 5–6). But we use "phantasy" rather than "fantasy" to give a sense of the cathexis involved in the affective process of the individual's relation to an imagined community.

9   The case for the historical links between the racial oppression in Ireland and that in the United States is persuasively argued by Theodore Allen (1994). That "race" and "whiteness" are contingent is vividly exemplified in this study, since the Irish who emigrated as bitter opponents of racial oppression were transformed into white Americans who defended it.

10 Michael Rogin's (1996) examination of the founding films of Hollywood shows how they are centrally about race. See also Shohat and Stam (1994).

11 *San Francisco Chronicle*, 22 January 1992.

12 See Boal (1990) for a review essay on this topic in the light of Martin Bernal's excavation of the racist suppression of the Afro-Asiatic roots of the culture of classical Greece in *Black Athena*. See also the special issue of *Representations* (summer 1996) on affirmative action.

13 Among the most tragic aspects of exclusionary practices is the growing disaffection of a generation of young people from many different ethnic backgrounds and their involvement in ethnocentered peer groups (criminalized as "urban gangs") as an immediate means of access to a measure of social power.

14 For a brief overview of the contradictions involved in the state's classifying system, see Orlans (1989).

15 See Kaplan (1995).

16 Robert Frost had intended to recite a different poem at the inauguration, but

it was lost at the last minute. Instead, he recited from memory "The Gift Outright," which had originally been published in the spring 1942 issue of the *Virginia Quarterly Review*. That makes "The Gift Outright," composed as the United States was poised to take control of the Pacific, another kind of war poem.

17 One early seventeenth-century document on land asserts that "savages have no particular property in any part or parcel of that country, but only a general residency there, as wild beasts have in the forests" (Miller, cited in Steinberg 1981, 14–15).

18 This is indeed a structuring discourse of imperialism in general. Pratt's (1992) study of travel and exploration literature is rich in examples of the space of colonial encounters. Bloom (1993) examines in detail the construction of "empty" Arctic space in the popular scientific mind in early twentieth-century writings; they become a form of national colonial discourse by articulating imperial phantasy, masculinist nationalism, and scientific imagination.

19 For a discussion of the political iconology of landscape, see Boal (1996).

20 The story of Yosemite and the genocide of the Miwok is recounted in Solnit (1994) and Hecht and Cockburn (1989).

21 Sommer (1991) discloses the relations between various Latin American romantic novels and patriotic historiography, directly linking this genre of writing to the history of nation building.

22 Tom Paulin (1981) recently attempted to fashion new cultural symbolism out of the ordinary experience of Irish landscape and the "green springy resistance" of the juniper: "For no one knows/if nature allowed it to grow tall/what proud grace/the juniper tree might show/that flared, once, like fire/along the hills./On this coast/it is the only/tree of freedom/to be found."

23 Even the largest nations imagine their own limits. No nation imagines itself coextensive with humankind but having boundaries with *other* nations. The whole process is not a matter of genuineness versus falsity, but of invention and reinvention (Anderson 1983). Danielle Juteau (1996) elaborates on this process; she speaks of the constituting of a *double frontière*, both external and internal.

24 Multicultural curricula have been grossly misrepresented as a threat to white cultural values by several conservatives. D'Souza's (1991) book on the politics of race and sex is a striking example.

25 Social reality, for example, institutional racism, homophobia, and economic exclusionary practices, belies the mythos. Consider, as examples, Haitian immigration policy, the barriers to gay parenting, and police harassment in the ghettoes.

26 The concept of "place," and its importance for social identities, has been

theorized by, among others, Jackson and Penrose (1993); see especially the introduction. They take note of John Agnew's observations on the mediating role of place, both in the substantive sense of a mediation between state and society and, methodologically, in bringing together geographical and sociological imaginations (Agnew & Duncan 1989).

27   See Beniger (1986) for a history of the relations among control technologies, production/consumption, and the bureaucracies of modernity; see also Boal (1995).

28   See, among others, Glazer and Moynihan (1975).

29   In Canada, for example, where it has a longer history, a series of challenges to the liberal discourse of multiculturalism has been emerging. In the Canadian context, multiculturalism as a discourse broke through both liberal individualist (in reality, Anglo-conformist) and Anglo/French "two-nation" biculturalism. Multiculturalism as official state policy was adopted by Trudeau's government in 1971, first vis-à-vis cultural and linguistic expression, though later it was given an economic rationale. From the beginning, the policy was criticized by some as the old assimilationism in ethnic dress; the question of multiculturalism only became explicitly tied to immigration policies during the debate in 1989 over the bill to create a new Department of Multiculturalism and Citizenship. The right-wing Reform Party, for example, attacked multiculturalist policy by employing such terms as "multicultural zoo" and "mosaic madness," arguing that multiculturalism lowers national standards (Abu-Laban and Stasiulis 1992). Clearly, the current backlash against multiculturalism reflects both internal demographic changes (in particular, the growth of immigration from non-European countries) and the rising temperature throughout the capitalist northern core over issues of race and immigration. It is true that the new rhetoric of multicultural nationalism—with its organizing imagery of "mosaic," "quilt," and "rainbow"—abandons the trope of the "melting pot" and the hitherto dominant discourse of assimilationist nationalism in the United States. The culturalist distancing from Bush's WASP party by the New Democrats—who in their economic and foreign policies were indistinguishable from, or worse than, their predecessors—was an important factor in Clinton's election. Gays, lesbians, women, and minorities mobilized on his behalf.

30   Liberal capitalism takes advantage of such discourses of diversity to compete in international markets. Bannerji (1993) gives the example of agriculture in Canada.

31   Theodore Allen has noted that the hallmark of the racial oppression of the Irish, the Africans, and the American Indians in its colonial origins was the reduction of "all members of the oppressed group to one undifferentiated social status, a status beneath that of any member of any social class within the colonizing population" (1994, 32).

32 For an interesting discussion of the production of "otherness-machines" in the postcolonial context, see Appiah (1992, chap. 7).

33 For an extensive discussion of multiculturalism and the politics of recognition, see Charles Taylor, in Guttman (1994).

34 A number of scholars have invoked a "critical multiculturalism" as a promising alternative; see Chicago Cultural Studies Group (1992); Hollinger (1995); McLaren (1995); and Shohat (forthcoming).

35 Shohat and Stam in their recent contribution to the debate, defetishize any appropriation of multiculturalism to a nationalist teleology, cautioning that "Virtually all countries and regions are multicultural. Egypt melds Pharaonic, Arab, Muslim, Jewish, Christian/Coptic, and Mediterranean influences; India is riotously plural in language and religion; and Mexico's 'cosmic race' mingles at least three major constellations of cultures. Nor is North American multiculturalism of recent date. 'America' began as polyglot and multicultural, speaking a myriad of languages: European, African, and Native American" (1994, 5).