

Identity/Difference Politics







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How Difference Is Produced,
and Why It Matters



Rita Dhamoon



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The University of British Columbia

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To my nieces and nephews





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Preface

I came to theory because I was hurting – the pain within me was so intense that I could not go on living. I came to theory desperate, wanting to comprehend – to grasp what was happening around and within me. Most importantly, I wanted to make the hurt go away. I saw in theory then a location for healing.

– bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*



The subject of this book is identity/difference politics, both in terms of how it is studied and how it shapes actual socio-political relations. I offer a theory and practice that is based on analyzing and critiquing how and with what effects power shapes difference. Theoretically and politically, I take as my point of departure the liberal multicultural approach. My journey with liberal multiculturalism began when my family and I emigrated from London, UK, to Canada. We did not come to Canada until the early 1990s, but the idea of doing so was planted much earlier. It had its roots in the capillaries of colonialism that had first led my parents to move from Punjab, India, to the UK, and then again, farther west to Canada. This colonial imaginary was and continues to be steeped in a legacy of British colonialism in India, as well as in acts of resistance practised by my great-grandparents and grandparents against British rule in India.

More directly, the prospects of immigrating to Canada were motivated by the overt racism we experienced in London. Several members of my immediate and extended family had been physically attacked there on racial grounds, some of them more than once; at university I watched white professors regularly give preference to white students; as Asians, my sisters and I were very aware of where we were safer and where we were not, and of the



differences between our neighbourhood in East London and wealthier neighbourhoods; and despite the hard work he did, my father was routinely treated as a second-class citizen. At every turn I saw my family fight back, but the colonial motherland did not (or would not) deliver.

Canada pledged more – more jobs, liberal education, and multicultural tolerance. But my mother couldn't go to a swimming pool without being told to go back to her own country; my brother couldn't get a job in a bar because they didn't hire Indians (later, he understood that this referred to indigenous people, not just to those who were brown); during my PhD a white senior professor told me that I was naive and stupid for not realizing that the British needed to go to India to civilize the Indians; my family and I regularly experienced racial profiling at the border, both before and after 9/11; while working for a major Canadian airline so as to support myself and my family, I was physically threatened, verbally abused, and deliberately isolated by work colleagues after speaking up against racist practices that discriminated against flight attendants who spoke Hindi, Punjabi, Cantonese, and Mandarin, most of whom were people of colour; and as I sat on the front steps of my home, a white teenage boy and his family walked by me and called me Osama, as if this name alone were a threat to them and an insult to me.

In among the racism has been Canadian liberal multiculturalism, the celebration of diverse cultures and their festivals, clothes, food, and music. The symbol of multiculturalism serves to distinguish Canadians from Americans. As a marker of tolerance and accommodation, it has many appeals: good multicultural television programs exist, and diverse knowledge, art forms, and different foods are exchanged; in the name of cultural diversity, state institutions (such as the police) make a point of hiring more ethnic 'minorities'; and there is a growing dialogue about institutionalizing the cultural and religious practices of marginalized peoples. And yet the histories of oppression experienced by people of colour and indigenous peoples are virtually absent in celebrations of multiculturalism: there is little talk of colonialism, racism, white privilege, sexism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, or capitalism, as if multiculturalism now makes up for the past and can correct present social inequities. It is all about accommodation and diversity, not anti-racism, decolonization, white supremacy, or power. It does not name the oppressors or require that the land of multicultural Canada be given back to indigenous people; nor does it directly attend to the problems of violence, unemployment, and poverty within my community. And it does not acknowledge the ways in which people of colour and indigenous people resist white patriarchal capitalist hegemony. Instead, it focuses on softening the edges that

mark 'the Other' and 'Otherness,' namely those socially constructed lines of difference that determine who and what is normal and dominant, and conversely who and what is abnormal and consequently deemed to be inferior.¹

In Canada my subjective experiences have not been as physically violent as they were in the UK. This is not to negate the ways in which Canadian history and experience have been and continue to be violent; we simply need to recall the internment of Japanese people during the Second World War, the overt Islamophobia against Muslims and Arabs (before and after 9/11), and the attempted eradication of indigenous knowledge and bodies. At the same time, for me, the violence is somehow more dangerous in Canada than in the UK. In the UK I lived with overt racism, with white people calling me a Paki to my face and directly threatening my existence. In Canada, while the number of reported hate-motivated crimes directed toward racial, ethnic, and religious minorities (as well as sexual minorities) remains in the hundreds every year (Dauvergne, Scrim, and Brennan, 2006), multicultural discourse often masks the violence, such that it is sometimes (although not always) more subtle, more insidious, and therefore more difficult to name and resist.

All of this has characterized my journey with Canadian liberal multiculturalism, leaving me with a number of questions. In principle, do I really want to be tolerated and accommodated, especially without questioning the character of tolerance and intolerance within Canadian society? Why is there a growing global defence of multiculturalism at this particular time of political history? Why do non-white people support multiculturalism, even though it can serve as a way to regulate us? Is the state effective in dismantling oppressive relations of power? In a post-9/11 world, is it dangerous to challenge the discourse of multiculturalism, which seems to be the only way to get racial issues on the political agenda? How can alliances be built between people of colour, and between them and indigenous people, while also recognizing the ways in which we become implicated in each other's social location? What should I make of the privilege I experience as a consequence of my upbringing in the West, my education, my English accent, and my able-bodiedness, in relation to the racism and patriarchy I encounter? How do I best enact my responsibilities to other marginalized people, including those with no legal status in Canada or those whose status is illegitimately determined by the state (such as indigenous peoples)? Why is culture-talk the basis of framing the concerns of 'multicultural groups,' and how does this affect an understanding of other aspects of my identity, such as my gender? Do all women, sexual minorities, the disabled, and the poor benefit from multiculturalism? Does change lie within the system or in disrupting the very system itself? What

theoretical, conceptual, and political tools would bring to light my own lived experiences as well as those of Others?

This book represents some of my thinking about these questions. When I returned to the academy after several years away, I hoped that theory would help me heal and comprehend what was happening around me. And it has, to some extent at least. But mainstream discourses on liberalism, multiculturalism, and diversity have not provided me with complete or satisfactory answers. On the contrary, they have closed doors for me. Despite the burgeoning literature on radicalizing inclusion, individual and collective identities, and the accommodative role of the state, the focus in mainstream contemporary political theory is almost exclusively on culture, ethnicity, and language, not on racism, colonialism, patriarchy, class difference, or privilege. To my mind, this diminishes an analysis of power, for power has been significant in determining my social and political relations, contexts, and positions, as well as those of others.

Other theories, particularly those developed in the fields of feminist and gender theory, cultural studies, and post-colonial, anti-colonial, anti-racist, and critical race studies, are better equipped to answer many of my questions. These fields encompass self-reflexive writings from many people marked as Other and, on a practical and discursive level, tend to directly problematize the existing social order. By drawing on theories and concepts within and beyond political theory, this book represents some of my interventions in the very discourses that frame an understanding of my social identity and social location, as well as that of others – namely, the politics of identity/difference.



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Identity/Difference Politics







Introduction

Over recent decades, contemporary Western political theory has consistently framed a wide range of events and struggles as issues of identity/difference politics. Some typical Canadian examples include the 2007 controversy that arose in Quebec when five young girls were told they could not compete in a local taekwondo match unless they removed their Islamic head scarves; the decision of the Tsawwassen First Nation in British Columbia to vote in favour of a modern-day urban treaty with the provincial government, amidst concerns of some indigenous people that the vote effectively signed away authority over land and resources; and the mobilization of Sikh communities and supporters across Canada to fight Ottawa's 2007 decision to deport a paralyzed Sikh refugee, Mr. Laibar Singh. Meanwhile, in the UK, debates rage about the legal recognition of Islamic-based councils, South Asian arranged marriages, and 'homegrown terrorists' (especially following the July 2005 bombings of London's public transport and the death of Jean Charles de Menezes, a Brazilian man shot by police, who wrongly presumed he was an extremist from Central Asia). In late 2005 in France, months of civil unrest, mostly among disaffected youth of Muslim and African descent, and the death of two teens of Mauritian and Tunisian origin (accidentally electrocuted as they hid from police in a power substation) raised issues of identity/difference politics. In the US, policy and legislative changes continue to increase the policing of American borders along identity lines. Borders are policed not only on the basis of a 'war against terrorism' but also on nationalist, racial, and economic terms; simultaneously borders are challenged along identity lines, as was the case in Los Angeles, 2006, when Latinos mobilized so as to legally gain and maintain rights to work in the US.

More often than not, these kinds of issues are analyzed through the lens of liberal multiculturalism, such that the theoretical framework for examining issues of identity/difference has assumed a specific shape. In particular, through



the lens of liberal multiculturalism, culture has become the central category of analysis. Although these kinds of issues do have cultural dimensions, two questions arise concerning the liberal multicultural approach and the study of identity/difference politics in contemporary Western political thought. First, is the study of identity/difference politics best framed through culture as a mode of social identity or, alternatively, are the issues described above better analyzed in terms of gendered Islamophobia, ongoing colonialism, refugee rights, racialized securitization and discrimination, and poverty and unemployment – namely, as struggles of power? Second, what specific and general theoretical insights can be brought to bear regarding such events when the study of identity/difference politics is examined through an analysis of power rather than through liberal multicultural interpretations of culture?

In this book I argue that, rather than developing and/or revising liberal multiculturalism or even reinvigorating its theories and concepts, an alternative path is needed for the study of identity/difference politics, one that directs the analysis to power rather than culture. Although studies of identity/difference politics have been criticized because they sometimes treat identities as if they were ascribed rather than contested, fixed rather than fluid and continuously changing, singular and reified rather than diversely constructed, and narrowly defined by the state rather than self-directed, this does not inevitably require that the study of identity/difference politics should be abandoned. Certainly, the analytic work of the 'identity' concept needs continuous re-evaluation and clarification because it has come to mean either too much or too little (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). But as a *field of study*, the politics of identity/difference has enormous and yet unfulfilled potential to address issues of power.

My core claim is that, in the field of identity/difference politics, it is necessary to make an analytic shift away from the current preoccupation with culture as an explanatory framework through which to grasp conflicts of difference to a critical examination of how meanings of difference are produced, organized, and regulated through power, and the effects of these meanings on socio-political arrangements. This analytic shift can be characterized as one that moves away from the liberal multicultural politics of culture in favour of a critical politics of meaning-making. Although culture is not irrelevant to the politics of meaning-making, it is not the central category of analysis, for this obscures an understanding of the variation between and within cultural groups, privileges one aspect of difference, over others, and separates culture from other dimensions of political difference, such as racialized or gendered

difference. Although all concepts are contested, 'culture' is a particularly troubled one in the study of identity/difference politics because it is given primacy over modes of difference, and it continues to be conceptualized in overdetermined ways.

Yet, because culture is the central category of analysis in liberal multicultural theories, and these theories dominate the field of identity/difference politics, the liberal multicultural approach cannot simply be dismissed.¹ Rather, it is important to examine how and why this approach has gained its pre-eminent status and what it obscures with regard to power.

Liberal Multicultural Approaches in the Study of Identity/Difference Politics

Though varied in their normative positions and in terms of the practices they advocate, liberal multicultural theorists broadly claim that the equal treatment of 'minorities' requires public institutions to acknowledge, rather than ignore or downplay, cultural particularities. This contrasts with theories developed from more classical or neutral liberal perspectives, such as those offered by Brian Barry (2001) and Chandran Kukathas (1988, 1992, 2003). These neutralist liberals position universalism, social cohesion, and the authority of a (supposedly) neutral state as values that transcend those of cultural pluralism; accordingly, a neutral liberal perspective sees no difference. By contrast, liberal multicultural theories seek to accommodate specific forms of cultural diversity. Three specific ideas typify this approach: first, because the state does not respond impartially to all individuals and groups, people are not and must not be treated identically; second, liberal views of the self and freedom must be broadened so as to acknowledge the importance of social recognition because individuals are not constituted transculturally or ahistorically; and third, the fabric of social and/or national unity must be maintained while diversity is accommodated – this imperative is often termed unity-within-diversity.

Two major architects of this liberal multicultural approach are Canadian philosophers: Will Kymlicka (1995a, 1995b, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2005a, 2005b) and Charles Taylor (1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1998).² Kymlicka (2007a, 7) understands himself to be a "foot soldier" of the global diffusion of liberal multiculturalism; as such, he has engaged widely with international organizations in the academy, civil society, and state bureaucracies in order to develop models and best practices of liberal multiculturalism. Taylor has also played a significant role in various aspects of political life, especially in Quebec, where, for example, he recently served as a commissioner for the Consultation

Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences (Bouchard and Taylor 2008), more commonly known as the Bouchard-Taylor commission.

Disagreement certainly exists between these two thinkers in that Kymlicka follows a framework of liberal individualism and Taylor one of liberal-communitarianism (Kymlicka 1989, 1994; Taylor 1994a, 1996). But both also reformulate liberal views of justice so as to accommodate minorities in a manner consistent with fundamental liberal commitments, to accept that goods and resources should be distributed according to some culture-based differences, and to reject monocultural approaches that explicitly defend principles of assimilation and conformity. On these bases, Kymlicka (2001, 22) offers a theory of multicultural citizenship, or what he calls a “liberal culturalist” view, which is based on conceptualizing culture as a context of choice and a site for developing individual self-capacity. And Taylor (1994b, 26) offers a theory of recognition, in which recognition is understood as a vital human need, not merely something that is delivered out of courtesy. These theories of multicultural citizenship and recognition have sparked a burgeoning literature on the study of identity/difference politics within political theory.

The idea that the state should accommodate some cultural particularities has also been prevalent in practice, and not just in political theory. Canada, it is often argued, leads this pluralist response to diversity in that it developed a multicultural policy as early as 1971, its multicultural heritage is constitutionally protected in section 27 of its Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and it was the first country to pass national legislation on multiculturalism, namely, the 1988 Multiculturalism Act. Canada is considered ideal not only because it consists of a secular constitutional liberal-democracy, a market-based economy, and a welfare state, but also because it symbolically and constitutionally accommodates diversity. Kymlicka (2003, 361), for instance, states that the fact that “this model of economics and politics should be adopted is completely undisputed in Canada. Few Canadians doubt that this model is the recipe for a successful country, and most would applaud the adoption of this model elsewhere.”

Even while public support for immigrant multiculturalism has retreated in places such as the Netherlands and Australia, in Canada, it is argued, support remains high, in part because levels of illegal migration are low, the cultural practices accommodated are consistent with values associated with liberal-democracy and human rights, and because immigrants are seen as

net-contributors to the economy (Kymlicka 2005b, 2007b). Although liberal multiculturalists acknowledge that the Canadian model of multiculturalism has not been fully realized, it is nonetheless presented as being ideally suited to respond to diversity. Even while some Canadians blame liberal multicultural values for creating homegrown terrorists, others see these values as lending themselves to the image that Canadian society is democratic and good because it is tolerant of cultural Others. And though it is in fact highly contested that Canada is an ideal model of multiculturalism, it is represented as such, within both Canada and other geopolitical contexts, including South Africa (Adhikari 2004; Kros 2005; Torr 2004), India (Deb 2002; Upadhy 2002), Asia (Kymlicka and He 2005), and countries of Eastern Europe (Kuzio 2005; Kymlicka and Opalski 2001).³ In the end, while the implementation of liberal multicultural ideas has been uneven and even a tough sell in some parts of the world (Kymlicka 2007a, 11-19, 315-16), these ideas have also been popularized in both Western political theory and Western liberal-democracies.

The appeal of liberal multiculturalism can be explained in the following ways. Liberal multicultural thinkers are attentive to a wide range of issues, including the historic claims of self-determination made by national minorities and indigenous peoples, language as a cultural marker of distinctiveness, and actual political challenges to the state, especially those regarding legal and constitutional matters. As well, liberal multiculturalism has provided the momentum for some projects that address difficulties faced by marginalized communities (Srivastava 2007, 307). Indeed, in the face of the backlash against immigrants (whether legal or illegal) and in the current heightened climate of Islamophobia and securitization, some versions of multiculturalism provide a recourse to diversity that may be otherwise difficult to negotiate and express. Liberal multiculturalism has, in this sense, mainstreamed issues of diversity and culture.

Overall then, this approach has become popularized because it promises to break from a past that demanded assimilation and to celebrate instead diversity and unity simultaneously. Kymlicka and Taylor both express a desire to renounce historical practices of discrimination, exclusion, and misrecognition in the name of liberal justice, and to demonstrate that strands of liberalism are not intrinsically plagued by inegalitarian impulses. Kymlicka specifically extends the limits of liberal tolerance so as to accommodate national minorities and immigrant groups, while also arguing that such accommodation should not hamper the economic or political success of the nation. Meanwhile, Taylor (1993, 183-89) calls for "deep diversity," which, he says,

requires that everyone should be heard and have an equal voice in decision making. This demands not a strong but minimally a weak national identity. Other liberal multiculturalists add to these variations on diversity-within-unity. Tariq Modood (2007, see especially Chapters 2 and 4), for example, argues for a more robust and reconfigured conception of civic multiculturalism than that offered by thinkers such as Kymlicka, specifically in order to include Islam as an organized religion and Muslim identity as a public identity.

Despite the appeal of various brands of liberal multiculturalism, it is my position that, on the whole, this normative-theoretical approach does not and cannot provide a robust analytic framework for addressing issues of power that are central to the study of identity/difference or to the lived experiences of this politics.⁴ Certainly liberal multiculturalism is a site of struggle for non-white subjects in that institutionalized multicultural discourses and practices shape socio-political and economic arrangements. But whether intentional or not, liberal multicultural theory obscures issues of power in three key ways. First, it reinvents the nation by forgetting the past and imagining the nation anew over the bodies of those who are marked as multicultural subjects. As Himani Bannerji (2000, 92-93) notes, images of a multicultural mosaic tend to mask over histories of white privilege and engravings of conquest, wars, and exclusions; in Canada's case, she continues, these histories display the "dark side of the nation." Indeed, though some liberal theorists do reflect on the importance of race-thinking in relation to multiculturalism (Mills 2007; Modood 2007), on the whole, liberal multicultural theories do not directly confront the histories and ongoing problems of white supremacy, colonization, slavery, discriminatory immigration legislation, or the practices of resistance undertaken by those marked as multicultural subjects, even when the claims of immigrants and indigenous people are included within the rubric of cultural diversity. On the contrary, the very histories of anti-racism and anti-colonial struggle that shape multicultural policies and practices are often pushed into the background.

The evasion of an analysis of white supremacy, colonialism, and racism is specifically masked by the language of diversity. "Diversity" may appear to be a neutral term that merely describes a multiplicity of identities, and it may also signal a well-intentioned stance against prejudice. Yet, as Sara Ahmed (2007, 235) states, the idea of diversity has also become a way to reify "difference as something that exists 'in' the bodies or cultures of others, such that difference becomes a national property: if difference is something 'they are,' then it is something we 'can have.'" In particular, liberal multiculturalists seem

to claim cultural difference as a constitutive feature of liberal-democracies and national identity, and do so by covering over histories of racial domination. The consequence is that historical and continuing problems of discrimination, oppression, marginalization, violence, and domination that arise from forms of racism, patriarchy, capitalism, ableism, and homophobia are whitewashed by the more sanguine language of diversity.

Second, liberal multiculturalism expands the bounds of toleration but continues to assume the superiority of particular liberal values. Bhikhu Parekh (1997, 56) observes, for instance, that "although Kymlicka does not explicitly say so, he implies that, other things being equal, a culture that encourages autonomy and choice [which are core liberal values] is better and richer, and in that sense superior to, one that does not." By privileging liberal values, these theories continue to suggest that 'different' cultural groups should adopt the values of an already existing dominant culture. Not only is there an underlying demand for conformity, but the dominant culture is represented as if it were not fraught with social inequities. Moreover, liberal political theory claims its superiority by downplaying its historical relationship to imperial and colonial ideas. Indeed, as Taiaiake Alfred (2005, 110) asserts, liberalism claims a triumph over socialism, and takes on a cultural particularity that privileges specific versions of individualism, competition, progress, order, and Euro-American culture over non-Western conceptions of sharing, truth, and justice.

The expectation of conformity is not a new feature of liberalism, for, though liberals such as John Stuart Mill and John Locke advanced theories regarding rights and freedom, they also argued that some colonial subjects should be culturally assimilated (Arneil 1996; Parekh 1995). Today, liberal multiculturalists claim that they have no wish to explicitly impose their particular set of values (Kymlicka 1995a, 94, 171); instead, these values are promoted through incentives (Kymlicka 1995a, 168) and dialogical exchange (Taylor 1985, 125) so as to draw multicultural Others into the norms of society. Richard Day (2000, 9) refers to this process as "seductive integration," whereby those who assume/claim authority and confer status to others (dominant groups) create a society in which minorities want to integrate into the dominant norm because doing so improves their chances of political, economic, and social success. In other words, underlying liberal multicultural discourses of diversity is an expectation that multicultural subjects will conform to a set of ostensibly superior liberal values.

Third, because liberal multiculturalism is concerned with why and how the state can legitimately 'manage' culturally different subjects, it not only reduces

power to state authority and the liberties of specified cultural groups, it also accords legitimacy to state practices of governance that privilege some kinds of difference over others. Although state agencies and practices are not simply regulatory (they also protect individuals and groups), the modern state has been a key actor in managing diversity. In his study of Canada, Day (2000, 5) notes that diversity "has always involved state-sponsored attempts to define, know and structure the actions of problematic Others (Savages, Québécois, Half-Breeds, Immigrants) who have been distinguished from unproblematic selves (French, British, British-Canadian, European)." Liberal multicultural discourses continue to legitimize this regulatory function of the state by assigning it the role of deciding which specific groups deserve differentiated rights and recognition, and by providing further grounds to gaze upon those deemed most threatening to the state (such as national minorities or Muslims).

Ultimately, liberal multicultural theories mask various issues of power, including (but not limited to) how histories of racial domination continue to shape difference today, why, how, and by whom liberal values are determined to be superior and how these are resisted, and how the state regulates various modalities of difference. This masking occurs because of the narrow conception and overdetermined role of culture in liberal multicultural theories. Indeed, the dominance of liberal multicultural approaches in contemporary political theory has framed the study of identity/difference politics as the politics of culture.

Although culture is an important aspect of identification and thus cannot be ignored, liberal multicultural theories cast a disparate range of social, economic, material, and political issues as considerations of culture, with the effect of eclipsing the multiplicity of ways in which difference performs. Furthermore, claims of culture are often separated from and/or prioritized over such issues as poverty, racial discrimination, homophobia, and heterosexism, effectively erasing some aspects of difference altogether. As well, specified cultures (rather than specified cultural practices) are subject to intense public scrutiny in ways that further legitimize state regulation of those marked as being too different. Overall, in liberal multicultural theories, (specific) identities themselves are the prevailing focus, and the broad political contexts in which various modes and degrees of difference are generated remain underanalyzed. The emphasis, in other words, is on the 'identity' side of identity politics rather than on politics (Josephson 2008).

Certainly, liberal multiculturalism does not claim to offer comprehensive and all-encompassing theories of identity/difference politics. But its

dominance has also limited the conversations to certain categories of community and identity, and to certain kinds of concerns (Srivastava 2007, 307). The consequence of this is that problems arising from structural and material differences tend to be deferred. By this I mean that, although practices that enable inclusion or tolerance or recognition may democratize how we engage in political life, they do not fundamentally change the terms on which differences are organized; the problem of these terms is suspended until after rights and recognition have been allocated.

In sum, my critique of liberal multiculturalism is not that it has gone too far – an argument that has gained momentum since fears of homegrown terrorists have been transported into the public consciousness – but that it cannot go as far as is needed to address social, economic, material, and political inequities. Whereas liberal multiculturalism paradoxically imagines the polity as heterogeneous so that differences do not have to be seen (an argument I develop in Chapter 1), I seek to analyze how differences are produced and operationalized through power.

Some concepts that have been developed outside the scope of liberal multiculturalism serve this proposed revision to the study of identity/difference politics in Western political theory. In particular, lessons can be learned from critical theorists who assess the contexts in which differences are produced by linking together history, culture, and power. For instance, well before the recent liberal turn to identity/difference politics, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, among other anti-colonial and post-colonial thinkers, explicitly addressed the violence of naming, misnaming, and not naming different racialized peoples and structures (Bannerji 1995, 23). The lessons from anti-colonial and post-colonial theory, as well as from post-structuralism, feminist and gender theory, queer theory, sociology, cultural studies, and critical anthropology – all of which deploy concepts of power, difference, identity, subject formation, subjectivity, subjection, and justice – are crucial to political theory's study of identity/difference politics and help to push against the boundaries of liberal multicultural thought.

Shifting from Culture to Power

In Chapter 1, I elaborate on the work and limitations of liberal multicultural conceptualizations of culture. Subsequently, to counter the dominant liberal multicultural approach to the study of identity/difference politics, I reframe this field of study so that the focus is not on culture but on how difference is constituted by, and generative of, vehicles of power. Power is the organizing

force of difference and also the subject of social struggle/transformation. My concern in this book lies not in the fact that power exists, but in how it functions. I approach power in Foucauldian terms as a relation and as a capacity that is spread throughout the socio-political body, rather than as something that is possessed or held by a sovereign subject or the state. Although agents and institutions of the state are instrumental in constructing and regulating difference, questions about the politics of identity/difference are not concerned solely with the state; nor is the state the singular site of social change. As Michel Foucault (1980, 158) argues, "One impoverishes the question of power if one poses it solely in terms of legislation and constitution, in terms solely of the state and the state apparatus. Power is quite different from and more complicated, dense and pervasive than a set of laws or a state apparatus." Accordingly, though I consider how aspects of the state, such as the law, generate meanings (in positive and negative ways), I also assess how power functions through other structures of society to generate meanings of difference. I pay particular attention to the differences within and between social groups. This contrasts with liberal multicultural theories, which tend to be preoccupied with why and how the state should accommodate specified cultural groups.

Furthermore, in my approach, power is not conceived solely as coercive in nature – it is also conceptualized as a productive force. As Foucault (1995, 194) suggests, "we must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes,' it 'represses,' it 'censors,' it 'abstracts,' it 'masks,' it 'conceals.' In fact, power produces: it produces reality, it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth." I seek to examine precisely these domains and rituals, and the specific rationalities behind them. My analysis therefore explores how power produces subjects and how subjects are vehicles of power; people, in other words, exercise power and are not simply possessed by it. From this understanding of power, I show not only that meanings of difference are historically generated, but that they are also subject to change.

My work in part thus generates a critique of reductive conceptions of power in which power is defined solely in terms of domination. The role of dominating power is without doubt central to an understanding of identity/difference politics in that meanings of difference that are closed off, blocked, invariable, and/or appear fixed (dominant ones) are distinguishable from those that are open, variable, reversible, and fluid. But the concept of power is not synonymous with that of domination, and thus issues regarding power expand beyond its contractual reorganization, or the need to move power to

more legitimate hands (i.e., the sovereign subject or sovereign state), or the desire to overcome or minimize its illegitimate or excessive use. Instead, I theorize domination as an instrument and effect of power as opposed to the constitutive feature of power. In short, power is not in general the opposite of freedom. In the words of Foucault scholar David Couzens Hoy (2005, 82), "Conceptually, all domination is power, but not all power is domination. Domination is exclusively power over, whereas power in a broader sense can be positive and productive."

In the chapters to follow, I specifically examine how power produces forms of subjectivity and subjection, how it invites occasions for resistance to domination, and how subjects are "put into action" through power (Cruikshank 1999, 41) whereby they become subjects and perform as subjects in and through power. Thus, rather than arguing for a form of politics that seeks to eradicate power, I opt for one that disrupts the vehicles of power that generate penalizing and privileging meanings of difference, namely, those that give rise to social hierarchies.

Analyzing Power and Difference: Taking an Account of Meaning-Making

To make the shift from an analysis of culture to one of power, I develop an approach in which the analyst contextualizes how difference is produced, organized, and regulated, and what effects these meanings of difference have on social hierarchies. This approach is constituted of accounts of meaning-making, namely, interpretative explanations of the processes that generate and organize meanings of difference. An account of meaning-making is driven by an analysis of power so as to deconstruct the processes that make and mark subjects differently and differentially. I develop this analytic approach not to empty, minimize, or manage difference, but to expose and disrupt the naturalized, calcified, and relational conditions under which privileging and penalizing meanings of difference emerge in the first place. In doing so, I rearticulate the study of identity/difference politics as the very process of *becoming* a subject through meanings of difference.

In my approach, identity is not the base of a subject but an effect of being produced as a subject through meanings of difference. An identity is thereby a symbol of difference rather than a synonym for a person. To put it simply, *identity is difference*. This is why I use the term "identity/difference politics" rather than "identity politics" or "difference politics," for it signals a relationship between these two concepts. Difference cannot be reduced to culture,

and difference always implicates power. It is an instrument and an effect of power rather than an essential or passive entity. It is specifically that which contingently and relationally distinguishes variedly positioned subjects in and through power. It is both desired and disavowed; it can be given positive and/or negative meanings; it is contestable but not always a source of contention; and it can never be erased. Representations of difference are created and modified over time and space, shaping well-worn markers of social division as well as new ones. Social divisions, as Nira Yuval-Davis (2006, 198) puts it, take on organizational, intersubjective, experiential, and representational forms. Accordingly, difference performs in and through institutions (state agencies, trade unions, and the family), and it exists in the relationships between people at the level of representation and in the ways they experience subjectivity and subjection. In each of these social divisions, meanings of difference are not constituted unidimensionally (that is, primarily through culture) but through multiple interactions between distinct but mutually constituted modalities of difference.

Not all representations of difference are equally salient in determining privilege and penalty, for some are voluntarily and others coercively adopted, some shape social relations without the effect of creating subjugation, and some are systemic and institutional, whereas others are not; in other words, not all differences carry the same essential characteristics or effects. The torturing of suspected Muslim and/or Arab terrorists, for instance, is not the same as differentiating Muslims and Arabs from Christians 'merely' on the basis of religion. Yet, all forms of difference are circumscribed by social norms, such that in this instance the suspected terrorist is subject to physical and psychological violence, and the practice of making religious distinctions provides a basis for the war on terror and the American-led attacks on Iraq and Afghanistan. In this sense, even interpretations of 'mere difference' can consolidate structures of Western imperialism.

As I elaborate in Chapter 2, accounts of meaning-making attempt not to discover differences, but to deconstruct how and why differences are created and sustained, and with what effects. My aim is to describe, explain, and critique the processes by which subjects are differently and differentially constituted in ways that create and recreate relations of penalty and privilege. Such an analysis provides an understanding of how interpretations of difference constitute material and structural inequities, and how the material and structural transform discourses of difference. For example, as I argue in Chapter 3, Immigration Regulations are premised on racialized, gendered,

class-based, heteronormative, and ablest meanings concerning the ideal potential immigrant, whereby some kinds of subjects are preferred over others. These meanings affect legal status, job opportunities, family relationships, and where one lives. Simultaneously, these institutionalized regulations also constitute and alter meanings about the ideal immigrant, such that differences between the model minority immigrant and the undesirable immigrant determine social and economic opportunities. Discourse, in other words, shapes the actual lived experiences of people, and social structures shape discourse. Given this, radical social change on the level of discourse effects social change on the material level, and vice versa.

My intent in critically analyzing meaning-making is not simply to identify who dominates or is dominated (or oppressed or marginalized or excluded or exploited), but, as noted above, to examine how power works to make difference in the first place. In this regard, an account of meaning-making driven by a focus on analytics of power is a *mode of analysis*. As a deconstructive method of analysis, this device does not simply reveal that differences are contingently produced and that an infinite number of meanings is possible: it also radically contextualizes interpretations of difference to show that and how these meanings are circumscribed by power. To put it another way, an account of meaning-making does not aim to smooth out differences but provides a mechanism to interpret how differences are produced and rationalized in and through power. This analytical approach thereby enables an understanding of the contingency of difference – how it is made, how it changes, and how it is operationalized in various penalizing and privileging ways.

Further, in as much as this analysis demystifies processes of subject formation, and thereby disrupts existing fields of meaning, it also serves as a politics seeking alternative representations of difference; it is, in this sense, a *mode of critique* that illuminates possibilities for political change. By rendering visible the mechanisms that produce difference rather than simply the agents who are marked as different, an account of meaning-making simultaneously interrupts the specific meaning that is produced and the norms and values in which that meaning is operationalized.

As a mode of analysis and of critique, an account of meaning-making is therefore simultaneously critical (deconstructive) and positive (prescriptive) in that it *disrupts* the prevailing processes of subject formation and, in doing so, points toward the possibility of constituting difference in new and alternative ways. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 6, disruption is important because, when the processes of meaning-making that produce

privileging and penalizing meanings are put into question, this opens up a space to refuse a characterization of difference that depends on the subordination of others and to also interpret difference in ways that are self-reflexive about power (on an individual and group level).

Accounts of meaning-making are directed toward ethics of accountability and responsibility. Accountability, states Sherene Razack (1998, 10), is “a process that begins with a recognition that we [as individuals and collectivities] are implicated in systems of oppression that profoundly structure our understanding of one another.” The ethics of accountability specifically direct analysts to “invest our energies in exploring the histories, social relations, and conditions that structure groups unequally in relation to one another and *that shape what can be known, thought, and said*” (Razack 1998, 10, emphasis in original). Accountability is distinguishable from responsibility in that it concerns the intentionality of agents, the rectification of past moral and legal crimes/failings, and “keeping the actions of the powerful within the law and minimally honest” (I.M. Young 2000, 175). Responsibility, by contrast, is an infinite obligation that goes beyond one’s intentions and private obligations (Bernasconi 2008). An account of meaning-making has the potential to lead to both kinds of ethical practices.

Mobilizing Accounts of Meaning-Making

As a way to deconstruct the operations and effects of meaning-making, I mobilize accounts of it in three ways. First, I examine simultaneously the processes of meaning-making that differentiate meanings of the Norm/Other and those that produce various meanings of Otherness. In other words, I take accounts of the processes that produce general categories of Otherness and varied meanings of Otherness, both of which are implicated in the production of privilege and penalty. Second, at individual, inter- and intragroup, and institutional levels, I study how self-directed and externally imposed meanings are produced through one another and in reaction to one another. I examine how these differences are regulated through dominant norms as well as through those adopted by groups marked as Other. Rather than valorizing or dismissing the latter, I subject all meanings to scrutiny because those developed by subjects marked as Other are not extractable from power. Third, I take accounts of relational processes of meaning-making so as to attend to degrees and forms of penalty and privilege. These relational differences are described and explained in the context of “a matrix of meaning-making.” This matrix idea describes and explains the interactive relationships between multiple

processes. In sum, I seek to illuminate the import of taking an account of, first, various processes of differentiation rather than singular objects of difference, second, processes of meaning-making operationalized by the state and other members of society, and, third, diverse interrelated processes of meaning-making that constitute differences between and among social groups.

Accounts of meaning-making enrich and advance the study of identity/difference politics in three significant theoretical-conceptual ways. First, they provide a way to *rethink* key social categories of difference by analyzing how these are constituted beyond the scope of culture. Second, accounts of meaning-making *expand* the analysis by going beyond the ontological and substantive logic of the form of identity/difference politics that conjures identities as fixed categories and as either singularly dominant or subordinate. This expansion occurs by examining how structures of difference are produced, de-formed, and re-formed in relational and historical ways with the effect of producing totalizing and also variable categories of Otherness and normality. Third, accounts of meaning-making *complicate* the field of identity/difference politics in that they deconstruct the relationship between multiple processes of meaning-making rather than analyzing one dimension of difference alone. Such an analysis enables an understanding of how modes of difference function through one another, how differences vary in content and form, and why one meaning of difference is not reducible to another (cultural difference, for example, is not reducible to gender, class, or sexual difference).

To make these claims, I draw on a number of examples related to the production and operationalization of whiteness, ableism, and heteronormativity (Chapter 3), Deaf identity and trans-sexuality (Chapter 4), and various modes of racialized gendering (Chapter 5). These illustrate the concrete value of shifting from the politics of culture to the politics of meaning-making. Each exemplifies how a critical political analysis of meaning-making widens and deepens the study of identity/difference politics by engaging an analysis of power. The examples also bring into view modes of differentiation that are largely ignored or undertheorized in liberal multiculturalism. Following Joseph Carens (2000, 5-6), I hold the view that "there is a lot to be gained by multiplying unfamiliar narratives if we can draw out the implications of these narratives for familiar theoretical positions." For instance, representations of whiteness, disability, Deafness, and trans-sexuality are not conventionally examined in the liberal multicultural study of identity/difference politics, but valuably illustrate broader ways in which differences are produced, governed, and resisted within a matrix of meaning-making. Conversely, examples related

to immigrants or indigeneity are not as unfamiliar in mainstream discourses. However, I consider the production of these differences through lenses beyond the unidimensional scope of culture so as to illuminate the complex relationships between processes of gendering, culturalization, racialization, and capitalism, all of which are pertinent to the historical experiences of identity/difference politics. Overall, these various examples provide a way to illustrate the theoretical-conceptual benefits of taking accounts of meaning-making, and they also help to navigate the terrain of identity/difference theorizing.

As I discuss these diverse examples, I am mindful that I speak not for Others but to the construction and effects of Othering. Conscious of the risk in drawing on instances related to differences that I myself do not experience – a risk in which the analyst gazes upon the Othered – I see it as my responsibility to address the ways in which various differences are constituted and managed through dominant historical norms. To do this, I focus on the processes of Othering rather than focusing on the subjects marked as Other. As well, because meanings of the Norm and of Otherness are relationally constituted through a complex matrix of meaning-making, and because we are never outside of these meanings (even though they may not affect us directly or consistently or heavily), I am implicated in the webs of power that produce difference. Therefore, regardless of whether I embody a particular mode of difference, because my own penalizing and privileging differences are constituted in relation to those of others, I carry responsibilities to disrupt broader social hierarchies.

Most of the examples I deploy come from the context of contemporary Canada. Although I extend the analysis of the politics of identity/difference beyond an inquiry into culture, I am mindful that culture is individually, collectively, and legally important to the lives of people in Canada. This may be especially the case for those groups facing systemic hostility and who understand culture as an important site of belonging and social change. Given this, while I critique liberal multicultural interpretations of culture and the primacy assigned to this concept, I also argue that culture cannot be ignored. This is especially the case because claims of culture are often tied up with claims of nationhood, community, and home. In Canada, culture is relevant, for example, to many indigenous peoples whose nationhood status and practices of reindigenization are, in part at least, predicated on meanings of culture.

At the same time, precisely because Canada is a settler society, what Taiaiake Alfred (2005, 207) calls “an artifice of Euroamerican rationality”

based on colonial territorial consolidation, culture needs to be analyzed in the historical context of nation and nation-building, colonialism, white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, and heteronormativity, as well as anti-colonialism and decolonization. The national identity of Canada is premised on the attempted eradication, assimilation, and suppression of indigenous knowledge and bodies, the appropriation of indigenous land and resources, practices of slavery as well as conquest and genocide, a historical tension between two colonial powers (British and French), and racialized and racist policies of immigration. Since the Canadian nation has been and continues to be imagined through colonial ideas that function through norms of gendering, capitalism, ableism, oralism, and heteronormativity, and indeed the very legitimacy of the nation-state is challenged by some indigenous peoples (G.R. Alfred 1995; T. Alfred 1999, 2005, 2007), difference needs to be interpreted through a lens that can recognize the continuation of the past into the present. To put it simply, history and context matters to an understanding of culture and difference.

I conclude this introduction with two final notes: first, given my focus on how processes of meaning-making constitute subjects to the effect of producing social hierarchies, domination, and marginalizations, this analysis foregrounds issues related to privilege and penalty rather than other areas of study; many aspects of identity/difference are not examined in any detail here. Second, even though I work to extend and deepen an understanding of the inner dynamics of identity/difference politics beyond what liberal multiculturalism can illuminate, this book necessarily does not offer a complete or conclusive analysis. I am still *interpreting* meanings through particular lenses, and what I see as salient may differ from what others consider important. Moreover, the very nature of deconstructive work is that it enables specificity and contextualization rather than universal or complete knowledge; indeed, since contexts of meaning-making are in a constant state of motion, something is always eclipsed. This inevitable partiality of analysis should not disappoint or disturb students of identity/difference politics, for it merely invites complementary projects and confirms that critical analysis is needed on a broad and continuous basis.



1



The Problem with 'Culture'

In the fall of 2006, two stories related to Sikhs living in Canada circulated in the news. The first centred on the violent attacks against three South Asian women by their male South Asian husbands: Manjit Panghali and Navreet Kaur Waraich were allegedly killed by their husbands; Gurjeet Kaur Ghuman was shot in the face by her husband and, although she survived, she is now blind due to the shooting (Bolan 2006a, 2006b, 2006c). The second story concerned the deliberate and violent beatings of two Sikh seniors, Mewa Singh Bains, aged eighty-four, and Shingara Thandhi, aged seventy-six, which concluded with manslaughter rather than hate-crime sentences of the attackers, two white boys aged thirteen and fifteen when they committed the crimes (CBC 2006). The mainstream media articulated the first story, of domestic and sexual violence, as a problem with and within Sikh culture; in the second story, however, the media erased the cultural (as well as religious and racialized) differences of the attacked men and the white male attackers, and framed the assaults as problems of individual behaviour rather than of systemic racism. In the first instance, culture was hyper-visible, in the second, invisible. Thus, *the* Sikh culture was blamed as the source of patriarchal and sexist violence against Sikh women (even though such gendered violence is exercised in many, if not all, cultural contexts), and the hate crimes against two Sikh men were deemed to be free of any culture-based (let alone racialized) discourse. Both cases shook the families and communities affected.

On a theoretical level, what is significant in these stories is the manner in which culture is taken up: depending on the context, it is either present or absent; it refers to those who are viewed as incompatible with liberal values of tolerance and equity; it is treated as the explanation of societal relations in some cases and depoliticized in others; and it comes to be understood as

a fully coherent entity, as a way to differentiate 'them' from 'us.' It is precisely these differing representations of culture that I consider in this chapter.

The concept of culture has, of course, been subject to hundreds of definitions (Vallance 2006, 97). As Barbara Arneil (2007, 51-58) notes, culture has been interpreted as "civilization" (and thus the antonym of nature), as "constructed and relative," as a "contested terrain," as an object made up of "incommensurable entities" (as in current discourses of cultural wars of religion versus secularism, Christianity versus Islam, traditional versus modern, modern versus postmodern), and as a "fluid category" that goes beyond ethnic and national difference to include categories of colour, sexual orientation, and disability. And yet, in liberal multicultural theory, a somewhat different definition of culture is adopted, one that seemingly rejects all of the above but is still shaped by ideas of civilization, some limited forms of contestation, and incommensurability. This concept of culture is specifically given meaning in terms of particular ethnic, national, and linguistic groups as discrete and bounded entities. Will Kymlicka (1995a, 19; 1998, 103) offers two reasons for limiting the scope of culture in this way: first, culture is commonly defined in reference to ethno-cultural minorities; and second, certain distinctions are necessary so as to avoid misunderstandings and false analogies. These are important explanations, and they reflect a certain awareness of some pressing social issues. Yet such reasons are also troubling, for they fail to interrogate who and what is being studied, and who and what is masked when culture is articulated as the primary category of analysis. Given this, a goal of this chapter is to elucidate what culture represents in liberal multicultural interpretations and what is at stake in them.

In particular, I consider how Kymlicka and Charles Taylor conceptualize and operationalize culture, why this should be the case, and what effects these conceptions have for the study of identity/difference politics. Neither Kymlicka nor Taylor claim to offer theories that address or resolve all issues of culture and diversity, and indeed this is not possible. But, as I suggested earlier, their respective theories of multicultural citizenship and recognition have taken on enormous significance and are thus useful points of entry for examining the work of culture as a diagnostic and organizing concept in liberal multicultural thought. After analyzing how and to what end the culture concept is deployed in the work of Kymlicka and Taylor, this chapter also briefly evaluates the ways in which culture has been reconceptualized by some critics of liberal multiculturalism. I conclude that, ultimately, these reconceptualizations also tend to narrow the terrain of identity/difference politics.

The Concept of Culture in Liberal Multicultural Thought

CULTURE AS ETHNIC/ETHNO-RELIGIOUS, NATIONAL, AND LINGUISTIC DIFFERENCE

In liberal multicultural discourses (and even in some critical discourses), "culture" is an umbrella term used to describe *specified* ethnic groups, historical nations, and linguistic minorities rather than all cultural groups. The specific cultural groups most commonly addressed are national minorities who are territorially concentrated and who share a common language (such as indigenous people, and French Canadians living in Quebec), as well as immigrant/polyethnic minorities whose members are assumed to share language, history, and a broad belief system (Kymlicka 1995a, 18; Taylor 1994b, 52-55). With regard to immigrants, due to the politicization of religion in recent years, liberal multicultural theorists have increasingly paid attention to the cultures of specific ethno-*religious* collectivities (Modood 2007). This is most evident in discussions regarding Muslims, whose identities may be simultaneously ethnic (Muslim), national (British Pakistani), linguistic (Urdu), and religious (Islamic).

This conception of culture as ethnic/ethno-religious, nationality, and linguistic difference gives rise to two serious methodological flaws in the study of identity/difference politics: first, it privileges one family of differences over other kinds of difference, and second, it overdetermines the bounds of social group identity. In particular, culture is pinpointed as the site of trouble that must be remedied and as an identity that should be subject to limited forms of regulated accommodation. In what follows, I examine how and why this takes place, and the theoretical and normative consequences of such an understanding of culture.

CULTURE AS A BOUNDED ENTITY

In situating culture as the primary lens through which to examine specific ethnic, ethno-religious, national, and linguistic groups, Kymlicka and Taylor tend to treat it rather nominally, in which it becomes an object. This essentialist view of culture risks "reifying cultures as separate entities by over-emphasizing their boundedness and mutual distinctness; it risks over-emphasizing the internal homogeneity of culture in terms that potentially legitimize repressive demands for communal conformity" (Turner 1994, 407). These essentializing tendencies have been much critiqued by such scholars as Seyla Benhabib (2002, 4, 60), who argues that liberal multiculturalists ground

culture on faulty epistemological premises, delineate cultures as whole, assume that they are congruent with population groups, and dismiss similarities between cultures as well as differences within them.

Even though Kymlicka (1995a, 17-18) states that he uses "culture" broadly in a non-ethnic sense so as to refer to customs or civilization, he also asserts that culture is "synonymous with 'a nation' or 'a people' – that is, as an inter-generational community, more or less institutionally complete, occupying a given territory, or homeland, sharing a distinct language and history." Kymlicka (1995a, 75) specifies societal culture – the culture of national minorities – as "a set of institutions, covering both public and private life, with a common language, which has historically developed over time on a given territory, which provides people with a wide range of choices about how to lead their lives." Culture, in this sense, becomes characterized in terms of stability, formal structures, longevity, and the choices it provides. In defending his two poles of national and polyethnic minorities, Kymlicka (2001, 59) asserts that there are legitimate reasons "to show that ethnocultural groups do not form a fluid continuum, in which each group has infinitely flexible needs and aspirations"; this is because "there are deep and relatively stable differences between various kinds of ethnocultural groups." In order to legitimize the boundaries of his identity categories, Kymlicka (1995a, 85) adds that each of us belongs to one culture and that generally people do not move between societal cultures, although they can enjoy other cultures.

This characterization of culture is a form of cultural essentialism, which arises as a consequence of the liberal need to categorize the subject as a coherent identity. Such an understanding of culture obscures similarities between groups and also conflates ethnic, national, and linguistic differences within groups. Although Kymlicka (1995a, 100, 104) is cognizant of variation within cultures such that he understands that cultures are dynamic and not static, he underestimates, for instance, the hybridity between modes of *racialized* and ethnic, national, and linguistic difference. He (Kymlicka 1998, 96) overdetermines Québécois culture by including "anyone who participates in the French-language society in Quebec, regardless of ethnic descent," and, in doing so, underrates the importance of ethnic and religious differences among French speakers. Indeed, even in Quebec, the importance of the French language varies, and not all francophones have the same options or possibilities because of gendered, classed, and racial differences. Kymlicka also ignores the differences between those racialized as white and non-white, including those from Africa, the Caribbean, and the Middle East, whose first language

may well be French. Although these 'cultural Others' may share sentiments of Quebec nationalism with other francophones, this should not be assumed. Moreover, the racialization of francophones as white and non-white has important consequences for how claims of culture are framed, particularly if they challenge claims of Quebec nationalism. Accordingly, although Kymlicka is right to suggest that societal cultures involve a shared vocabulary of tradition and convention, he freezes specific configurations of culture and overestimates the boundedness of groups.

Although Taylor takes the position that identities are dialogically constituted, he too tends to assume the uniformity and boundedness of a culture. Thus, on the one hand, he provides a more nuanced view of identity production than does Kymlicka in that he understands that recognition takes place within shared meanings, where 'we' define who we are. In the process of recognition, Taylor suggests, it is required that we investigate other cultures, while always leaving open the possibility that the standards we employ will also be transformed. On the other hand, despite Taylor's turn to broaden our horizons so as to understand 'them,' he tends to adopt an essentialist approach to evaluating Other cultures. Specifically, in arguing that judgments about worth are possible and necessary, he evokes the idea that cultures must be unified and homogeneous in such a way as to make assessments about them as whole entities. Since, for Taylor (1994b, 67), it is necessary to avoid what he sees as the dangers of relativism, he offers a criterion to judge the worth of cultures: the "validity of the claim has to be demonstrated concretely, in the actual study of the culture."

These judgments, however, are possible only if a culture is assumed to be unified and homogeneous such that judgments concerning it as a whole entity can be made (Benhabib 2002, 58). Generalizations about entire cultures tend to assume that dominant norms within a culture are central to everyone who belongs to that group, such that particular harmful practices of a minority culture become the responsibility of an already essentialized group. A harmful sexist practice, for example, tacitly becomes a feature of an entire community rather than the result of the particular meaning given to that practice by some members of a culture. This form of cultural essentialism often leads to false or skewed conclusions regarding oppression within a culture and can further impede resistance against oppressive practices within particular communities by constructing those who engage in resistance as traitors (Narayan 2000).

Taylor is clearly aware that cultures are more than bounded entities, for he draws on Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion of the fusion of horizons and

webs of significance. However, even when Taylor asserts that members of a culture share modes of intelligibility, he undercuts the idea that cultures are changeable through dialogical exchange when he suggests that cultures worthy of recognition should contain some key characteristics, such as temporal longevity. Therefore, a tension exists in Taylor's theory of recognition in that he argues that cross-cultural evaluation is aimed at avoiding Eurocentric assumptions about culture, and yet he underestimates the ways in which cultures are also sites of internal contestation. He (Taylor 1994b, 66-67) states, "But merely on the human level, one could argue that it is reasonable to suppose that cultures that have provided the horizon of meaning for large numbers of human beings, of diverse character and temperaments, over a long period of time – that have, in other words, articulated their sense of the good, the holy, the admirable – are almost certain to have something that deserves our admiration and respect, even if it is accompanied by much that we have to abhor and reject." Here, Taylor is suggesting that cultures need to be stable, time-endured, mature, and encompassing of many people in order for them to be worthy of recognition. Accordingly, he (Taylor 1994b, 66) dismisses "partial cultural milieux within a society as well as short phases of major culture."

But, in conceptualizing cultures in this way, Taylor's theory immediately excludes many cultures, cultures that may be shifting, transforming, in-between, partial, or only more recently organized. Spatial and temporal dimensions have enormous implications for Deaf, disabled, and queer cultures, which may not be recognized as having the historically documented longevity of some cultural groups (as a result of the historical forces of power) but that have more recently made claims for recognition. These cultural groups would be largely discounted because, according to Taylor (1994b, 66), they have "not animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time." What is more, to the extent that queer politics is directed at shifting modes of identification, partial meanings, and unbounded fluid definitions, queer cultures are marginalized in a theory of bounded and mature culture.

This is not to suggest that Taylor would dismiss recognition claims made by those signified as disabled or sexual minorities. However, his theory of recognition is very much centred on his concern for Québécois demands in Canada rather than on claims of injustice more broadly defined. Thus, Taylor wrongly treats claims of recognition as if they were generalizable across social groups and contexts (Nicholson 1996). His preoccupation with Quebec obscures important differences across groups, especially because he assumes

that the modern need for recognition of difference is commonly shared across different kinds of cultural contexts.

In the end, though some scholars such as anthropologist Christoph Brumann (1999, S9, S11) argue that there is communicative expediency when speaking of a cluster of elements, features, parts, or traits of a culture, I hold that such shorthand tends to represent some sort of megaculture without adequate qualification or interrogation. This uncritical essentialist tendency ultimately presents cultures as if they can be studied, known, and managed according to the standards set by dominant cultures.

CULTURE AS A PRE-SOCIAL IDENTITY

Liberal multiculturalists also tend to treat culture as if it were a given fact of identity or a pre-existing entity with identifiable characteristics. Cultures specifically become identifiable not through a careful and situated analysis of practices, histories, and relations, but through assumptions regarding natural affinity with culture. Although we are born into particular cultural contexts and, as a consequence, do have attachments to them, this does not mean that our cultural identities are prior to the political production of difference.

Kymlicka is aware of the dangers of naturalizing identity, but despite this, he eventually collapses into precisely this understanding of culture. Although he concedes that the societal culture in which one makes choices need not be that into which one was born, he argues that adaptation to a new societal culture is extremely difficult and demanding. On this basis, he concludes that it is reasonable for people to want to access their native culture (Carens 2000, 55), namely, their natural culture. Further, though Kymlicka (1998, 97) states that ethno-cultures are not united by shared blood, he also suggests that culture-as-nationality is more significant than other aspects of identification; this is because socialization of nationality takes place early in life. He (Kymlicka 1998, 98) goes on to claim that we learn about our sexual identity after we are socialized into national communities. Such a position suggests that culture-as-nationality is primary because one is born, or at least socialized at an early age, into certain nationalities. This is telling, not only because national identity outweighs sexual identity for Kymlicka, but also because lifespan rather than historical context determines which identities are most important.

This argument regarding homosexual identity is troubling for three other reasons: first, it assumes that national identities are pre-given; second, it neglects the ways that even culture-as-nationality is changeable as a consequence

of shifts in government, emigration, or loyalty; and third, it assumes that sexuality is necessarily gleaned later in life, whereas in fact much debate exists concerning the origins of sexual orientation and gender identification. Accordingly, it is impossible to make generalizations about the intensity or saliency of one form of identification over another.

Even if one accepted that cultural identities were to some extent natural rather than socially constructed, this would not justify focusing, as Kymlicka does, on a specific set of ethnic, national, and linguistic social groups, thereby narrowing the scope of culture. He certainly explores the broader application of multiculturalism. In determining whether multiculturalism should be extended to non-ethnic groups, Kymlicka (1998, 90-103) considers whether gays, lesbians, and the Deaf fit into his model of multicultural citizenship. Deaf cultures, he notes, bear a particular resemblance to other cultural groups. He (Kymlicka 1998, 102) states that they are akin to national minorities because "Deaf people were raised in a Deaf culture, and indeed this is the only culture they are effectively able to participate in." He (Kymlicka 1998, 95) also recognizes that, like other minority language groups, the Deaf have suffered persecution because Sign languages have been suppressed. Gay and lesbian groups, he continues, are more like immigrant groups than are the Deaf in that they wish to integrate into mainstream society.

Yet, because the Deaf do not meet his criterion of having a full societal culture, Kymlicka concludes that they are entitled only to special representation rights. He acknowledges that the Deaf have a commitment to their own language (Sign) in the same way as do national minorities, and he maintains that the Deaf have developed substantial institutional completeness (unlike gays and lesbians). But, because the Deaf are too few in number, territorially dispersed, and unable to guarantee the *reproduction* of Deaf children, Kymlicka (1998, 102) declares that they "can never become a genuinely 'national' minority. They will always remain at best a quasi-national group, and will have a difficult time developing and maintaining a complete societal culture."

This naturalized relationship between identity and culture seems entirely at odds with Kymlicka's (1998, 102, emphasis added) statement that, because "the obstacles to integration in the mainstream are enormous – *much greater than for immigrant groups, or even more traditional 'national' minorities,*" the cultural nationalist aspirations of the Deaf must be respected and accommodated. It is also at odds with Kymlicka's (1998, 96) position that ethno-cultural groups deserve recognition not because of ethnic descent, but because

they share a culture that provides them with shared meaningful options and a sense of belonging and identity. Thus, even though Kymlicka insists on a justice-driven framework and on using culture in an ethnic sense, he does not fully disentangle culture from the idea that we are born into particular ways of being.

In the end, this means that Kymlicka's (1992, 141) criterion to "match the rights to the kinds of disadvantage being compensated for" is both arbitrary and skewed. With regard to Deaf culture, the linguistic distinctiveness of Deaf immigrants should concern Kymlicka, even by his own definition. A Deaf person from a non-English-speaking background, for example, may well have to operate within a Deaf culture and language, a dominant English culture and language, and a third culture and language in which she is immersed at home because her family is neither Deaf nor English-speaking (Christensen and Delgado 1993, 1). Deaf ethno-cultural minority immigrants could therefore be multicultural in the strictest sense of multiculturalism.

Taylor is less overt in naturalizing culture, but this trend in his theory resembles that of Kymlicka in two key ways. First, in articulating and rediscovering authenticity, Taylor (1994b, 31) argues that we should be true to our "own culture." The bond between the self and culture suggests that, for Taylor, markers of culture are naturally part of identity. Second, in discussing the Québécois (as a distinct nation or society), he does not specify features of their culture because he assumes that language inherently connects members of a culture. For Taylor, language is not solely an instrument of communication: it also represents the essence of the human subject. As Andres Lecours (2000, 504-5) argues, Taylor thinks that, above all, man is a "language animal" and that the crucial role of language in the constitution of the self makes it an inevitable and pre-political aspect of culture. Lecours (2000, 505) contends that Taylor has a primordial view of culture in which "the bond between individuals and culture is so fundamental that individual dignity and self-respect are directly connected to group status." The preservation of culture protects language and, by extension, a way of life; given this, culture becomes a natural part of identity. Such an understanding precludes investigation of "the mechanics of identity formation, transformation, politicization and mobilization that are central to the politics of cultural identity" (Lecours 2000, 504).

The naturalizing of culture thus seems to serve two purposes in liberal multicultural thought: first, it gives legitimacy to a defence of why culture is

a valuable good (I return to this in the next section); and second, it serves to bolster the idea that cultures are bounded entities that can be pinpointed and judged.

CULTURE AS A RESOURCE

The concept of culture is also put to work in liberal multiculturalism by making it a valuable resource. Two problems arise from this. The first is that the value of culture tends to be justified in universal terms. For Kymlicka (1995a, 83), culture is instrumentally valuable in the Rawlsian sense, whereby it is a primary good for all individuals. Access to culture provides individuals with contexts of choice that enable personal agency and development, as well as equality (Kymlicka 1989, 208). The significance of choice is particularly necessary because "it's only through having a rich and secure cultural structure that people can become aware, in a vivid way, of the options available to them, and intelligently examine their value" (Kymlicka 1989, 155). Culture is hence both the object (that is, what individuals have) and background of choice (a way of life) (Markell 2003, 156-61). To be denied access to one's culture or to be prohibited from acting in accordance with it is, for Kymlicka, a form of injustice (Markell 2003, 171).

Whereas, for Kymlicka, the moral and epistemological imperative for respecting culture is instrumental, for Taylor (1994b, 34), culture is intrinsically valuable; it is an essential part of the communal good, and it helps us to discover our own identities. Taylor (1985, 136) states that culture "is not a mere instrument of the individual goods. It can't be distinguished from them as their merely contingent condition, something they could in principle exist without. That makes no sense. It is essentially linked to what we have identified as good. Consequently, it is hard to see how we could deny it the title of good, not just in some weakened, instrumental sense, like the dam, but as intrinsically good." Culture is thus a necessary social good to him, and not just of instrumental value. However, though culture holds intrinsic value in his theory (which is consistent with his communitarianism), I would argue that, for Taylor, culture also holds instrumental value. This is because it is valuable to groups (not solely to individuals) as a way to be self-reflective about group authenticity and because it provides a multi-generational collective resource for identity formation.¹

Kymlicka, then, conceives of culture as a primary good for the individual, and Taylor perceives it as a social good. In both instances, culture is a resource, a thing that can be drawn on for instrumental and/or seemingly naturally

important reasons. Recognition of culture-based difference is something we are subsequently owed because it enables self-realization. But, in approaching culture as a resource, liberal multiculturalists are forced to justify why culture should be respected. This necessity traps them into providing universalizing philosophical and moral justifications for tolerating and accommodating Othered cultures. Although theories should be explained, the defence of culture is particularly fraught. This is because interpretations about the meaning of culture are so varied, contested, and constantly shifting; as a result, deriving definitive and universal reasons as to why cultures should be generally valued is nearly impossible. In other words, though Kymlicka and Taylor present general theories about why (and which) diverse cultures should be respected, no such generalizations can hold, precisely because cultural differences vary as a result of the wide-ranging transmission of meanings to people. This is especially the case because cultures do not possess people, but people actually create, enact, and iterate cultural practices, symbols, and differences.

The second and more pressing political problem is that culture becomes treated as a resource that can be and is owned by individuals, groups, and the state. The point must now be obvious that cultures are not in fact entities that can be owned, but when culture takes on instrumental value for the state, it becomes a guise through which to manage difference according to global economic market demands. This is important in places such as Canada, where 'multicultural subjects' are migrating from diverse countries (Statistics Canada 2001) and where applicants who apply under the business/independent class are preferred to those in the family class (Abu-Laban 1998, 73-78). The point system of immigration specifically works in tandem with the idea that cultural diversity is a core part of Canadian identity, whereby culture is a resource that helps to build the nation on economic as well as social terms. Culture is, in this sense, "a national property" (Ahmed 2007, 235).

Kymlicka and Taylor do not directly conceptualize culture on these instrumental market terms, for they tend to refer to culture as a resource that aids individual self-realization and identity development. Their conceptions of culture cannot, however, be entirely separated from what George Yúdice (2003) calls "cultural economy" and Yasmeeen Abu-Laban and Christina Gabriel (2002) conceptualize as "selling diversity." Market multiculturalism (that is, the commodification of culture) is tied up with the idea that culture has individual and group value, whereby in both instances the identities of subjects within a nation and the identity of the nation itself are (in part at least) predicated on the idea that culture has instrumental value.

CULTURE AS THE OTHERED

Unlike traditional Western anthropologists who study non-Western places, liberal multiculturalists also utilize culture in reference to non-Western people who make claims within the boundaries of the West. Culture specifically translates into what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1999, 355) calls "a nice name for the exoticism of the outsiders" and Uma Narayan (2000, 84) sees as the construction of an identity that systematically ignores the "profound similarities between Western culture and many of its Others, such as hierarchical social systems, huge economic disparities between members, and the mistreatment and inequality of women."

This separation between 'their' cultures and 'ours' underlies the work of both Kymlicka and Taylor, who reference culture directly in relation to groups marked as Other. Although Kymlicka does refer to the problem of Anglo-conformity, he implicitly suggests that the cultures of those who do not conform create difficulty for the state, whereas dominant cultures do not. Indeed, he is concerned not with redistributing rights for all groups – which would shift the balance of power between dominant and subordinated groups rather than simply extend differentiated rights to marginalized cultures – but only with the rights of specific minority cultures. And Taylor assumes that recognition can be assigned to misrecognized Othered cultures without taking into account the ways in which the values of dominant groups become, by default, the standards of recognition. In other words, because neither thinker addresses what changes are required of dominant groups, they render invisible the power and privilege assigned to some cultures. Cultures that are normalized (dominant cultures) form the background of both Kymlicka's and Taylor's theories but ultimately receive little analytical and critical attention. In this, the Anglo cultures (as per Kymlicka) and Canadian culture as North American, modern, and Christian (as per Taylor) become homogenized and inserted as a stable norm.

Despite this underlying support for the status quo, liberal multiculturalism continues to present itself as being a theory and policy of social change, one that is tolerant of Other cultures. This image appears to be necessary not only to free liberalism of the legacy of cultural imperialism, but also to construct a self-image as non-cultural. This, however, is disingenuous precisely because liberal multiculturalists attempt to liberalize culture by linking it to particular brands of liberal tolerance, freedoms, rights, and dignity, thus creating a cultural formation most acceptable to the liberal paradigm. What is especially striking is that the process of shrinking the status of culture by

converting its communal dimension to universalistic principles of rights and recognition is, ironically, dependent on revering culture (Brown 2004). In other words, only by claiming the concept of culture (in the form of the Othered who needs liberalizing or recognizing) can liberal multiculturalists transcend it. By claiming culture in this way, liberals seek to maintain the hegemony of liberalism (regardless of the brand of liberalism employed) and to situate it as transcendental to culture. Paradoxically, then, liberal multiculturalists maintain the self-image of being tolerant and accommodating of cultural difference while simultaneously promoting only those versions of tolerance and accommodation that meet liberal standards. The effect is that the centre remains invisibilized, and a regulated boundary remains between the Other and the Norm in which liberal multicultural values occupy the centre, and values that do not correspond are repeatedly positioned on the margins.

CULTURE AS A PROXY FOR RACE

The conceptual parameters around questions of culture in liberal multicultural theory have effectively placed a wide range of differences outside the scope of identity/difference politics. One key example lies in how race-thinking, racialization, racism, and colonialism are undertheorized and/or reframed as issues of culture. References to culture and multiculturalism are, more often than not, used to package those who share some aspects of difference without adequately addressing historical and global racialized relations, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and other forms of domination. Kymlicka and Taylor tend to theorize polyethnic minorities, for example, without any reference to the global racial and colonial histories that have marked their identities within Canada. In fact, it seems that the same kinds of Othered subjects that were historically categorized and subjugated by race-thinking and racism are now being analyzed through meanings about culture. In reflecting on the use of culture in political theory, anthropologist David Scott (2003, 103-4) argues that culture has indeed become the most recent way of conceiving and constructing Otherness. The Renaissance, he states, constructed the non-European Other through Christianity; in the Enlightenment the Other was interpreted through distinctions between European Reason and non-European Ignorance; through the nineteenth century, race organized the paradigms of normalcy and Otherness. In the twentieth century, Scott (2003, 104) continues, culture "becomes the grid and horizon of difference. It becomes, so to speak, the commanding natural language of difference."

One of the effects of privileging culture as *the* grid and horizon of difference is that the operations and effects of race-thinking are virtually erased. Kymlicka (1998, 96) is quite explicit about this move when he remarks that "the shift from racialism to culturalism is an obvious moral improvement." This shift certainly has the potential to characterize the meaning of culture developed by Franz Boas and his followers in which culture was an alternative to racist and racial categories of difference (Upadhyya 2002, 184). However, the separation of ideas about race and culture leads Kymlicka to virtually expunge the discursive, material, and ideological relationship between culture, racism, and colonialism. In consequence, sometimes, culture becomes a proxy for race; at other times, the race category is culturalized (Fleras 2004; Mills 2007, 94).² Perhaps confusion exists regarding race as a culturally constructed category and racial categories that are (falsely) based on cultural differences (Cowlshaw 1987, 227). But even if Kymlicka is responding to the criticism of race-as-biology, his conception of culture continues to obscure the material and historical construction of cultural groups. Consequently, it veils the impact of processes of racialization and racism, and reinscribes the same essentialism that has characterized the idea of race.

Although some liberal pluralists, such as Tariq Modood (2007) and Charles Mills (2007), approach multiculturalism with questions of race-thinking, Islamophobia, and white supremacy very much in mind, Kymlicka brackets issues of racism and racialization outside the scope of multiculturalism. In these instances, race-thinking appears extraneous, even though it is constitutive of socio-political difference and shapes the very backdrop through which multiculturalism has emerged. This trend extends across other strands of liberal thought, whereby liberal modernity tends to deny its racialized history and hides behind some idealized dismissal of race as a morally relevant category (Goldberg 1993, 7). The swathe over race-thinking is especially troubling because it depoliticizes the ways in which culture is intertwined with systems of racialization; this depoliticization occurs both by making race-thinking seem less significant and by framing difference in terms of tolerance rather than in terms of the impact of white supremacy.

The effect of masking over contexts of white supremacy is that histories of racism and the privilege assigned to groups marked as white remain unexamined. In the Canadian context, this depoliticized (rather than apolitical) character of culture has been especially criticized by indigenous scholars who view indigenous groups as nations, not as multicultural or cultural groups (T. Alfred 1999; Green 2000), and by those who understand the legacies of

slavery, segregation, racial violence, and hate in terms of racism rather than culture. Although racism often has cultural dimensions (in that people categorized as members of a race have different cultural values, beliefs, and practices), racial differences are not simply the result of failing to recognize or know a culture. Rather, they are the product of economic, social, and political white domination. As Charles Mills (2007, 97) says in reference to Taylor's theory of recognition, "If cultural distinctiveness were the sole or primary obstacle to white acceptance, then culturally assimilated people of color would not encounter racism."

It is perhaps the case that, since the war on terror has provoked a backlash against multiculturalism, liberal multicultural theorists may be increasingly drawn to anti-racist discourses, either as a way to supplement multiculturalism or to expand its boundaries. Steps toward anti-racism discourses may occur specifically because the previous justifications of multicultural tolerance and accommodation are under attack by those who call for explicit practices of integration and assimilation, and because, as Jakeet Singh (2007) notes, multiculturalism is increasingly being scripted as the *enemy* of integration and therefore the *friend* of terrorism. Liberal multiculturalists will no doubt continue to respond to this charge so as to defend liberalism. The turn toward anti-racism may have less of an impact in places such as the UK where anti-racism and multiculturalism already come together. But in Canada, where the lines between multiculturalism and anti-racism are sometimes blurred and sometimes clearly divergent, such a move could potentially foreground issues of racial discrimination currently ignored and masked in liberal multicultural theory.

Yet, appropriation of critical race and anti-racism discourses by liberal multiculturalists may simply end up being another way to claim the higher moral ground of liberal freedom and tolerance at the neglect of issues of privilege and penalty. Such a position may nonetheless gain legitimacy because multiculturalism has become the most palatable expression of difference allowable in Western mainstream discourse. Although anti-racism and anti-colonialism should be front and centre so that relations of power are foregrounded, if liberal multiculturalists approach race-thinking in terms of liberal tolerance – namely, as individual irrational prejudice – and cross-cultural education and exchange rather than as a problem of historic and systemic white hegemony, they will be no further ahead in addressing racial violence. Indeed, as Sarita Srivastava (2007) argues, anti-racist multicultural practices can shift the focus from grassroots political priorities to state-defined

priorities, give legitimacy to uncritical (race-free) narratives of nation-building, and limit radical forms of anti-racism.

CULTURE AS A UNIDIMENSIONAL SIGNIFIER OF DIFFERENCE

The tendencies toward essentialism, a naturalized conception of cultural identity, and a deracialized notion of culture are also reflected in and produced by the privilege assigned to culture over other aspects of difference. More specifically, liberal multicultural theory privileges culture in such a way as to mask cultural differences that are formed through modes of racialization, gendering, ability, class, sexuality, and so on. Indeed, liberal pluralist interpretations present multiculturalism as if it were conceived outside the context of gendered, racialized, ablest, and class-based relations. This (mis)representation merely serves to reinscribe dominant forms of nationalism and to mask various power inequities. Paradoxically, therefore, though liberal multiculturalists wish to recognize a multiplicity of cultural differences, they tend to erase the differences within cultures.

There are some exceptions to the unidimensional focus on culture, where, for example, the rights of women within their cultures are examined. But while such an examination is important, the patriarchal cultural practices of dominant society tend to go unscrutinized, and cultural identity and gender identity tend to be framed as oppositional to one another. Certainly, Kymlicka and Taylor are both right not to treat cultures as amorphous entities, but they also underestimate the ways in which members of a culture are shaped through interactions between multiple modes of identification. The experience of culture, in other words, varies according to modes of identification beyond the scope of ethnicity, nationality, and linguistic difference. Since the position of members of minority cultures is also affected by historical relations of power drawn along *non-ethno-cultural* lines, a theory of social identity and difference should seek to address a complex range of interlocking historical systems of oppression and privilege. But nowhere in their analysis is there an adequate treatment of the interactions between different systems of oppression. Given this, as Richard Day (2004, 37) rightly argues, the discourse of liberal multiculturalism fails to live up to its own standards of justice and equality.

Indeed, the overemphasis on culture promotes a unidimensional analysis of difference, a form of analysis that has been much criticized by feminists of colour and indigenous feminists who stress the simultaneity of oppressions. Unidimensional analysis contributes to what American critical race

scholar Kimberle Crenshaw (2000) calls "intersectional invisibility," in which the interactions between gender and race discrimination, for example, become hidden and made imperceptible. Crenshaw asserts that the foregoing critique of the single-issue framework renders problematic the claim that the struggle against racism is distinguishable from, much less prioritized over, the struggle against sexism. Mohawk scholar Patricia Monture (Monture-Angus 1995, 136-41) also makes this point in her critique of section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. She suggests that, in part, the enumerated grounds in the Charter are inadequate because they list separated entities (race, sex, religion) that fail to account for the combined impact of multiple grounds of discrimination experienced by indigenous women.

Following feminist approaches that go beyond unidimensional theories of gender, students of identity/difference politics also need to question the primacy accorded to culture in liberal multiculturalism. This primacy obscures an understanding of how meanings about culture perform through other systems of meaning. To be clear, I am not suggesting that other dimensions of identification should take priority over aspects of culture so that gender, or class, or sexuality becomes the central organizing concept. Rather, my point is that systems of identification are integral to one another, and accordingly culture cannot be prioritized as the main axis of difference.

The capacity of liberal multiculturalists to address the interactions between multiple systems is perhaps ultimately limited to an additive response because of the demand for a clearly-defined subject. This additive understanding of identity simply appends one dimension to another and maintains a unidimensional categorization of identity. Such a perspective continues to emphasize some dimensions of identity at the cost of examining the interdependency of multiple dimensions and emphasizes difference without adequately examining *relations* of difference. In consequence, a tension is produced between culture-based forms of identification and other aspects of identification, such that these may appear irreconcilable. This tension has been especially illuminated in debates about whether multiculturalism is bad for women (Okin 1994).

Another approach to examining the relationship between multiple modes of identification is to broaden the meaning of culture. This has been suggested by Barbara Arneil. Arneil (2007, 65) suggests that the definition of culture be expanded to include "all groups who have been treated unjustly within liberal theory." For Arneil, this includes groups marked as sexual minorities and those marked by social disabilities. Arneil (2007, 67) is especially

interested in exploring “the processes by which cultural ‘others’ are defined as deviant” within the context of liberal norms of industry, reason, autonomy, heterosexuality, and the public/private divide. She contends that a broader definition of culture will enable subjects to draw from the tools made available by liberalism (such as liberal rights) and to temper the assimilationist tendencies of liberalism by rejecting constraining expressions of cultural difference.

This conception of social difference is certainly appealing because it recognizes that, in multicultural discourses, some formulations of difference are problematically privileged over others. It also reflects the importance of culture to groups conventionally outside the scope of liberal multiculturalism. But such an expansion of the culture concept may also serve to undermine the vision of agonistic pluralism that Arneil argues is necessary for justice; this is because culture becomes a catch-all monolithic way of characterizing difference. Indeed, as Arneil (2007, 58-60) herself observes, even if the meaning of culture were broadened, it could simply make other subjects susceptible to precisely the liberal modes of cultural assimilation and normalization that reiterate Otherness. Theresa Man Ling Lee (2006) reaches a similar conclusion. In response to arguments that people marked by disabilities are no different from people of colour, Jews, Muslims, or gays and lesbians, and that disabled groups are like any other cultural group, Lee contends that characterizing persons with disabilities as a quasi-ethnic group is unproductive, potentially divisive, and hierarchical. This is because such meanings of culture create two tiers of minority groups: those who are deemed to be ‘properly’ cultural and therefore deserving of multicultural accommodation, and those who are not.

The narrow scope of culture cannot therefore be countered by an additive approach or by extending the meaning of culture. Both responses simply replicate liberal multicultural trends to overdetermine the separation between aspects of difference and/or to see all differences through the lens of culture.

STATE REGULATION OF DIVERSE CULTURES

The following discussion illuminates how liberal multiculturalism substantiates an understanding of culture as something that is, at best, deserving of regulated accommodation. The culture concept, in other words, appears accommodative of diversity, but underlying this pluralism is a form of state-led governmentality of difference.

In particular, state regulation of cultural Others takes place through the requirement that 'they' be included in dominant society. Although this underlying goal of inclusion is driven by notions of liberty, equality, and recognition, it is also a troubled ideal. First, the language of inclusion depoliticizes the problem of power. This occurs by defining social transformation in terms of the expansion and pluralization of an existing core/centre, rather than in terms of fundamental change of the conditions that give meaning to that core/centre, and by collapsing all kinds of exclusions. On this latter point, Iris Marion Young (2000, 13) remarks that the "concepts of exclusion and inclusion lose meaning if they are used to label all problems of social conflict and injustice." In fact, she continues, "where the problems are racism, cultural intolerance, economic exploitation, or a refusal to help needy people, they should be named so."

Second, the goal of including Others into the mainstream falsely assumes that those who are currently included are equally included and that inclusion brings equity. But inclusion is premised on defining the inside and outside of a delimited core, such that an inclusive sphere exists only in relation to a sphere of exclusion. Inclusion, therefore, paradoxically depends on the continued denial of itself – it can be realized only if some subjects are excluded. These modes of exclusion, or hierarchies of difference, are masked, however, by simply pluralizing the core and leaving the unequal character of that core intact. The following quote from Amarpal Dhaliwal (1994, 43) characterizes this problem very well:

[The politics of inclusion] does not account for the ways inclusion can still oppress or fail to alter structures of domination. The inability of radical democratic inclusion politics to deal with inclusion retaining peripheralization is a key limitation, especially given that, in many liberal democratic societies, many democratic groups have been 'included' by being accorded certain formal rights like the right to vote. If inclusionary attempts often reaffirm a hegemonic core to which the margins are added without any significant destabilization of that 'core' or continue to valorize [sic] the very centre that is problematic to begin with, then it is clear that the motivation to include needs questioning.

Indeed, in assuming that there is a primary (if not singular) mainstream culture in which to include Others, the goal of inclusion erases the experience

of having many centres of inclusion or sites of belonging. Furthermore, it does not attend to the ways in which the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are regulated by those with an established reign of authority. In Kymlicka's theory, for example, inclusion is premised on the values of dominant societal cultures, and in Taylor's, inclusion requires those who dominate to bestow recognition. In both instances, there is an assumption that those who do not need differentiated rights and recognition (dominant subjects) are active participants who are fully integrated into Canadian society.

Third, underlying the desire for inclusion are corresponding but subtextual agendas that may emerge from a desire for peace and social harmony but that may also arise in contexts of exploitation and domination. In the latter case, the value of inclusion is advanced not for the sake of equity or justice, but as necessary in order to promote such ideologies as market liberalism, as I suggested above. Abu-Laban and Gabriel (2002, 169) refer to this as multiculturalism selling business, "whereby the skill, talents, and ethnic backgrounds of men and women are commodified, marketed, and billed." In these instances, inclusion is not simply about providing access and opportunity for cultural minorities: it is about the financial prosperity of the state and the implementation of a neo-liberal agenda. Inclusion of diverse cultures can, therefore, mask the desire to use and exploit the intellectual, linguistic, and material capacities of Othered subjects in order to maximize the benefits of a market-driven economy.

Fourth, because the terms of inclusion are set by the state, its regulatory role is further legitimized. The state can certainly bring some benefits to the people of a nation in that it can protect the rights of individuals and groups, enhance the capacity-building potential of subjects, and facilitate active citizenry by engaging subjects in political life. Yet, in order to maintain its own authority, the state necessarily acts as a gatekeeper of social differences. Indeed, as Patchen Markell (2003, see 27-32) notes, though the state is a disproportionately powerful actor, it too depends on subjects and other states to recognize its sovereignty. Liberal multicultural theory expands and justifies state management of those marked as different and threatening, even potentially threatening, to the nation.

One needs simply to recollect that Kymlicka published *Multicultural Citizenship* in 1995, and that Taylor published a collection of essays titled *Reconciling the Solitudes* in 1993, when the legitimacy of the Canadian state was at question and the country was in a state of constitutional crisis. Both thinkers were preoccupied by issues of self-determination for Quebec, especially

in light of heated and divisive debates over Canadian unity and constitutionalism. Tensions were particularly high because Quebec never signed on to the Constitution Act of 1982 and because of the failures of the two constitutional accords (Meech Lake and Charlottetown) in the 1980s and 1990s. Responding to these political events, Kymlicka and Taylor articulated their theories through discourses that enabled them to pinpoint specific cultures, which in turn allowed them to evaluate those groups that were deemed to pose an actual or potential threat to the state and to national unity. This same sense of crisis continues to shape liberal multicultural theory today with the preoccupation that Muslims can/do threaten the nation's identity, its people, its borders, and its security (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002; Arat-Koc 2006; Razack 2007). From a liberal multicultural perspective, if the state can both accommodate and manage diverse cultures, fragmentation can (at least for the moment) be avoided.

The consequence of this crisis-driven approach is that some modes of difference become constructed as more pressing than others. Of course, some issues are more urgent than others in specific contexts, but the dual focus on national minorities and immigrants obscures the context in which other groups are marginalized, including "transported forced labour, political and economic refugees, guest workers," all of whom are colonial and racialized subjects who make up "a large portion of the forebearers of contemporary multicultural minorities" (I.M. Young 1997, 50). Although Kymlicka (1995a, 99; 2002, 357-59; 2005a, 23-28) has over recent years nuanced his conception of immigrant and national minority groups, it is clear that he is not concerned about difference per se but with questions of diversity that are most pressing for the state to address.

The authority of the state is without doubt a legitimate concern for those who study the politics of identity/difference. However, when the focus is on how and why the state should manage difference, the perspectives of those who are marginalized due to their perceived difference are taken to be secondary. Moreover, from a state-centred stance, culture emerges as a problem because Othered cultures are making demands that threaten national and political unity. The function of the state is to secure the nation against this disunity. These threats, Arneil (2007, 56, emphasis on original) argues, are especially salient to Kymlicka and Taylor because of their intellectual, ideological, and geographic locations: "As *political theorists*, as opposed to anthropologists or cultural studies' scholars, the central concern is the origin of *political* authority. As *liberals*, they seek to theorize the liberal democratic

state in relation to the rights of individuals and communities ... [and] as *Canadians*, the theoretical problem of national unity took on a very concrete and acute form at the close of the twentieth century." Liberal political thought is specifically premised on establishing the limits of justified coercion, or, to put it differently, on justifying state interference to protect individual liberty without undermining individual freedoms and rights. Liberal multiculturalists adjust the goal for liberals because they are driven by a concern to be sensitive to group difference, which they argue is not contrary to the liberal tradition of tolerance and dignity. Hence, they enable specific groups to engage in specific practices that would otherwise be contrary to liberalism. Even though (some) group differences are acknowledged, the liberal multicultural paradigm ultimately requires the establishment of new parameters of justified state coercion. The focus is now not only on the extent of individual liberties but also on group liberties.

Reconceptualizing Culture: Turning to Anthropology

If, then, liberal multiculturalism *analytically* narrows the terrain of identity/difference by focusing almost exclusively on that aspect of identity named "culture," *theoretically* interprets culture in obscuring and depoliticizing ways, and *normatively* masks the ways in which the state regulates Others through the ideal of inclusion, is there analytic worth or possibility of reconceptualizing the concept of culture so as to confront issues of power? My short answer is yes, but culture needs to be extracted from the bounds of liberal multiculturalism, and it cannot be the primary lens through which to examine issues of identity/difference politics. To make this argument, I turn to developments in anthropology as a discipline that has historically and normatively situated culture. Although I am suspicious of what Linda Smith (1999, 11, 42) calls the "imperial eyes" of anthropology, in this discipline culture has also been theorized in the context of political arrangements between groups, and this link to power is central to my own approach.

Political scientists have long relied on specific anthropological notions of culture in indirect and sometimes unacknowledged ways. Over recent years, some political theorists have been explicitly mindful of the lessons to be learned from theoretical developments in anthropology. The turn to anthropology is noteworthy in itself because it indicates that the intellectual tools for studying the politics of identity/difference within political science need to be supplemented and that theories of culture transcend disciplinary boundaries. In this section, I explore how and why political theorists Seyla Benhabib

and James Tully turn to postmodern anthropology. Whereas traditional anthropology stressed the organic unity, boundedness, and self-sufficiency of the object of culture, "the critical potential of postmodern anthropology ... lies in the fact that anthropological categories of cultural difference, though articulated from within a Western tradition, nevertheless make available perspectives of otherness" (CCSG 1994, 121). Postmodern anthropology especially emphasizes cultural relativism, the importance of displacing Eurocentrism, and the need to reject essentialist and conflated understandings of culture and race. These ideas inform the work of Benhabib and Tully in ways that counter the narrowing and obscuring effects of liberal multicultural interpretations of culture.

SEYLA BENHABIB: CULTURE AS NARRATIVE

In her important book *Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era* (2002), Benhabib develops a social constructivist conception of culture that directly challenges Kymlicka's and Taylor's normatively suspect conception. She utilizes feminist anthropological concepts of culture as a way to differentiate between moral, ethical, and evaluative concerns. Benhabib specifically offers an intersubjective and localized notion of culture-as-narrative, which challenges cultural essentialism. An analysis of culture, she asserts, becomes essentialized from the standpoint of the social observer. By contrast, from the standpoint of the participant, culture is shaped through narratives that arise from traditions, stories, rituals, symbols, and material conditions. For Benhabib, the production of culture is hence embedded in experiential knowledge.

In this narrative view of culture, Benhabib (2002, 6, emphasis in original) states, there is no need for culture to appear as whole: instead, it arises through contested narratives because "we identify *what* we do through an *account* of what we do." Hence, cultures take on meanings through webs of narratives. This resonates with Taylor's notion of webs of interlocution, although Benhabib places more emphasis on questions of power than does Taylor. Benhabib (2002, 33-41, 60, 103, 137) specifically understands cultures as heterogeneous, dynamic, porous, hybrid, and as communities of dialogue fraught with power. Further, culture-as-narrative encompasses what she calls second-order narratives in which we take evaluative stances about what we do. For Benhabib (1995, 240), cultures are not "hermetic and sealed wholes" that represent only some kinds of delimited difference; rather, they are systems of articulating the material and the symbolic. Cultures are likened to associations of

people that provide expressions of ways of living. Through this understanding of culture, Benhabib (1995, 240) suggests, it becomes possible to avoid flattening the internal contradictions and debates within cultures.

There are, in sum, several propositions from Benhabib's model of culture: culture is narratively constituted; cultures are communities in conversation; culture is power-laden; cultures are heterogeneous, dynamic, and contested; and cultures tend to be porous and hybrid in that people and the practices/ideas within them move across and between cultures (Peritz 2004, 269-70). This narrative account of culture is conducive to the notion of intersubjectivity and the critique of essentialism that I wish to advance in my approach to the politics of identity/difference. As well, I agree with Benhabib (2002, 8) that "human groups should be defended in the name of justice and freedom and not of an elusive preservation of cultures."

Benhabib's conception of culture-as-narrative could be applied more widely so as to address multiple standpoints, not solely those related to culture. This, however, could collapse into the same problem identified by Arneil, a problem in which culture comes to stand for everything. Moreover, some narratives may emphasize gender, class, or sexual orientation (or interactions between these systems and other systems) in ways that destabilize the primacy of culture. In other words, culture may not be of principal significance for the participant or may take on distinct subjective forms in relation to two or more aspects of identification, which may or may not include culture. Moreover, it is unclear whether Benhabib intends cultures to be defined by cultural narratives alone. If narratives constitute culture, the potential to change cultural meanings would depend heavily on the agency of marginalized individuals and groups. Although a key attraction of Benhabib's notion of culture-as-narrative is the agency of those marked as Other, cultural meanings emerge from sources that extend beyond the agent. Benhabib argues that cultures themselves are torn by conflicts concerning their own boundaries, but it is not simply that cultures continually create, recreate, and renegotiate the imagined boundaries between insiders and outsiders; rather, the boundaries can be imposed by members of other cultures as well as by members of one's own culture. Culture, in this sense, should be examined as both a productive and a constraining site of difference rather than something that is valorized.

Benhabib's theory also has a tendency to universalize the notion that contested and hybrid narratives of culture are an empirical fact, which she later qualifies by acknowledging that a discourse theory of democracy should

not definitively exclude claims based in reified understandings of culture but should require instead that such claims respect democratic equality and autonomy (Peritz 2004, 274). The important point is that, though cultures are constantly changing, essentialized conceptions of culture can provide a radical critique of the hegemonic order; as Glen Coulthard (forthcoming) and Nikolas Kompridis (2005, 2006) argue, reified narratives of culture need not be any less meaningful to the participant than fluid, open, hybrid, and contested notions of culture. Indeed, it is critical to ask for whom culture is deemed to be hybrid – the analyst or the person/people whose culture is under analysis.

This tension between non-essentializing and essentialist discourses of culture has preoccupied some theorists, but I will argue in later chapters that this preoccupation is less fruitful than examining why and with what effects these understandings of culture gain meaning. For now, I simply note that only some features of Benhabib's notion of culture-as-narrative are useful when assessing alternative ways to theorize culture. In particular, she carefully shows that holistic conceptions of culture offered by liberal multiculturalists are inadequate for considering issues of democratic public reason. She does not simply object to essentialist notions of culture for the sake of anti-essentialism: rather, she evaluates interpretations of culture from the perspective of how well they respect democratic norms (Peritz 2004, 267, 274). And she also offers a social constructivist perspective in which culture is the effect of continuous contestation and narration. Not only does this understanding contrast with liberal multicultural accounts of culture as a bounded entity, but it also corresponds to how I approach cultural identities as socially produced markers of difference.

JAMES TULLY: CULTURE AS CONTESTED TERRAIN

In *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age of Diversity* (1995, 10, 14, 46, 65, 101), James Tully also reflectively draws upon anthropological conceptions of culture, specifically to examine whether a modern constitution can recognize and accommodate cultural diversity. He offers a theory of cultural diversity that explicitly rejects ideas of empire that justify European imperialism, imperial rule of former colonies over indigenous peoples, and cultural imperialism. Tully (1995, 5) contends that culture is an "irreducible and constitutive aspect of politics," but in order to fully recognize cultural diversity, the modern concept of culture must be reconsidered. According to Tully, this entails dissociating culture from the modern concept of nation because

recognition of a culture need not require the establishment of separate nations or states. Although developments from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century articulate cultures as "separate, bounded and internally uniform" entities, Tully (1995, 10) rejects this "billiard-ball conception of culture, nations and societies."

In order to formulate a concept of culture that is not "separate, closed, internally uniform and relative to a stage of development," Tully (1995, 65, 10-11) argues that "there is no end or exception to this criss-crossing and overlapping," that cultures "overlap geographically and come in a variety of types," and that "cultures are not internally homogeneous." To reflect the idea that the modern age is intercultural, Tully (1995, 11) further states that cultures "are continuously contested, imagined and reimagined, transformed and negotiated both by their members and through interaction with each other. The identity, and so the meaning, of any culture is thus aspectival rather than essential." He emphasizes the dynamic interaction in the formation of cultures, as well as the divergence and parallels between cultures. Overall, Tully (1995, 11, emphasis in original) shows that "cultural diversity is a tangled labyrinth of intertwining cultural differences *and* similarities, not a panopticon of fixed, independent and incommensurable worldviews in which we are either prisoners or cosmopolitan spectators in the central tower." His interpretation of culture therefore importantly moves away from the liberal multicultural notion of a bounded entity in that he treats culture as an identity that is contested and in motion.

At the same time, in *Strange Multiplicity*, Tully tends to depend on a broad cluster of concepts that continue to privilege some ethnic, national, and linguistic modes of difference over other kinds of difference. This is reflected in his concern for nationalist, multicultural, and supranational movements, linguistic and ethnic minorities, and indigenous claims for self-government. The exception is feminism, specifically cultural feminism, which Tully states raises demands within and across national, supranational, minority, and intercultural struggles. Although it is not entirely clear whether Tully intends to locate cultural feminists as members of identifiable cultures or as members who create their own distinct cultural group, and whether women are simply members of a cultural group or in fact also form culture, his conception of culture moves the analysis toward issues of power. In particular, the shift to culture-as-contested-terrain has radical potential for political theory. It is this characterization of culture as an activity – in which culture is relationally given meaning rather than taken as given – that I emphasize in my own thinking

on the politics of meaning-making. As Tully (1995, 15) states, "Culture is a way of relating to others in any interaction, a way of following or challenging a social rule, and so a dimension of any social relation, from a cultural slur in the workplace to the relations among nations."

Difference beyond Culture

In light of the more robust conceptions of culture developed by Benhabib and Tully, can culture still be centred in the analysis of identity/difference politics? This depends on the normative project of a political theory. To the extent that the descriptive and diagnostic value of the culture concept in liberal multiculturalism describes specific groups to whom the state must respond and also provides a liberal defence as to why the state should accommodate particular group-based claims, the work of culture serves the purpose of liberal multiculturalists. Yet, as the above analysis demonstrates, liberal multicultural interpretations of culture are narrow in scope and shallow in depth, such that they obscure many key aspects of identity/difference theorizing. An understanding of the politics of identity/difference is constrained because difference is reduced to specific kinds of cultural Otherness and also because of essentializing and naturalizing tendencies, the unidimensional emphasis on one mode of identification, the construction of culture as the problem of the Other, universalizing assumptions about the intrinsic and instrumental value of culture, and the imperative of the state to regulate cultures that deviate from the norm. Overall, though all concepts are generative and all carry their own tensions, this interpretation of culture and the primacy assigned to it obscures more than it reveals. Liberal multicultural interpretations of culture not only frustrate analytic and political clarity, they also legitimize subtle (and not so subtle) forms of governmentality. To put it simply, liberal multicultural interpretations of culture are not sufficient for examining the complexities of identity/difference politics.

This is not to say that liberal multiculturalism has had no positive influence on political life or political theory. It has, in some instances, opened up avenues of social change and minority participation in politics. But the liberal multicultural lens of culture can provide only limited insight into issues of power that are central to identity/difference politics. Indeed, if we return for a moment to the news stories that opened this chapter, liberal multicultural conceptions of culture cannot adequately describe or explain why these instances of violence occurred. These conceptions would end up constructing the problem of violence against Sikh women as one essentially

about Sikh religion (that is, Sikh culture is sexist), and they would effectively depoliticize the contexts of white supremacy in which the two senior Sikh men were attacked. In effect, this would conceal the broader sources and consequences of political injury. Given this, one might think of culture as a red herring, a distraction from issues of power.

In a manner quite different from that of Kymlicka and Taylor, Benhabib and Tully revise the concept of culture in order to emphasize the agency of subjects. Benhabib argues for an understanding of culture that emerges most successfully within deliberative democratic contexts; and Tully contends that intercultural dialogue is necessary because culture is a site of contestation. Both attempt to expand the boundaries of the centre to include Others previously excluded (a goal not unlike that of Taylor and Kymlicka) but do so by reconceptualizing culture as a mode of identity and practice that is constantly changing, meaningful for different people in different ways, and situated in relations of power. Culture, in short, is not conceptualized as a passive and deracialized identity but as something that is constituted, experienced, and changed in and through power. It is not an object of difference but an inter-subjective and contested site in which differences are constituted and transformed.

Despite these important reconceptions of culture as a dynamic feature of human life, culture continues to be treated as the central site of analysis. Cultural diversity is a problem that needs solving, and a reimagined notion of culture serves as the prescription for the problem. Yet, the primacy assigned to culture, even if it is revised, does not altogether eliminate the slippery slope that produces essentialized depictions of difference. This is because the composition of a culture continues to require definition even when it is narratively (Benhabib) and dialogically (Tully) constituted in non-Eurocentric and self-directed ways. Although the conceptions of culture offered by Benhabib and Tully certainly expand its meaning, these revisions continue to assign primacy to one dimension of difference and to underestimate how discourses of culture sometimes constitute regulatory paradigms and sites of resistance.

The argument that culture is an inadequate starting point of the study of identity/difference is not new. If you recall, neutral liberal scholars such as Chandran Kukathas have voiced this same critique, specifically by claiming that liberalism already entails the capacity and will to address inequities; accordingly, the state need do nothing about cultural claims. Although these are not my grounds for evaluating liberal multiculturalism, my critique does

nonetheless overlap with that of some liberal thinkers – notably liberal pluralists rather than neutral liberals. Feminist theorist Anne Phillips (2007), for example, offers a liberal pluralist theory of multiculturalism but does so by critiquing essentialist views of culture. She suggests that culture is treated too much like a solid entity, as the primary source of identity, and as being far more definitive of each individual's horizon than is likely to be the case. The effect of this understanding is to erase differences between members of a culture and to encourage an unhelpful distinction between modern and traditional culture, between 'us' and 'them.'

More specifically, Phillips (2007, 23) continues, culture is much more ordinary than is commonly assumed; its significance is exaggerated such that "there is a tendency to call on culture when faced with something we cannot otherwise understand." For example, culture comes into view in debates regarding forced arranged marriage among South Asians, when in fact these issues may be more concerned with the difficulty of breaking out of a culture, the need to change particular practices, the consequence of political experiences grounded in violence, and the authoritarian response of parents faced with unfamiliar sexual norms. Accordingly, she concludes, it is necessary to dilute the significance of culture. Phillips' (2007, 21, emphasis in original) point "is not that there are *no* cultural differences, or that the differences are sufficiently minor to be ignored in public policy ... [but] that when culture becomes the catch-all explanation for everything that goes awry in non-Western societies or minority cultural groups, while remaining an invisible force elsewhere, something has gone wrong with the use of the term."

Something indeed has gone wrong with the use of this term. Yet, though I am sympathetic to Phillips' critique of culture, I am not of the mind that diluting the notion of culture will in fact fundamentally resolve the problems underlying a liberal approach to the politics of identity/difference. This is because the problem is not simply that culture has become a catch-all category, but that the operations and effects of power are obscured. Diluting the significance of culture may well make sense in some instances, but this cannot be a general rule in principle, for the weight of culture will vary, culture may well be an expression or symptom of a political problem, and it also might be a site of mobilization and resistance. This cannot be pre-determined for all groups and in all contexts. Nor can it be assumed that culture is the primary way of socially identifying difference, or, conversely, that culture is simply part of a long list of discrete objects of difference, for it is given meaning

through interactions with other modes of difference. As such, it is not possible to simply shelve the relevance of culture; nor can culture be centred at the cost of neglecting other formations of difference.

My argument, therefore, is not simply that the significance of culture should be weighted differently (Phillips) or revised to become more self-directive, fluid, and heterogeneous (Benhabib, Tully), but that it is necessary to analyze difference from a position that does not assume the primacy of culture or, conversely, the dismissal of culture, and that situates specific cultural practices in their relevant relations of power. This requires more critical reflection about why and how culture gives meaning to, and gains meaning from, many sites of difference. As Lisa Wedeen (2002, 720) notes, since culture is a way of looking at the world rather than an object with essential traits, it is important to take into account "how symbols operate in practice, why meanings generate action, and why actions produce meaning, when they do." In particular, it is necessary to contextualize the historical, legal, political, symbolic, and personal significance of culture, to consider how meanings of culture change even when recognized in positive ways, to approach culture as only one dimension of the politics of identity/difference, and to do so with a critical eye on how and why one mode of difference gains specific meaning in relation to other modes of difference. To do this, I turn my attention to the politics of meaning-making.