LIMITING LIBERALISM:
(MULTI)CULTURAL EPISTEMOLOGIES, (MULTI)CULTURAL SUBJECTS

By

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Abstract

The central argument of this text is that the liberal subject is constitutively rather than coincidentally or contingently exclusionary. From this initial premise, I explore the conceptual and practical inadequacies of liberal articulations of multicultural justice, many of which I argue can be traced back to this exclusionary subject. When making this critique, I frame my analysis around the scholarship of Canadian philosopher Will Kymlicka, whose articulation of a distinctly liberal defense of the value of cultural belonging has shaped much of mainstream theoretical debate on multiculturalism both within Canada and elsewhere. Although Kymlicka’s work has faced a multitude of critiques from within and without liberal theory, he is widely recognized as the most prominent liberal defender of multiculturalism, and his work has been particularly influential within related discussions of national unity, multicultural accommodation, and national identity in Canada. I have chosen, then, to focus my critique of liberal multiculturalism on Kymlicka specifically for two reasons. Firstly, due to his prominence within the field and, secondly – and more importantly – because of the instrumental relationship between subject and culture which Kymlicka defends throughout his work.

Despite this critical focus, what is primarily at stake in such a project is a rearticulation rather than a rejection of multiculturalism. While my arguments are based fundamentally on a critical interrogation, and ultimately a rejection, of liberal articulations of multicultural justice, within my project I also offer an alternative model of multiculturalism conceived as a vital form of *epistemic cooperation*. Such an alternative defense of multiculturalism is rooted in a commitment to the value of everyday experience, a more dialectically formed and culturally embedded sense of self, and finally, a critical and substantive awareness of context, both contemporary and historical. In making this positive case for a more radical form of multiculturalism expressed through intercultural dialogue/negotiation and a widening of the
public sphere, I challenge dominant understandings of the value of multiculturalism defended within liberal theory and the mainstream of Canadian Political Science (CPS).
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Chapter One: Introduction

We are collectively caught in an intricate, delicate web in which each action I take, discursive or otherwise, pulls on, breaks off, or maintains the tension in many strands of a web in which others find themselves moving also... Thus, the attempt to avoid the problem of speaking for others by retreating into an individualist realm is based on an illusion, well-supported in the individualist ideology of the West, that a self is not constituted by multiple intersecting discourses but consists in a unified whole capable of autonomy from others.


The central argument of this text is that the liberal subject is constitutively rather than coincidentally or contingently exclusionary. From this initial premise, I explore the conceptual and practical inadequacies of liberal articulations of multicultural justice, many of which I argue can be traced back to this exclusionary subject. What is at stake in such a project is a rearticulation rather than a rejection of multiculturalism. While my arguments are based fundamentally on a critical interrogation, and ultimately a rejection, of liberal articulations of multicultural justice, within my project I also offer an alternative model of multiculturalism conceived as a vital form of epistemic cooperation. Such an alternative defense of multiculturalism ‘from below’\(^1\) is rooted in a commitment to the value of everyday experience, a more dialectically formed and culturally embedded sense of self, and finally a critical and substantive awareness of context, both contemporary and historical. In making this positive case for a more radical form of multiculturalism expressed through intercultural dialogue and a widening of the public sphere, I challenge dominant understandings of the value of multiculturalism defended within liberal theory and the mainstream of Canadian Political Science (CPS).

My critique is thus focused not on a rejection of multiculturalism in all forms, but rather is geared specifically toward highlighting and explaining an array of theoretical inadequacies and

\(^1\) I borrow this phrasing from the work of Himani Bannerji (2000), and seek to echo and extend many of her conclusions in my own work, particularly in defense of this more radical, grassroots conceptualization of multiculturalism generated from ‘below’ rather than imposed from ‘above’ by the state.
practical harms sustained in and through leading liberal conceptualizations of multicultural justice. In particular, I seek to emphasize structural patterns of racialized injustice and exclusion that remain operative in settler contexts such as Canada despite formal commitments to official multiculturalism. Throughout this project, then, I argue that such ongoing forms of racialized structural injustice are often masked (and thus sustained) by these idealized liberal defenses of multiculturalism, which all too often cast liberal standards of value and personhood as universal or neutral rather than culturally particular and ultimately harmful to many exploited and excluded (typically non-white, non-male) bodies.

In making this argument, I frame my analysis around the scholarship of Canadian philosopher Will Kymlicka, whose articulation of a distinctly liberal defense of the value of cultural belonging has shaped much of mainstream theoretical debate on multiculturalism both within Canada and elsewhere. Although Kymlicka’s work has faced a multitude of critiques from within and without liberal theory,² his conceptualization of cultural communities as critical contexts owed to their members as a precondition for autonomous individual choice remains the focal point for much of mainstream scholarly discussion of and support for cultural difference. In this way, I argue Kymlicka’s approach to cultural difference can be legitimately characterized as

² Among those who have engaged critically with Kymlicka’s work, some of the most important and influential critiques from within liberal theory specifically have been made by Joseph Carens (2000), Nancy Fraser (1997, 2001), Susan Okin (1999), Brian Barry (2002), Seyla Benhabib (2002), Chandran Kukathas (2003), Bhikhu Parekh (1997, 2006, 2008), and Anne Phillips (2007). While Kymlicka’s position has thus been subject to critique from within liberal theory, and some, like Barry (2002) have gone so far as to question whether his theory of multiculturalism is liberal at all, I find accept Kymlicka’s self-assessment on this point, and am not sympathetic to critiques such as Barry’s. Indeed, I find Kymlicka’s position to adequately capture the central liberal values of autonomous individualism alongside a version of state neutrality, and it is on these terms that I suggest his theory must be interrogated and rejected. Because of my understanding of Kymlicka as, in a sense, an exemplary liberal, I will at times refer to either the ‘liberal subject’ or ‘Kymlicka’s subject’ interchangeably. While tension remains between his account of the subject and attempts to define a single liberal subject agreeable to all who consider themselves liberal, Kymlicka’s position offers a consistent and compelling articulation of the liberal subject, drawing from the work of both classical liberals such as Kant and Mills, as well as contemporary thinkers such as Dworkin and Rawls.
hegemonic within both liberal theory and more specifically, within the ‘Canadian School’s’\textsuperscript{3} ongoing conversation on matters of (multi)cultural difference and national unity. Part of my task within the second chapter of this text will be to demonstrate that Kymlicka’s work can and ought to be analyzed as hegemonic and representative of a strong and consistent liberal articulation of multicultural justice.\textsuperscript{4}

More generally, I will argue that the conceptual inadequacies and ideological abstractions embedded in Kymlicka’s work function to cover over pressing matters of structural oppression and exploitation along racialized and gendered lines. While not limited to Kymlicka’s version of multiculturalism, these shortcomings are prominent in his work. As I will argue throughout this text, what is elided in Kymlicka’s theory is endemic to the contemporary practice of liberal theory and, more narrowly, helps shape ongoing obfuscations of racial inequality within the Canadian

\textsuperscript{3} I follow Gerald Kernerman (2005) in my use of the label ‘Canadian School,’ and at other points ‘Canadian conversation,’ throughout this text. In addition to Kymlicka, other prominent representatives of this ‘Canadian School’ – that is, English-Canadian political theorists and scientists writing about connected matters of multiculturalism, national identity and unity, as well as Aboriginal self-governance and citizenship – as identified by Kernerman include Alain Cairns (1995, 2001), Charles Taylor (1991, 1992, 1993) and James Tully (1995). While these scholars – and others – have made important contributions to debates on multiculturalism in Canada and elsewhere, it is the specific relationship between subject and culture that is of primary interest to me, and my choice to limit my analysis to Kymlicka’s liberal defense of cultural belonging is thus largely the result of what I find uniquely problematic about the instrumental relationship between subject and culture Kymlicka describes. Moreover, in \textit{Multicultural Nationalism}, Kernerman has already offered an excellent critique of the discursive practice of the ‘Canadian School’ as a whole, and rather than repeat his observations, my own work seeks to build off of them and to further many of his arguments relating to the ill effects resulting from the often highly philosophical and idealized nature of this conversation. Similarly, Rita Dhamoon (2009) has recently put forward a broad critical overview of the work of Kymlicka, Tully, and Taylor in particular, and while my focus is intentionally narrower than theirs, targeting Kymlicka’s liberalism in particular, I draw from both Dhamoon and Kernerman throughout this project. For another recent work assessing and critiquing the discursive operation of the ‘Canadian School’ on multiculturalism and national identity, see Winter (2011b), especially chapter three.

\textsuperscript{4} I am far from alone in making this claim. For example, in a recent anthology on the development of political thought in Canada, Kymlicka is referred to as “the theorist who has best defined and examined the nature of multicultural citizenship within liberal democracies” (Fierbeck 2005, 295). In their work, fellow liberals Kukathas (2003), Carens (2004), and Jacob Levy (2007) have all referred to Kymlicka as the leading and most influential theorist of liberal multiculturalism, and he is typically recognized as such both inside and outside of Canada, although my analysis is situated within and in large part limited to the Canadian context.
conversation on multiculturalism. Here I echo the conclusions drawn by feminist post-colonial scholars analyzing the discursive dangers embedded in the Canadian practice of multiculturalism, which arguably produces a narrative of tolerance and equality that covers over enduring structures of racialized oppression and, in so doing, denies the need for structural reforms to replace formal commitments to cultural recognition.

While in broad agreement with many of the conclusions drawn by such post-colonial thinkers relating to the ill-effects of liberal multiculturalism in Canada, I locate my own primary criticisms within the liberal character of this multiculturalism, and am interested in salvaging an enabling and relational conception of culture as a legitimate source of political, experiential knowledge, contrasted from the instrumental and indeed ‘fetishistic’ usage of culture in liberal theories like Kymlicka’s. In this way, I somewhat part company from post-colonial critics of culture, although, again, I share many of their objections to the manner in which culture is operationalized in liberal articulations of multiculturalism.

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5 Within the Canadian context, in which I will seek to ground my critique, this growing body of post-colonial scholarship has been articulated through the work of Himani Bannerji (2000, 1995), Eva Mackey (2002), Sunera Thobani (2007), Sherene Razack (2008), Rita Dhamoon (2006, 2009), and others. In this view, multiculturalism functions to mask enduring realities of racial and gendered subordination, problematically covering over the economic, political and social inequalities that are still largely determined by gender and race. Such masking is discursively performed through the liberal positioning of all individuals as equal moral beings regardless of material inequalities, while at the same time privatizing cultural belonging and attaching a culturally determined essence to non-white persons. Here the construction of the ‘cultural’ as a minority quality, rather than universal aspect of the human condition, is also key.

6 The choice to situate my project within the Canadian context was made for both pragmatic and principled reasons. Pragmatically, the Canadian context of official multiculturalism and the Canadian literature on multicultural theory are simply the ones I am most familiar with. On a principled level, my method’s rejection of abstraction and ahistorical theorizing entails a commitment to working and writing from one’s own location, both geographically and socially, to develop contextually sensitive recommendations and critiques. Moreover, it is important to write critically about and from within the Canadian context and the Canadian ‘conversation’ on multiculturalism in large part because Canada is so often held up as a leading example of multicultural justice and its success within broader international debates. In critiquing these triumphalist and nationalist narratives of multicultural tolerance and success within the Canadian conversation and beyond, I seek to interject critically within a debate which often relies on idealized and reified characterizations of national structures and institutions in order to resist and deconstruct them, rather than continue to reinforce their dominance.
In an effort to demonstrate that it is Kymlicka’s liberalism, more fundamentally than his subsequent articulations of multiculturalism, that largely limits the force of his theory to an abstract philosophical discussion of cultural matters seemingly divorced from exploitative and unequal relations of power and privilege, I often pair my analysis with that of critical race theorist Charles Mills (1997, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c). Addressing the cognitive and structural biases within the academy and the ideals of justice which are developed in the abstract and then unevenly applied to unjust contexts, Mills names white supremacy as a political system of exploitation and domination that is constitutive of, rather than anomalous to, the liberal order7 and I echo this understanding of racism as a structural form of ongoing exploitation endemic to the liberal order throughout my work.

Ultimately, by premising my critique of liberal multiculturalism on a rejection of what I maintain is the inherently exclusionary liberal subject motivating Kymlicka’s multiculturalism, my primary quarrel is not with Kymlicka’s multiculturalism, but his liberalism. Indeed, following the insights of critical realist scholars like Satya Mohanty (1997, 2003) and Paula Moya (2000, 2002, 2006), I argue in favor of a radical multiculturalism ‘from below,’ rooted in support for the epistemological value cultural diversity8 holds, while rejecting the imposition of particular and exclusionary liberal standards onto such cultural diversity and membership.

7 When seeking to demonstrate that liberalism and white supremacy relate to each other constitutively rather than simply anomalously, I will focus mainly on Mills’s work in outlining whiteness as a system of domination in the Racial Contract (1997) and in Contract and Domination, co-written with Carole Pateman (2007a). In particular, I will consider how Mills links whiteness as such a constructed system of unequal political and economic power relations to the ideological abstractions covering over this system in the practice of idealized liberal theory. Similar articulations of whiteness as a system of political and economic domination have been made by Goldberg (1993), Razack (1998), Agnew (2007), and Thobani (2010).

8 Choice of terminology is always important to a theorist, particularly when writing about constructed social categories such as ‘race.’ Within the literature engaging critically with liberal multiculturalism, important criticisms of the term ‘diversity’ have been made – suggesting it operates as ideological tool designed to cover over economic and political imbalances in power under the guise of ‘colorful’ and power-neutral ‘diversity.’ For this reason, it sometimes suggested the label ‘difference’ should be favored instead. Despite taking this criticism seriously, I will use the terms ‘diversity’ and ‘difference’ interchangeably in this text, while attempting to
In the chapters that follow, I aim to demonstrate that the failure of liberal multiculturalism to account for such diversity or to provide a substantial critique of or remedy to systems of racial and gendered domination within discussions of ‘cultural’ diversity has its theoretical origins in this exclusionary subject. While the main substance of my argument will not begin to take shape until the second chapter, I offer this introduction as a roadmap tracing the steps I take throughout this piece to formulate an alternative defense of multiculturalism informed by post-colonial, critical realist, and critical race theorists; a defense which is grounded fundamentally in a rejection of the liberal subject as inherently exploitative and exclusionary.

In the second chapter, then, I set up this critique of the liberal subject and connect it within my project to an ongoing interrogation of the hegemonic defense of liberal multiculturalism articulated by Kymlicka. Here I also briefly introduce my ‘critical synthetic’ (C.S) model as both a critique of and alternative to Kymlicka’s liberal multiculturalism. This method synthesizes post-colonial and critical realist scholarship, as well as drawing heavily from the critique of ideal theory, ideologically motivated abstraction and racialized, privileged ignorance made by Mills.

In the third chapter, I apply this critique begun by Mills to two conflicting narratives depicting the nature of and motivations behind Canadian nation-building processes, particularly evaluating the adoption of official multiculturalism as a central component of contemporary Canadian national identity. Using Mills’s theory of willful, racialized ignorance as my critical foundation, I compare and contrast Kymlicka’s (2007a) narrative depicting the Canadian nation-building project as one premised on steady liberal progress ultimately leading to the adoption of

be critically aware of the potential for such ideological occlusions in my own writing. For some notable examples of this critique, see Bannerji (2000), Chandra-Talpade Mohanty (2003), Thompson (2008), Thobani (2007), and Dhamoon (2009)

9 Although Kymlicka is not an ideal theorist in the sense of bracketing problems of non-compliance in his work, I find his theory is guilty of the type of ideologically motivated abstractions that Mills’ critique of ideal theory centrally problematizes. In this sense, rather than an ideal theorist, Kymlicka is best thought of as making idealized abstractions from Canada’s colonial history and other structural practices of racialized injustice.
official multiculturalism with that of post-colonial rejections of multiculturalism as an essentializing project ‘from above’ designed by the Canadian state to contain and depoliticize racialized difference and resulting injustice as mere cultural diversity requiring only symbolic recognition. Contrasted with Kymlicka’s account, which suggests primarily that multiculturalism arises out of the liberal heritage of the civil rights movement and processes of de-colonization on the global scale, this post-colonial critique articulated by Sunera Thobani (2007) and Himani Bannerji (2000) suggests that the adoption of official multiculturalism was motivated by a ‘crisis of whiteness’ and served to cover over rather than interrogate and transform racialized hierarchies of personhood and citizenship within the ‘Canadian’ nation, access to which is arguably both symbolically and materially exclusionary to many non-white subjects. After arguing in favor of the critiques of official multiculturalism made by Thobani and Bannerji, the gaps between the narratives told by these post-colonial thinkers and by Kymlicka are explained in part through reference to Mills’s theory of racialized ignorance. Specially, Mills’ work helps to demonstrate the ways in which racialized ignorance may be perpetuated by particular abstractions which imply that there now exists a ground zero of equality that covers over and insulates the privileged from recognizing and/or interrogating instances of historical and ongoing structural injustice.

While drawing again from post-colonial criticisms of liberal multiculturalism made by thinkers like Bannerji and Thobani, along with Rita Dhamoon (2006, 20009), in the fourth chapter I go beyond these criticisms and attempt to redirect them towards liberal articulations of culture in particular, rather than the concept of culture generally. In so doing, I argue that it is not the focus on culture itself – but rather Kymlicka’s liberal, instrumental conceptualization of culture and its uses for individual subjects which is most crucial to critique and ultimately reject within debates on multiculturalism and racialized injustice in Canada. Here, I argue that it is not

10 Here I again borrow my choice of terminology from Bannerji in her description of official multiculturalism as a form of state, top-down management and containment of racialized and cultural difference (2000).
an overly bounded or essentialist vision of culture which limits the value of Kymlicka’s theory of multicultural justice, as many post-colonial and post-multicultural\textsuperscript{11} critics suggest. Instead, I suggest that the fault or weakness within Kymlicka’s theory lies more fundamentally with the instrumental use of culture that his defense of multiculturalism problematically relies upon.

In Kymlicka, cultural communities are characterized as contexts for choice, and cultural diversity is justified in order to make available a meaningful range of options to be taken up, revised, or rejected by the supposedly autonomous individuals. This characterization, along with other liberal constraints on the nature and value of cultural identity, potentially inverts the value and meanings of cultural practices for their members by overemphasizing culture’s autonomy building role.\textsuperscript{12} Kymlicka’s formulation becomes all the more problematic when the ‘autonomous individual’ meant to be instrumentally benefited by the maintenance of a variety of cultural contexts is demonstrated to be culturally particular, exploitative, and exclusionary in ways that ultimately privilege the racialized hierarchies of the status quo in Canada. Within this chapter, then, comes an argument concerning the culturally particular nature of liberalism itself, and the use of the liberal subject as a supposedly impartial or neutral measure of acceptable and unacceptable cultural practices within multicultural contexts is interrogated in this light.

Beginning in the fifth chapter, I develop my own alternative defense of multiculturalism as a radical form of epistemic cooperation aimed particularly at the interrogation of oppression, and facilitated through the sharing of knowledge derived from culturally and racially marginalized subjects’ lived experience. This account of multiculturalism as a form of epistemic

\textsuperscript{11} I borrow this term from Kymlicka (2012) himself, who uses it to refer to theorists who are concerned with the presumed ill effects of multiculturalism in practice, particularly relating to its potential to essentialize cultural identity to the harm of minorities within minorities, particularly women. Prominent among such critics are Nancy Fraser (1997), Anne Phillips (2007), and Seyla Benhabib (2002). The term is also used in reference to the ‘retreat’ from multicultural policies (in theory or practice) based on fears that such policies threaten social cohesion and reduce commitment to redistributive practices (and immigration itself) within liberal democracies.

\textsuperscript{12} For a full articulation of this critique of the overemphasis on the autonomy-building role of culture within Kymlicka’s work, see Bhikhu Parekh (1997, 2000).
cooperation is inspired and largely informed by the work of Sataya Mohanty and other ‘post-positivist’ critical realists. In the fifth chapter, I argue in favor of the epistemic value of subjective experience, not understood simply as raw data or unmediated truth, but as theory-laden and already culturally and socially embedded, yet still carrying broader political and potentially objective merit. To help set up this argument, I further my critique of Kymlicka’s liberal culturalist position by suggesting that his theory problematically relies on a false division between internal/external selves and world that artificially separates individuals from their social and cultural contexts, and ascribes a false unity of internal selves and an artificial distance and separation from the ‘external’ that cannot and should not be sustained.

In the sixth chapter, I expand my critique of Kymlicka’s liberal culturalist position by challenging both the theoretical consistency and normative efficacy of his use of ‘polyethnic’ and ‘minority nations’ as the primary and indeed exclusive categories of cultural difference which are relevant within a theory of liberal multiculturalism. Drawing from the work of Iris Marion Young (1997) and Bhikhu Parekh (1997, 2000), I suggest these categories are illegitimately hierarchical and insufficiently sensitive to global connectivities between the First World/North and the Third World/South,13 as well as to complexities in the history and identity of ‘minority’ subjects. Following from this critique, I favor instead a continuum model of the kind recommended by Young in her own reply to Kymlicka’s seminal work on group differentiated rights, Multicultural Citizenship. This chapter, and my critique of Kymlicka’s cultural categories and his privileging of minority nations above ‘voluntary’ immigrants or polyethnic groups in particular, is also informed by Parekh’s interrogation of the liberal biases within Kymlicka’s work. A continuum model, I argue, ultimately offers a more flexible and responsive approach to dealing with cultural identity and difference – which often is too heterogeneous, complex, and overlapping to fit within one of Kymlicka’s two monolithic categories – than that of Kymlicka’s. Such an approach,

13 I borrow this terminology from Chandra-Talpade Mohanty (2003). More will be said about this choice of terminology in the sixth chapter.
moreover, allows for claims to cultural accommodation and collective rights – conceptualized as matters of justice within an anti-racist, anti-colonial project – to be considered in a more situated, nuanced, and case-by-case fashion that Kymlicka’s dichotomous and limited approach allows.

In the seventh chapter, I offer three procedural criteria, which may be used to help guide such an alternative, continuum approach to multiculturalism as a form of epistemic cooperation and dialogue. These are, first, a fundamental and motivating emphasis on the potential *epistemic contribution* – whether it be illuminating an occluded injustice or simply offering a unique and culturally informed perspective on some contested aspect of the good life – offered by the expression of at times radically diverse cultural speakers; second, critical awareness of the need to reflect on and help evaluate such perspectives in light of the *social location* of speakers; and third, attending closely to *histories* of colonialism, white supremacy, and other patterns of racialized injustice and cultural imperialism as they continue to operate on a de facto basis in settler contexts like Canada. Within this argument comes an interrogation of what constitutes public versus private identities and perspectives within liberalism, contrasted with my own dialogical model of multiculturalism as a form of vital epistemic cooperation. The seventh chapter also furthers my critique of the limitations of the liberal subject through a defense of an alternative conception of persons, understood as culturally embedded, yet with identities dialectically formed through interaction between a subject’s structural positionings and their own critical, reflexive positionality in relation to these external structural positionings.

Finally, in the eighth chapter, I offer a critique of liberal impartiality (expressed through both the ideal of state neutrality and of the ideal subject as an impartial reasoner) using the work of Young and insights from my own C.S model. From this critical discussion, I sketch a preliminary defense of testimony – that is, the telling of personal stories from experience as an invaluable means of facilitating epistemic cooperation across difference – as an alternative to the liberal goal of detached impartiality when engaging in intercultural dialogue in the public realm. This chapter constitutes a final challenge to the efficacy of the liberal public/private split both
generally and with multicultural polities in particular. Connected to this discussion, I conclude the project with a preliminary gesture towards cities as potentially productive sites for such intercultural dialogue to take place, pointing to directions for future research in this area and serving as a call to redirect conversations within CPS, as well as within political science more generally, away from a central focus on the nation as a fundamental source of identity and belonging towards investigating and empowering the local.

Ultimately, this project seeks to draw from and critically synthesize insights made by post-colonial, critical realist, and critical race scholars on connected subjects of racial oppression, cultural identity, and the positive epistemic value of every day, lived experience in order to challenge and at times reject liberal defenses of and limitations on multiculturalism. Moving beyond merely symbolic and instrumental expressions of cultural difference typical to the liberal practice of multiculturalism, and reflected in Kymlicka’s model in particular, I call for the (re)articulation of multiculturalism, particularly within settler states like Canada, as a radical, politically motivated and epistemologically necessary form of exchange of knowledges spoken from a variety of lived experiences informed by the cultural membership of heterogeneous subjects embedded in relations of structural privilege and oppression. By beginning with an interrogation of the liberal subject as culturally particular and inherently exclusionary, this project necessarily involves a call to widen the public sphere and to reconsider what is deemed legitimately public and political in order to make room for such cross cultural dialogue and epistemic cooperation. Such an interrogation and widening of what rightfully falls within the realm of the public and political helps to open up the possibility for radical critiques of liberalism itself14 within intercultural dialogue, and facilitates the possibility for substantive exchanges of

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14 Through arguments developed particularly within the second and fourth chapters, liberalism is itself marked as culturally particular – rather than as a universal yardstick against which all groups and practices can be judged – in my account.
knowledge to occur across many intersecting aspects of identity and difference – cultural or otherwise.
Chapter Two: the exclusionary nature of the liberal subject

A peculiar kind of freedom is invoked when it can be exemplified in subjection for life.

Carole Pateman (1988, p.73)

As stated in the introduction, the central argument of this text is that the liberal subject is constitutively rather than coincidentally or contingently exclusionary. This subject is marked not only as culturally particular, then, but as harmful, as well. By my lights, when attempting to develop a just theory of multicultural accommodation and inclusion, Kymlicka’s liberalism provides poor vehicle for addressing the structural oppression and exploitation facing ‘cultural’ minorities, largely because it retains a foundational commitment to an exclusive and exploitative subject, access to which is limited in particular racialized and gendered ways.

What I therefore aim to demonstrate throughout this project is that liberal multiculturalism provides a faulty set of ideals, both of the subject and of cultural belonging, that are ill-equipped to deal respectfully with the range of significance cultural belonging provides for its members, as well as being largely unable to address ongoing relations of oppression and exploitation within culturally and racially diverse societies. The failure of these ideals to map onto and provide remedies for crucial social realities of privilege and oppression can be best explained, I argue, through a critical examination of the deficient liberal understanding of the self, operating within and supporting structures of white supremacy. While these racialized hierarchies are not wholly unique to the philosophy of liberalism, I aim to suggest that the liberal subject has proven to be a particularly effective vehicle for such obfuscation and the maintenance of unequal power relations. This capacity is due to the implicit but essential ontological hierarchy embedded within the liberal subject. As other feminist and critical race scholars have argued,\(^1\) the

ideal of universal equality promised by liberal theories of the self is an embodied reality to which only white heterosexual able-bodied, middle-class males have been granted full access, and through this access, such subjects gain full inclusion into the human community.

Within Kymlicka’s liberal culturalist position, I suggest, this subject – and the defense of culture stemming from it – can be shown to be necessarily rather than only temporarily or contingently exclusionary in three closely interrelated ways:

1) First, I argue the highly individualized liberal subject functions to privatize cultural experience as nonpolitical and in so doing, often silences ‘minority’ (typically non-white) knowledges in a manner that serves to maintain inequalities embedded in the status quo. Here, matters of structural oppression and exclusion are often cast as matters of personal responsibility, as when a subject marked as (multi)cultural sees their exclusion from the public realm of politics and job opportunity explained away as simply the fault of their ‘difference,’ or their choice to retain their distinct cultural identity, rather than become integrated.

2) Second, as other feminist scholars have observed, I contend that this subject’s autonomous independence is premised on the exclusion of encumbered others from the public sphere and the exploitation of these others within the private sphere. In this way, liberalism offers a universal equality and freedom to all while denying the reality of this freedom to many gendered and racialized bodies. Whether intentional or not, the exclusionary nature of this liberal freedom is, I argue, masked in particular ways within Kymlicka’s defense of cultural communities as contexts for autonomous choice. This masking obscures exclusionary hierarchies that work to implicitly reinforce themselves through a regulation of who is deemed sufficiently rational (and thus capable of autonomy) in order to take culture up in this highly instrumental manner, versus those who will be considered unable to make independent moral evaluations without external

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2 While discussions of ‘cultural’ difference are perhaps most often used as a sanitized or coded referent to racialized hierarchies, intersecting hierarchies of gender, ability, age and sexuality also come into play. As a means of shorthand, I will at times refer only to the exclusionary liberal subject or the exclusionary ontological hierarchies this subject relies on, but in so doing, I do not mean to refer to any one set of difference based exclusion in isolation, but the confluence of these various forms of naturalized difference within liberal theory. When explicitly naming forces of racialization, racism, or the ontological hierarchies embedded in categories of ‘race,’ I do not mean to preclude the importance of other sources of identity, but do so in an effort to resist the urge to slip into the imagined neutrality and innocence of race-blind language. The centrality of these categories is, further, meant to underscore my commitment to the need to name and interrogate white supremacy as a fundamental and political aspect of the basic structure of liberal democracies such as Canada.
intervention or ‘rescue’. Such concealed hierarchies also help to determine which groups are
given moral and epistemological authority to evaluate and manage cultural communities from the
outside on the basis of whether or not these communities adequately meet liberal standards of
merit.

3) Finally, I argue that Kymlicka’s construction of cultural belonging as a primary good which
should not be subject to unchosen dis/advantage masks the constructed nature of cultural
categories, particularly failing to attend critically to the external role played by a colonial state
such as Canada’s in shaping how culture is perceived, valued and managed. I also contend that
conceiving of culture as one such primary good plays on a fetishistic understanding of culture.

Under this schema, culture is understood instrumentally as a tool to be used or abandoned, rather
than as a process, a series of overlapping and dichotomous loyalties, beliefs, and practices, the
engagement with and contestation of which is practiced under a set of highly unequal power
relations. In all three of these areas, cultural difference is naturalized and privatized, and through
this process, matters of racialized exclusion and exploitation are glossed over or excused as the
product of these ‘natural’ differences or, as is often implicitly the case, inferiorities.

Within Kymlicka’s theory of multiculturalism, I argue the privileged position of this
exclusionary liberal subject is supported by ideological abstractions endemic to the current
practice of liberal theories of justice, abstractions which produce ideals ill-fitted to address the
unequal power relations of the status quo. In this way, despite explicitly framing multicultural

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3 Narratives of rescue are particularly prominent in discussions of the status of women within
cultural minorities. For examples of this critique, see Chandra-Talpade Mohanty (2003), Razack,
(1998, 2008), and Thobani (2007, 2010). In such discussions, a false dichotomy is implicitly and
at times explicitly constructed between the Western majority’s assumed greater concern for
gender equality and the inherently dangerous and oppressive cultural norms of the non-Western,
non-white cultural ‘minority.’ Women within these communities are then cast in the role of
victims of their cultures, in need of Western rescue and benevolence.

4 In making this criticism of Kymlicka, I owe a debt to Iris Marion Young’s (1990) similar
critique of the fetishistic nature of the ‘distributive paradigm’ of justice and its conceptualization
of rights more broadly.

5 To supplement this analysis, I will later engage with a sympathetic reconstruction of Charles
Mills’s (1997, 2007a, 2007c) work on ‘white ignorance’ and his critique of ideal theory stemming
form it. Put briefly, Mills suggests ideal theory is structured in ways that purposively abstract
from historical oppression and contemporary manifestations of racial privilege. Rather than
being accidental or innocent, Mills argues ideal theory functions ideologically to obscure realities
of domination and subordination that exist in society by beginning from an imaginary ‘ground
zero’ of equality. This hypothetical and ideal starting point, within mainstream social contract
rights as a matter of consistency within a fully articulated conception of liberal justice, Kymlicka’s liberal culturalist position remains largely divorced from the very realities of injustice it is meant to address. This inability is, in large part, a result of Kymlicka’s theoretical commitment to liberalism, that is, a commitment to abstract ideals of formal equality and autonomy that precludes a substantive recognition of exclusionary hierarchies of power and privilege as central to the basic structure of liberal democracies such as Canada. More problematically still, the abstractions embedded in Kymlicka’s idealized theorizing on matters of cultural difference which fail to recognize and ultimately mask such hierarchies are arguably further buttressed and sustained by the exclusionary subject operating at the core of such ‘comprehensive’ liberalism as Kymlicka’s,⁶

For the reminder of this chapter I will begin to explore the manner in which this exclusionary liberal subject is operationalized within Kymlicka’s theory, taking particular care to examine the instrumental relationship between this subject and its cultural context. I explore this instrumental relationship and the subsequent false universalization of the autonomous liberal self (who may adopt or reject cultural values as one tool among many with which to direct and give content to its life plan) as a means of demonstrating the incommensurable gap between this subject and attempts to extend the freedom and equality it experiences to all persons. Indeed, as a disembodied, rationally self-interested and independent individual, the liberal subject position is highly particular and exclusionary subject. In this way, the liberal conception of the self applies to and provides remedies for white male bodies only. In this discussion, I link my general critique of the exclusionary liberal subject to its particular operationalization in Kymlicka’s theory, and attempt to justify this decision with reference to Kymlicka’s own self-identification as theory in particular, is arguably not equipped to provide effective and substantive solutions to problems of inequality and injustice.

⁶ In Kymlicka’s case, his liberalism is ‘comprehensive’ in the sense that it casts autonomy as an ultimate and universal value, as opposed to the more limited ‘political’ liberalism of Rawls’s (1993) later work, for example. For more details on how Kymlicka defines himself in relation to these differing conceptualizationos of liberalism, see Kymlicka (1992, 1995a, and 2007c).
a “foot-soldier” of liberal articulations of multiculturalism in the global context, along with my understanding of Kymlicka as a hegemonic representative of the liberal consensus concerning how and why culture matters to individuals and states (2007b, 7).

In this effort, I situate my analysis first as an abstract critique of liberal multiculturalism as Kymlicka defines it; and, second, as a contextualized assessment of the failures of this idealized theorizing about cultural difference to produce remedies for ongoing structural relations of racialized oppression and exclusion within Canada. Here, again, I follow the conclusions drawn by post-colonial thinkers who have argued that multicultural discourse produces an illusory narrative of tolerance and even the celebration of diversity that covers over racialized exploitation and exclusion by and from the ‘core’ (white settler) Canadian citizenry, and therefore fails to unsettle the racialized hierarchies of the status quo.7

Before concluding, I also briefly articulate my own critical synthetic (C.S) approach as an alternative to liberal multiculturalism, whereby I aim to provide a synthesis of critical race scholarship and post-colonial theory concerning the ill effects of multiculturalism in practice, combined with a critical realist alternative to liberal accounts of cultural belonging. The critical realist, post-colonial and critical race approaches I hope to synthesize are united through their common stance on the importance of lending epistemological legitimacy to previously subjugated (and often racialized) knowledges in order to combat the cognitive biases that help maintain the privileged status of the white male as the neutral or impartial subject and citizen.

7 When assessing Kymlicka’s theory of cultural rights, Richard Day (2000) in particular has highlighted the similarity between Kymlicka’s idealized prescriptions of multicultural justice and the status quo, that is, the Canadian state’s ‘management’ of the ‘problem’ of diversity dating back to 1864, thereby denying any revolutionary shift in the move out of overt colonial rule into the entrenchment of cultural rights given to ‘minorities’ following the formalization of multiculturalism in 1971.
In this vein, my synthesis is premised on three related objections: first, to the instrumental view liberalism takes to cultural belonging; second, to the liberal division of subjects into public and private selves and the subsequent privatization of cultural beliefs; and third, to the imagined distinction between rational individuals who are thought to select or reject values by abstracting from their cultural backgrounds and those ‘minorities’ who are thought to be determined by them. It is to these objections that I now turn.

The liberal subject as inherently exclusionary

As suggested in the introduction, I primarily contend that the ideals of liberal selfhood are necessarily rather than coincidentally exclusionary, and I therefore argue that full selfhood cannot simply be mapped onto previously excluded groups (namely non-white and non-male) without first challenging this liberal conception of the self. This premise leads to three related objections to the account of cultural diversity Kymlicka offers to supplement the conditions of justice and fairness owed to this subject. Briefly restated, these objections are, first, to the instrumental view Kymlicka’s liberalism takes to cultural belonging; second, to the liberal division of subjects into public and private selves and the subsequent privatization of cultural beliefs; and third, to the imagined distinction between rational individuals who are thought to select or reject values by abstracting from their cultural backgrounds and those ‘minorities’ who are thought to be determined by them. Furthermore, I argue that full autonomous agency – defined through independence and self-creation – is both a particular (rather than universal) and a potentially harmful and alienating goal.

In particular, I follow Wendy Brown’s (1995, 2006) argument that the liberal subject is inherently masculine and exclusionary, while aiming to extend the gendered nature of the exclusion she highlights to include explicit attention to the racialized hierarchies embedded.

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8 In making this criticism of the instrumental role played by culture in Kymlicka’s theory, I have been influenced by critiques of the ‘detached’ the liberal subject found in the work of Charles Taylor (1979, 1985, 1991), Michael Sandel (1998), Margaret Moore (1993) and others.
within this subject as well. For Brown, the liberal subject is perceived to be independent in three core ways – economically independent, capable of independent movement in all social spaces, and independently motivated – that are detached from social and familial responsibility and directed by self-interest (1995, 158). This subject, Brown importantly highlights, can only exist in this role of independence if others do not – and Brown argues this unfreedom is typically displaced onto women in the liberal order.

What greater attention to the racialized exclusions embedded within the liberal order helps to demonstrate is that in order for some women to be granted access to this unencumbered, autonomous liberal subject position, their own unfreedom must be displaced onto others. Because much of women’s encumbrance relies on the division of labor (here Brown is concerned with highlighting the exploitation of unpaid domestic labor to serve the independence of the masculinist liberal subject) and does not require all biological women to occupy the position assigned to their gender as a whole, the freedom of some women can be ‘purchased’ through the substitution of subordinates (1995, 153). In her work, Brown cites a convergence of gender and class exploitation to explain how middle-class women may gain their freedom through the displacement of their unfreedom onto domestic workers. Complicating this analysis are the arguments of post-colonial scholars, who have begun to argue that the racialized dimension of this displacement must be more fully recognized and interrogated, typically seeing the purchase of this freedom for white women to be made at the cost of non-white women’s continuing unfreedom (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002, Thobani 2007). Rather than demonstrating the fluid nature of the liberal subject by providing alternative modes of access to autonomy for non-males, the displacement of gendered encumbrance onto a class-based or racialized one helps to highlight the constitutive element of the liberal subject’s exploitations of some unencumbered Other. This is an Other who, as Brown points out, must have their difference – be it gendered or racialized difference – naturalized so that this difference and any resulting unequal access to the public sphere and to economic and political equality stemming from it are seen as outside the scope of
liberal justice. As Brown writes, “liberal equality’s conceptual opposite is not inequality but
difference: while inequality is the problem to which equality as sameness is the solution,
difference is the problem to which equality as sameness doesn’t apply” (1995, 153).

Liberal equality – now understood as equal access to this exploitative freedom – is not
universally realizable. Difference thus becomes a means of bracketing whole segments of the
population (typically gendered and racialized groups) from access to this freedom. While
ostensibly open to all, the freedom to move through public space and to autonomously select and
pursue one’s life plan requires for its realization the continuing unfreedom of others and their
exclusion from the public sphere. Subsequently, these Others become objects of debate rather
than subjects or participants within debate and dialogue, ensuring that such Others will continue
to be excluded from contributing actively in public contestation of fundamental political matters.
Often deemed insufficiently rational or overly determined by their ‘difference,’ these excluded
groups see their inequality naturalized. Their concerns, experiences, and knowledges become
conceptualized as too rooted in the particular (and therefore private) roles they occupy to be of
objective worth to public deliberation.

Thus, what cannot be accommodated by liberalism’s commitment to formal equality, is,
in effect, privatized and naturalized as outside the scope of liberal justice, and this operates in
particular ways within the discussion of liberal multicultural justice. Indeed, even in a theory
such as Kymlicka’s, which begins with the rejection of equality as sameness so long embedded
within liberal theory, there remains a core commitment to an illusory universal autonomous
subject, which contains a false promise of full inclusion to all persons that can never be
practically achieved for all without losing the exploitative ground on which this autonomy is
premised.9 Turning to a closer examination of the relationship between the liberal subject and its

9 In making this critique of the false universality of liberal autonomy, I again echo Brown, who
writes “[t]o the extent that the attributes of liberal personhood and liberal justice are established
by excluding certain beings and certain domains of activity from their purview, liberalism cannot
cultural community in Kymlicka will help demonstrate the necessary biases and exclusions embedded within this relationship more clearly.

In order to reconcile his liberal commitment to individualism with his defense of multiculturalism, Kymlicka’s task throughout his work has been to demonstrate that his model can support collective or cultural rights while still effectively ensuring the background conditions against which persons may autonomously pursue their individual good. Kymlicka does this, in part, by arguing that those who define skepticism about the good as a fundamental liberal value are incorrect. Indeed, according to Kymlicka, one of the most essential reasons we desire liberty is that “we hope to learn about the good,” and his defense of multiculturalism rests on the claim that cultural contexts provide the necessary tools for individuals to meaningfully satisfy this hope (1989a, 18). Importantly, within these cultural contexts, social authority is not meant to determine what constitutes the ‘good’ in a liberal conception, but rather, the free and individual pursuit of the good must be recognized by society as a necessary project for autonomous individuals. By prioritizing this individual pursuit of the good life, Kymlicka attempts to situate his theory of multiculturalism within “the political morality of modern liberals from J.S. Mills to Rawls and Dworkin” (1989a, 10).

Despite the importance of cultural frameworks for the development of autonomous choice, the liberal good thus remains highly individual within Kymlicka’s work, and while pursued within a cultural framework, individuals must ultimately retain independent authority over themselves and their own search for a life of value. In order to have confidence in this search and to be autonomous, individuals must be able to reject any culturally endorsed values as they see fit. Kymlicka fundamentally maintains that “no life goes better being lived from the outside” and thus retains the individual as the final authority in their own pursuit of the good life (1989a, 12). Individuals, by these lights, must be left free to pursue the good as they each fulfill its universalist vision but persistently reproduces the exclusions of the humanist Man” (1995, 164).
independently define it, while a ‘reasonable’ variety of choice is ensured by the protection and at times promotion of different cultural frameworks and ways of living.\textsuperscript{10}

For Kymlicka, the aspects of a cultural framework considered most useful to individual choice are a shared language, culture, and history (1995a). Protecting these frameworks, when they may exist in minority contexts, Kymlicka argues, is necessary in order to protect against unjust and involuntary assimilation by ensuring that individuals have access to these cultural tools as preconditions of autonomous choice. Importantly, such cultures are not defended because they are believed to offer objective truth, or because they retain any moral claims of their own, but rather because they are deemed instrumentally necessary as contexts in which individuals engage with and debate the good, and must exist to be rejected or revised as resources for individual choosers.

There is, at this point, an important limiting distinction on the scope of permissible state commitments to multicultural justice drawn between cultural protection and cultural promotion within Kymlicka’s liberal defense of multiculturalism. In Kymlicka’s model, cultural practices must be open for revision, and they cannot permissibly be entrenched and promoted in a way that would prevent them from being abolished if proven to hinder rather than facilitate choice. Indeed, when certain cultural practices can be shown to serve as a limitation on an individual’s ability to make free choice – when they are therefore deemed illiberal – these practices must be rejected, whether by broader society or through internal reforms.\textsuperscript{11} Kymlicka’s liberal, individual

\textsuperscript{10} How such ‘reasonableness’ is determined, however, points again to the unequal starting positions – both epistemologically and politically – facing divergent ‘cultural’ groups in intercultural dialogue and evaluation. For example, Kymlicka has been criticized for focusing illegitimately on the value of cultural contexts to minority nations within Canada – particularly arguing for the rights of the Quebecois within their geographically concentrated and therefore more easily protected cultural context, while denying a full range of protections to ‘ethnocultural’ groups – coded for racialized immigrants – because of their supposedly ‘voluntary’ withdrawal from the cultural contexts of their homeland. For an extended version of this critique, see Parekh (1997, 2006), as well as chapter six in this text.

\textsuperscript{11} Kymlicka attempts to temper his position on the illegitimacy of ‘internal’ restrictions on group members’ freedom in multicultural contexts by acknowledging that there are illiberal and unjust
conception of the good, therefore, greatly restricts the independent or intrinsic value granted to cultural values, and possibly eliminates this value altogether by viewing diversity as a means towards choice as a good in itself.

As has been emphasized thus far, for Kymlicka, the process of critical evaluation of one’s individual ends is itself what requires some protection of culture in the first place. Here, again, Kymlicka is not defending the particular content of a culture, but instead is arguing that cultural frameworks serve as a necessary context within which individuals make and evaluate their choices. Far from arguing in defense of a static, essentialized conception of the value of a particular set of cultural practices, Kymlicka’s model conceives of the cultural community as continuing to “exist even when its members are free to modify the character of the culture, should they find its traditional ways of life no longer worthwhile” (1989a, 166).

In such a conception, the content of cultural values can and ought to change. Indeed, it is never the contingent values of a given period in a culture’s history but only the framework itself that is instrumentally valuable to individuals in Kymlicka. Thus, the collective identity of a group is kept alive through progressive modifications that serve to make continued identification possible, not by internally oppressing members such that they would continue to comply with cultural norms, but by altering these norms to fit different circumstances and needs of individual members. Ideally, Kymlicka argues, members are not forcibly bound to particular values, but are instead offered a set of broadly endorsed values against which they may assess their own.

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practices even within the ‘liberal’ majority, acknowledging that “the task of liberal reform remains incomplete in every society, and it would be ludicrous to say that only purely liberal nations should be respected, while others should be assimilated” (1995a, 94). He does, say, however, that in “extreme cases, intervention is justified – such as the case of gross and systematic violation of human rights, be it slavery, or genocide, mass torture and expulsions” (Kymlicka 1995a, 169). While this position aims to strike a reasonable balance between cultural accommodation and the protection of individual freedom defined by liberal lights, I contend that it is this particular liberal definition of autonomy as well as the relegation of this accommodation to the private realm which remains most problematic in Kymlicka, continuing to diminish the lasting significance of cultural values by restricting how and when these values may be expressed.
Importantly, cultures provide their members with continued access to a common language, which provides particular modes of expression for these values. Cultures can thus be understood to serve as a vital context for meaningful choice in Kymlicka’s liberal reading, and for this reason, threatening the overall framework of the culture has the potential to threaten the member’s individual autonomy.

Thus, for Kymlicka, cultural membership is conceived as properly aimed at providing valued, public standards against which critical self-reflection may take place while still ensuring a foundation of self-respect across cultural lines. According to Kymlicka, self-respect is necessary in order to give individuals a sense of confidence that they may be getting their values ‘right’ (1989a, 164). Privately held beliefs require at least some public validation for respect to be maintained – but this respect is also necessary as a foundation of critique. Equally important to this goal is the condition that all sources of evaluation and critique need not come wholly from internally derived cultural sources.

Here, Kymlicka attempts to draw a distinction between the need to protect minority groups against coercive external interference and internally generated reforms, although this does not preclude the possibility that such internal reformers will draw on knowledges or values from both in and outside the community in order to make progressive change. So long as this process is founded on a set of basic equalities, and so long as respect for difference – and not just difference itself – is protected, internal and external critiques may ostensibly take place without violating individual’s rights to cultural contexts as a precondition for their autonomous pursuit of the good life. Despite this seemingly inclusive and respectful approach to the value of diverse forms of cultural belonging, it must be reemphasized that only cultural groups satisfying these distinctly liberal qualifications and thus providing room for such instrumental use and disuse of cultural values may be considered permissible. In this way, despite a formal commitment to the value cultural communities hold for their members, liberal principles serve to justify the external
evaluation and regulation of even the narrow range of cultural frameworks deemed worthy of protection.

Indeed, in Kymlicka, all must value and display their differences under the same standards of liberal merit. In order to be worthy of public demonstration and support, cultural practices must prove themselves to be conducive to a particular understanding of autonomous choice and the rational pursuit of individual life plans. Kymlicka’s instrumental defense of diversity becomes particularly problematic when noticing that the types of cultural practices that can be deemed permissible are limited by their ability to demonstrate their liberal credentials in this way, and by the relegation of even these ‘acceptable’ practices to the private sphere. Furthermore, Kymlicka’s supposedly innocent or even praiseworthy defense of cultural contexts as backgrounds for the development of autonomous choice masks the disjunct between those deemed capable of such rational and instrumental use of culture and those presumed unequal subjects who are instead stamped with a cultural essence thought to predictably control their practices and beliefs.\(^{12}\) Such groups are then subject to external interference, management, and moral evaluation by a coercive, colonial order in ways that are both disrespectful and epistemologically shortsighted.\(^{13}\)

In this way, liberal principles serve to flatten out the permissible range of cultural diversity and restrict its expression to the private realm along lines that are neither culturally

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\(^{12}\) The masking of this racialized disjunct between those subjects considered rationally autonomous and ones who are perceived to be under the irrational sway of their culture is particularly evident in debates surrounding the potential for gendered oppression to continue within – or indeed to be inherent to – ‘minority’ cultural groups. Often, within such debates, there is an implicit a dichotomy set up between the *choices* made by members of a supposedly culturally neutral liberal majority and the passive unfreedom of subjects within a culturally essentialized minority. Such a dichotomy is present in the work of many post-multicultural critics, having been canonized by the work of Susan Okin (1999) in her piece *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* Some particularly useful replies to Okin have been made by Bonnie Honig (1999), Janet Halley (1999), and Homi Bhabha (1999).

\(^{13}\) I refer here to ‘official’ multiculturalism of the kind that distributes funding, recognition and collective rights while surveilling cultural bodies and communities marked as Other and potentially threatening to the nation and evaluating the authenticity of particular cultural practices as worthy or unworthy of political protection and public support.
neutral nor attentive to the resulting subordination of minority or subjugated (often racialized) knowledges and perspectives in the public and political realm. Furthermore, conceiving of valuable cultural difference instrumentally, as Kymlicka does, has the effect of reducing and reformulating such difference, transforming difference not simply from the inside, as Kymlicka explicitly advocates, but through external and potentially oppressive norms from the dominant culture. This transformation may, as Bhikhu Parekh (2006) suggests, produce both alienation and undesirable homogenization, all under the guise of a diverse and tolerant liberal polity.¹⁴

*Kymlicka’s theory as hegemonic and representative of the liberal position on cultural difference*

What this brief interrogation of Kymlicka’s approach to the liberal management of cultural diversity demonstrates is that the commitment to promoting cultural contexts as critical backgrounds against which all individuals may allegedly pursue a variety of autonomously selected life plans masks the particular and exclusionary nature of the liberal subject’s autonomy. Recalling Brown, the autonomy of the liberal subject requires the exploitation of unfree and privatized Others, who may see their gendered, racialized or cultural identities naturalized and taken up as a means of placing these encumbered subjects outside of the scope of liberal justice, despite Kymlicka’s explicit project of extending the bounds of liberal justice to these previously excluded groups. Furthermore, I have argued that Kymlicka formulates cultures’ value to persons in a way that is similarly premised on a false universalization of a liberal ideal – the promotion of this kind of unencumbered, detached subject moving freely in and out of public and private, cultural space, practicing culturally distinct roles only privately and publicly displaying the suitably liberal character of their cultural differences when this difference is expressed at all.

¹⁴ Parekh (2006) finds the application of liberal standards impermissible largely due to his pragmatic belief that it will fail in the goal of attaining social cohesion. Rather than being concerned with alienation and homogenization from the perspective of social unity, as in Parekh, I am critical of these effects in their own right, as disrespectful harms unjustly imposed on minorities. This emphasis on social unity is, however, only one strand of Parekh’s argument, which is also premised on normative objections to the false equation of liberal standards with universal ones.
Motivated by this logic of privatization of difference (even if that difference is formally protected through ‘collective’ or ‘cultural’ rights), ideals of impartiality and consensus at work in liberal accounts of dialogue and cross-cultural exchange are not simply culturally biased, and yet largely justifiable, as Kymlicka and others maintain. On the contrary, I argue that such ideals of consensus and impartiality work to suppress subjugated knowledges and ‘minority’ positions from participation in the public sphere. And again, rather than being merely innocent or accidental, I contend that such failings within liberal multiculturalism are ideological products of epistemological biases tied into relations of racialized and gendered privilege and the subsequent stake one has in maintaining the status quo.

As I have attempted to demonstrate thus far, Kymlicka’s articulation of multiculturalism is based on a commitment to promoting the autonomous choice of individuals. He frames his defense of cultural rights within this core commitment to liberal individualism, identifying cultural belonging as a ‘primary good’ owed to all persons. Kymlicka argues that cultural accommodation can be best understood as an extension of the liberal ideal that rejects the organization of social goods along unchosen advantages or disadvantages, drawing on earlier work done by Rawls (1971) and Dworkin (1981a, 1981b). Kymlicka’s project began, then, as an attempt to extend liberal principles of justice beyond what he argued were the culturally homogenous assumptions of past liberal scholarship. Fundamentally, Kymlicka’s defense of multiculturalism argues that cultural belonging is valuable from a liberal perspective because cultures provide critical contexts for choice within which individuals reflect on and revise culturally endorsed conceptions of the good life. Because this critical backdrop is said to be a valuable part of the development of autonomous choice, Kymlicka argues that a consistent liberal

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15 More on the limitations of impartiality and consensus within intercultural dialogue will be said in the eighth chapter.
16 Following Rawls (1971), primary goods are defined as those things which any rational person would want in order to successfully pursue their life plan, regardless of the other particular things they may need or desire.
position, concerned primarily with promoting the rights of individuals, must offer some schedule of cultural rights to support these individual ones.

Indeed, Kymlicka’s approach to incorporating a defense of cultural recognition and rights into liberal theory begins with the premise that “the individuals who are an unquestionable part of the liberal moral ontology are viewed as individual members of a particular cultural community for whom cultural membership is an important good” (1989a, 162). Following Rawls (1971), Kymlicka argues, “the freedom to form and revise our beliefs about value is a crucial precondition for pursuing our essential interest in leading a good life” (1989a, 163). Under this schema, individuals require social conditions that promote their autonomous formation and revision of these beliefs. Still echoing Rawls, Kymlicka writes, “self-respect… isn’t so much a part of any rational plan of life, but rather a precondition for it,” and for Kymlicka, the social basis for self-respect ought to include respectful recognition of one’s cultural identity (1989a, 164). Indeed, for Kymlicka, the essential next move that is missed by Rawls and other liberal thinkers is that “in deciding how to lead our lives, we do not start de novo, but rather, we examine definite ideals and forms of life that have been developed and tested by innumerable individuals,” emphasizing that “the range of options is determined by our cultural heritage” (1989a, 165).

While Kymlicka suggests that liberals like Rawls and Dworkin have missed the importance of diverse cultural contexts for the development of autonomous individual choice due to an imagined homogeneity of the national community, he concludes that “[w]e decide how to lead our lives by situating ourselves in these cultural narratives, by adopting roles that have stuck us as worthwhile ones, as ones worth living” (1989a, 165). For this reason, he argues that a consistent liberal position “should be concerned with the fate of our cultural structures not because they have moral status of their own, but because it is 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” (1989a, 165). Again, Kymlicka is able to argue that cultural accommodation remains an ongoing individual good that must be provided by a just
liberal state only by first establishing such accommodation as one important enabling precondition for autonomous self-direction and self-respect. While individuals may choose to accept, revise or reject their cultural practices and beliefs, they cannot choose the initial cultural community into which they are born, and this particular community, despite its largely instrumental benefit, is likely to have important linguistic, historical, and institutional structures that individuals are connected to in important and ongoing ways.

Maintaining his understanding of positively recognized cultural membership as an extension of a Rawlsian commitment to self-respect – and therefore an important primary good – Kymlicka goes on to argue that being in a minority cultural group can be correctly viewed as an unchosen disadvantage that ought to be at least partially rectified by the liberal democratic state through special rights and privileges. Participation in cultural communities, as contexts for choice, is a right that members of majority cultures may enjoy ‘free of cost,’ while those in minority cultures, particularly in the case of minority nations, must expend time and resources in protecting their cultures from majority influence and assimilation. This, again, is shown to be a gap in liberal justice, and Kymlicka’s work functions as a corrective, expanding the liberal schedule of rights to include the protection of cultural contexts for their members.

In this way, Kymlicka offers a systematic account of the linkage between support for multiculturalism and liberal justice, and while he has faced a multitude of challenges both from those writing outside of liberalism and those scholars identifying as part of the liberal tradition, Kymlicka’s liberal credentials are, by my lights, without question. At minimum, he is commonly recognized as an authority in the field of multicultural discourse, both inside the ‘Canadian conversation’ and internationally. Indeed, I select Kymlicka as my liberal foil in part because he offers a more robust and compelling account of why cultural diversity matters from the liberal perspective than most others writing in this area. In other words, I find Kymlicka to be a worthy opponent because he offers what is, to my mind, an internally consistent liberal defense of cultural belonging that marks an important step beyond the limited and more easily dismissed
liberal rejections of cultural or collective rights, like those offered by Brian Barry (2002), which are concerned solely with the status of individual rights without attention to the necessary collective elements of individual well-being, or those liberal accounts more explicitly concerned with the perceived threat of cultural diversity to social cohesion and national identity, as in the work of David Miller (1995) and others.

In his own writing, Kymlicka explicitly conceives of his project as a necessary step forward in the ‘natural progression’ of liberal theory (1989a). Disagreements about the scope and content of liberal theory may remain, but I accept Kymlicka’s self-description on this point. At its core, liberalism is best defined as a modern form of political morality primarily concerned with protecting individual freedom.\(^{17} \) Within Kymlicka’s usage, individual freedom is more robustly defined as entailing a political obligation to ensure ongoing conditions under which persons can pursue autonomously chosen life plans. In this way, cultural belonging is understood in Kymlicka to be an extension of ‘comprehensive’ liberalism’s commitment to promoting conditions of autonomy for individuals. With this goal in mind, Kymlicka is attempting to widen the scope of liberal justice to include the important primary good of cultural belonging. In his work on multiculturalism, Kymlicka writes as if he is describing a teleological progression in the study of liberalism and justice, and so my aim throughout this text is to take Kymlicka up on this claim and see what follows from it. Ultimately, I view Kymlicka’s idealized theorizing about liberal duties to cultural Others as offering an internally consistent and coherent contemporary articulation of familiar liberal problems – again pointing to the impossibility of escaping the necessary exclusions lurking in the foundational tenets of liberal theory.

Thus far, I have highlighted the inherently exploitative nature of the liberal subject – emphasizing that the autonomy this subject experiences is necessarily derived from the

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\(^{17}\) Challenges to this conceptualization of individual freedom or indeed autonomy as the defining liberal value can of course be made, and have perhaps been best articulated by Chandran Kukathas in his alternative defense of ‘toleration’ as liberalism’s central value (2003).
unfreedom or encumbrance of a typically gendered or racialized Other. I have also attempted to problematize the instrumental approach Kymlicka takes to cultural belonging as both disrespectful and potentially oppressive of those who may wish to value and express their cultural membership for reasons not captured by liberal standards of value. I have argued that the imposition of liberal standards onto cultural frameworks is unjustly self-referential and epistemologically short-sighted: cultural contexts are owed to all individuals as a precondition for the meaningful pursuit of autonomous life plans, but only those cultural communities that prove their worth by displaying their sufficiently liberal character as such contexts for autonomous choice will be deemed permissible and worthy of protection. This imposition of liberal standards greatly narrows the possible range of cultural contexts available and has the potential to violate the very premise on which they are defined in Kymlicka, namely as an extension of the primary good of self-respect.

Before concluding this section, I will turn to one final problematic aspect of Kymlicka’s liberal multiculturalism that helps explain the failure of his theory to provide ideals conducive to the promotion of such respect or to address ongoing structural relations of oppression and inequality. These relations are, arguably, obscured by current formal commitments to multicultural diversity and the narratives of liberal tolerance that support particular expressions of such diversity within Canada.

As I have already noted, Kymlicka’s defense of multiculturalism is based on an extension of the liberal commitment not to organize social goods along unchosen advantages or disadvantages. Rather than operating as a positive step towards a more fully just and inclusive liberalism, I suggest this construction of minority cultural belonging as ‘unchosen disadvantage’ harmfully implies that these are ‘natural’ disadvantages (or inferiorities) as well. In this way, such a construction of ‘difference’ as unchosen disadvantage can function as a means of glossing over historical and systematic oppression and exploitation along ‘racial’ as well as ‘cultural’ lines, suggesting these differences – and resulting inequalities – occur ‘naturally,’ rather than
being seen as the result of a pattern of imperialism, colonialism, and white supremacy. Further, such a view suggests these ‘natural’ inequalities can be effectively addressed merely through positive cultural recognition, failing to attend to more urgent needs for structural reform and interrogation of these enduring oppressions. In settler contexts like Canada, simply viewing cultural minoritarianism as an unchosen and natural disadvantage of certain groups within liberal democracies therefore works to discursively erase the colonial legacy on which these unequal and exploitative relations were built.

In this way, Kymlicka’s liberal framing of multiculturalism obscures the responsibility of settler states to do more than offer nominal protections against assimilation through positive recognition of cultural diversity. Contra Kymlicka, I argue that a morally responsible politics of difference must go beyond recognition of difference to address the deeper material and psychological harms that have been perpetuated through state policies that continue to put non-white minoritarian groups in a position of political, economic and social oppression. These harms may include, among others, the economic and political disadvantages perpetuated by the enduring racial hierarchies operating in the Canadian context, disadvantages which multiculturalism’s discourse of tolerance and equality claims to have lessened if not eliminated. Such racialized disadvantages and exclusions are often reflected in the enduring outsider status of the non-white ‘multicultural’ Other positioned on the periphery of the core (white, settler) citizenry, and sustained through the internalization of distorted images of their culture that racialized minorities may have projected back to them by the liberal majority, as well as through the power of this majority, in Kymlicka, to evaluate minority cultural practices and deem them authentic/inauthentic, permissible/impermissibly illiberal.

Indeed, Kymlicka arguably fails to take into account the external reconstruction of these ‘minority’ cultural communities through the liberal ‘national’ gaze. While he argues that external protections are needed to shield cultures from undue majority influence, he fails to unpack the subtleties of cross-cultural exchange, as well as internal differences within cultural communities.
In particular, Kymlicka’s analysis of cultural contexts fails to attend to the manner in which ‘minority’ cultures, within liberal multiculturalism, are constructed as backward/uncivilized/illiberal in a way that works to reshape communities to fit this distorted external image. Such a process, again, serves to reinforce ontological hierarchies between those who have the epistemological and moral authority to make such evaluation and those who are subject to them.

Conceiving of cultural difference as an unchosen dis/advantage buttresses these artificial hierarchies by naturalizing such difference, and as Brown has observed, what may be naturalized within liberal theory may also be privatized and bracketed as outside of the scope of liberal justice and equality. In this way, liberalism’s formal commitment to recognizing the value of cultural contexts as preconditions of autonomous choice need not extend to more substantial equality, which would necessarily include a recognition and rejection of structures of white privilege and exploitation that underlie much of the experience of non-white citizens in the Canadian context.

The critical synthetic approach

Throughout this project, conceived as both a critique of and an alternative to Kymlicka’s impoverished liberal conceptualization of multicultural justice, I propose to generate and apply a synthesis of the three critical bodies of scholarship: 1) Charles Mills’s critical race writings on white ignorance and supremacy within the practice of idealized liberal theory; 2) post-colonial scholarship on the ill effects of multiculturalism within the Canadian context; and 3) an alternative critical realist defense of cultural diversity based on the epistemological value such diversity provides. I argue that this synthesis has the potential to offer greater conceptual clarity.

18 In her work, Sunera Thobani refers to the ‘communalizing power’ of multiculturalism, which she suggests functions to construct “communities as neatly bounded, separate cultural entities, unchanged by the process of migration and dislocation,” emphasizing the supposedly ‘deep and unchanging’ nature of ‘minority’ cultural difference without attending to their relational formation in uneven contexts of power, subject to great historical and geographical variation (2007, 149, 159).
on matters of difference than any of these theories taken alone, and should therefore prove better equipped to address the relations of privilege and oppression which liberal multiculturalism masks. This synthesis arguably has the added benefit of promoting a more contextualized, nuanced, and respectful account of the range of value that cultural belonging may hold for persons. My critical synthetic approach requires both a rejection of the liberal subject as the primary signifier of value within discussion of cultural belonging, as well as a call to deal frankly with relations of racialized and gendered power and privilege that are masked by this subject. This requires, in part, a rejection of many of the abstractions from historical and contemporary realities of injustice that are typical of ideal theory, as well as idealized theories such as Kymlicka’s. Again, where my own critique differs from others (including those whose work I synthesize) is in the choice to ground it not just in these observed ill effects of liberal multiculturalism in theory and practice, but in an ongoing interrogation of the exclusionary conception of the liberal subject that I argue motivates and sustains racialized and gendered inequalities, both ontological, epistemological, and political.

In the following chapters, I attempt to more fully link the failure of Kymlicka’s liberal approach to multiculturalism to address ongoing relations of racialized oppression and privilege with the exclusions and conceptual inadequacies embedded in the liberal subject he employs. While ostensibly granting collective rights to cultural communities, Kymlicka’s liberal ontology restrains his theory, providing for an individualized account of cultural belonging and its worth that carries all the way down. Put differently, Kymlicka’s liberal theory promotes cultural belonging as background against which individuals form and revise their beliefs about the good life, and he is careful to emphasize that the cultural community to which an individual may belong holds no independent moral significance of its own. This does more than provide an internally consistent liberal defense of cultural belonging, however.

In addition to providing an account of the linkage between the necessary conditions owed to individuals under which they may reasonably pursue their autonomously chosen good lives and
a liberal need to protect cultural contexts one such set of conditions, Kymlicka’s approach to culture makes matters of discrimination and oppression that may result from ascriptive or visible cultural identities individual matters as well. In this way, his individualized approach to why culture matters narrows the range of claims individuals may make from and about their cultural identities. Constructing cultural belonging as an instrumentally beneficial primary good, in other words, has the effect of denying the relational and overlapping nature of cultural membership, while serving to cut off attempts to connect cultural belonging with ongoing relations of structural oppression, which as Iris Marion Young (1990) reminds us, functions at the level of social groups, rather than individuals. Furthermore, by constructing cultural membership as a primary good, Kymlicka arguably fetishizes cultural identity as a thing in the world to be used in this instrumental manner, rather than as a set of enabling conditions and unequal power relations. The individualized ontology from which Kymlicka begins his defense of cultural rights, then, is ill-equipped to cope with the variety of ways in which cultures may prove valuable for their members or to provide remedies to ongoing structures of cultural imperialism and white supremacy operating within liberal democracies like Canada.

Ultimately, while theoretically driven, my project is premised on commitment to a radical contextualization of theory that seeks political principles derived from social realities of injustice rather ideally abstracted away from them. This commitment demands that I seek to apply these theoretical findings contextually. Indeed, while I am primarily concerned with the direction and content of liberal multiculturalism as a matter of social and political theory, my use of Mills’s aims to make a bridge between the deficiencies in this idealized theorizing about cultural difference and the failure of practical attempts to map such theories onto the lived experience of individuals within a ‘multicultural’ society such as Canada. There is an assumption, then, that this type of academic theorizing filters down into public policy and social and political relations in important, and, at present, harmful ways.
Within the scope of my project, my contention is that, while by no means the only voice within liberal discussions of multiculturalism, or within the Canadian conversation on matters of cultural diversity and national unity, Kymlicka provides both a particularly prominent and a particularly problematic voice. For this reason, I seek to generate a theoretically rich critique of his liberal defense of multicultural rights, both in order to point out important gaps and conceptual inadequacies in Kymlicka’s idealized theorizing as well as to link these theoretical shortcomings to ideological biases within the broader practice of liberal theory and within the operation of ‘Canadian conversation’ on multiculturalism and national unity. Following Mills (2007c), I suggest these biases are the result of cognitive investment in maintaining the material and psychological privilege offered to white persons within the status quo, supported and made sense of by an ongoing commitment to an inherently exclusionary but formally equal liberal subject.

By my lights, making sense of the theoretical and practical failings of liberal multiculturalism requires a critical interrogation of the exclusionary liberal subject whose freedom remains only theoretically universal while being practically unrealizable for all persons. The failure of a theory like Kymlicka’s to address deeper material and psychological harms resulting from and justified by naturalized accounts of ‘cultural’ difference – viewing resulting

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19 It is important not to overstate this case. Within the ‘Canadian conversation’ on connected matters of multiculturalism and national identity, Kymlicka provides what is to my mind the most consistent defense of multiculturalism from a distinctly liberal perspective, and his defense of the instrumental relationship this subject has with cultural belonging is of greatest interest to me because, as I will suggest throughout this text, it is also the most significant reason his work is unlikely to produce justice or even direct other theoretical discussions toward means of attaining it. However, Kymlicka has written extensively on multicultural justice, and by all appearances is strongly committed to efforts, both theoretical and practical, which seek to reduce discrimination and inequality. Moreover, in his impressive body of work, Kymlicka has gone beyond many of the limitations of fellow liberals in rejecting strict compliance to difference-blind equality and assumptions about the internal homogeneity of ‘well ordered’ nations. In part, then, it is also because of this strong ethical thread running throughout Kymlicka’s work that I direct my attention toward him, suggesting most fundamentally that whatever his motivations in working to defend liberal multiculturalism in Canada, his reliance on the exclusionary liberal subject will block the path to justice and equality at every substantive turn.
inequalities stemming from such difference as natural instead of social and artificial – can be linked to the fundamentally exploitative and exclusionary nature of the liberal subject motivating Kymlicka’s theory and debate around it. What is at stake in such a critique is the demonstration – made vivid by attending to a contextual case like that of the formal and informal practice of Canadian multiculturalism – that the ideals generated by liberal theorizing on multiculturalism are ill-equipped to deal with relations of structural oppression and indeed, function to mask and maintain this oppression. From this demonstration, I argue, alternative defenses of multiculturalism can and must be made, and this need motivates the promotion of my own critical synthetic method of multiculturalism, characterized as a form of epistemic cooperation used to share important and distinct cultural interpretations of the self and the good life, as well functioning as a vehicle for the radical critique of racial and cultural injustice.
Chapter Three: Two narratives of Official Multiculturalism: liberal and post-colonial

The liberal state’s advocacy of multiculturalism is an act of contradiction, of having one’s cake and eating it too. For if only by abstracting from difference (for example class, “race,” and gender, sexuality and so on) could liberal thought arrive at the persona of the rights-bearing equal individual or the citizen, then it could not appeal any more to the principle or actuality of difference among individuals to now create another sphere of rights.

Himani Bannerji *Dark Side of the Nation* (2000, p. 130)

In Will Kymlicka’s hegemonic contribution to the mainstream discourse on multiculturalism, the emergence of group-differentiated cultural rights in Canada is depicted as a natural liberal progression arising out of patterns of decolonization and the civil rights revolution in the post-war period.¹ I will argue, however, that such a narrative of steady progress towards liberalization in Canada has the effect of obfuscating both historical and contemporary relations of white supremacy, colonialism and other forms of ongoing structural oppression and domination. Such obfuscation is arguably facilitated through theoretical abstractions which fail to attend to the ongoing efficacy of colonial and racialized hierarchies within the Canadian citizenry, hierarchies which are implicitly denied and their effects marginalized through Kymlicka’s assumption that there has been a significant leveling of the moral, economic and political playing field which now requires only minimal reconfiguring in order to fully realize liberal justice and equality for all persons.

While post-colonial scholars typically place the blame for such obfuscating effects of official liberal multiculturalism on the preoccupation with matters of culture and recognition

¹ While Kymlicka is a particularly influential voice in the multicultural literature within Canadian Political Science, he is far from the only prominent member of the ‘Canadian School’ to depict Canada’s national trajectory as one of steady liberal progress. See for example Alan Cairns (1995, 150), who suggests that, post-Charter, the Canadian political landscape has been transformed into a more pluralistic and participatory one, empowering many new groups of so ‘Charter Canadians’ and reducing deference to governmental authority in Canada’s political culture, something Cairns seems at times to lament, at least in terms of its impact on stable governance and national identity, while also presenting this shift as a permanent and powerful step towards a more liberal and progressive Canadian political culture.
within mainstream multicultural scholarship, I am interested in looking at how this obfuscation is justified within or facilitated by liberal theory. By engaging with Kymlicka’s account of the rise and instrumental value of liberal multiculturalism, I aim to demonstrate how gaps in liberal theorizing about cultural justice produce a failure to attend to matters of racial injustice and other patterns of structural oppression. An ongoing interrogation of the inherently exclusionary nature of the liberal subject and the ideological abstractions endemic to the practice of idealized liberal theories of justice, I argue, helps explain how this failure is smoothed over or left uninterrogated by leading liberal theorists like Kymlicka and his mainstream critics.  

In order to call attention to what is overlooked in Kymlicka’s idealized account, then, I will proceed by contrasting two narratives depicting the rise of official multiculturalism in Canada. The first, again, is a tale of liberal progress told by Kymlicka, linking the rise of support for group-differentiated rights in Canada to earlier (and presumably successful) waves of liberalization in the post-war period. The second, told by Sunera Thobani and Himani Bannerji, challenges this idealized account by connecting the adoption of official multiculturalism to a legitimizing project for the Canadian colonial state and its core white citizenry. In this post-colonial narrative, liberal multiculturalism operates as a form of rescue and revitalization – distancing the Canadian state from its colonial legacy and ongoing structural commitments to de facto white supremacy through a formal attachment of cultural tolerance and celebration of

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2 In my critique, I present Kymlicka as perpetuating ideological abstractions through his ‘idealized’ theorizing on matters of liberal justice. However, Kymlicka’s position may conversely be characterized as more ‘contextual’ than ‘ideal,’ particularly through his use of examples, both historical and contemporary, in order to defend his theory of group differentiated rights. Although Kymlicka relies on less theoretical abstraction than some liberals, I will suggest here that his account still rests on the types of troubling ideological abstractions (particularly occluding the fundamental importance of colonialism in forming the Canadian nation state) that will be outlined below. While beyond the scope of my project, Michael Walzer (1983), Joseph Carens (2000, 2004), and Spinner-Halev (2001) are among other prominent political theorists who reject complete ideal abstraction as a starting point for discussions of cultural diversity and justice, arguing instead for a contextualized approach that attends to the specific local histories of injustice and local traditions rather than appealing from the start to universal claims or generalizations about the right of cultural preservation (Levy 2007, 174).
diversity to the nation-building project, thus championing the superior moral character of the Canadian political community.

In contrasting these two narratives, I will attempt to sketch an account of the ideological and psychological motivations embedded within Kymlicka’s idealized narrative of multicultural and liberal progress, which arguably deradicalizes the aims and potential of multiculturalism. I will employ Charles Mills’s critique of ideological abstractions away from racialized injustices and the masking effects of what he terms *white ignorance* as a potential explanation for the gaps between these two narratives.

*Two narratives of Canadian multiculturalism*

I begin with a brief rehearsal of the ‘genealogical’ narrative of the historical roots and progression of diversity accommodation in Canada Kymlicka offers. While attributing the adoption of official multiculturalism to a ‘third wave’ in the ‘rising tide’ of liberalization throughout the Western world following WWII, within Kymlicka’s narrative the accommodation of diversity in Canada is given a historical legacy going well beyond this post-war period, suggesting that ‘accommodation of diversity’ has always been central to Canada’s history and nation-building project (Kymlicka 2007a, 39). When describing the ‘historical legacy’ of accommodation for diversity by the Canadian state, leading to the development of official multiculturalism, Kymlicka writes,

> At each step along the way, Canada’s stability and prosperity – and indeed its very survival – have depended upon its ability to respond constructively to new forms of diversity, and to develop new relationships of coexistence and cooperation, without undermining the (often fragile) accommodations of older forms of diversity, which are themselves continually being contested and renegotiated.

(Kymlicka 2007a, 39)

While Kymlicka later acknowledges the colonial and overtly racist nature of this past ‘accommodation,’ the introduction of Canada’s history of diversity is given an idealized account in his narrative, abstracted from colonial violence and dispossession. This abstraction denies the
fundamental role played by racialized hierarchies of non/sub/personhood\(^3\) that helped justify and facilitate the colonial nation-building project, failing to identify white supremacist doctrines as central to the political structure and culture of this emerging nation.

Indeed, rather than placing central emphasis on the colonial nature of Canada’s national-building project and interrogating this colonial legacy within contemporary bonds of citizenship and multicultural accommodation, Kymlicka instead defends the *liberal* character of this project. In his work tracing the historical and institutional roots for the contemporary support for group-differentiated rights by Canada state, Kymlicka identifies three ‘diversity silos’ that constitute Canada’s model for accommodating cultural diversity, and emphasizes that while the legal and administrative basis for each silo is quite different, they are united by their common liberal logic. As identified by Kymlicka, these silos refer to 1) the ‘French fact,’ that is, the need to offer accommodations to the Francophone/Québécois minority nation through asymmetrical federalism and national recognition, particularly important due to the ‘threat’ posed to national unity by the Quebecois; 2) Aboriginal peoples, offering accommodations including land claims, treaty rights and self-governance to these minority nations, still overseen by the federal government and the Department of Indian Affairs; and 3) the integration of immigrants/polyethnics groups through official multiculturalism.

Kymlicka emphasizes the liberal pedigree and logic behind multicultural policy and other aspects of Canada’s ‘diversity’ accommodation in order to respond to those commentators who argue such ‘cultural’ accommodations are in fact the result of a backlash against individual rights, ushering in conservative, traditionalist doctrines. This view suggests that cultural or collective rights are ripe for abuse from these conservative and typically (assumed to be) patriarchal cultural

\(^3\) I borrow this language of full/sub/nonpersonhood from Mills (1997, 2007a). While Mills uses these categories to mark racialized and gendered exclusions within his work developing the racial contract and the racial sexual contract, I find the analytical value of conceptualizing such a hierarchical ordering of personhood along these lines within a formally equal subject (be it the ideal contracting subject in Mills’s case or the liberal subject in mine) translates beyond this contractual model.
elites. Against those who suggest that the adoption of official multiculturalism and other collective accommodations of ‘diversity’ have constituted a conservative backlash against liberalism, Kymlicka argues that along with previous waves of liberalization in the west, the recognition that a full schedule of liberal rights would include culturally differentiated ones was based on a common liberal commitment to upholding individual rights and promoting equality through a contestation of ‘inherited’ ethnic and racial hierarchies (2007a, 58).

Kymlicka thus argues it is this common liberal logic which links the three diversity silos, and while guided by somewhat different principles in practice, they all operate under a liberal banner which, as Kymlicka stresses, both shapes and constrains the content and scope of the claims that can be made within any of these ‘silos.’ Kymlicka applauds the liberal constraints of these diversity policies, arguing that liberalism serves as a ‘double-edged’ sword, offering accommodation and an avenue for the contestation of inherited hierarchies and resulting inequalities on one hand, but constraining the nature of these claims to the language and principles of liberal constitutionalism and individual rights on the other (2007a, 63).

Kymlicka is, I think, quite right to deny any ‘conservative’ basis for the adoption of official multiculturalism, or other modes of diversity accommodation in Canada. The execution of these policies, diverse though their institutional frameworks may be across the ‘three silos,’ is certainly liberal in character. Indeed, it is for this reason that I object to them, suggesting it is

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4 Brian Barry (2002) and Susan Okin (1999) offer two sides of this critique linking the adoption of multiculturalism to a conservative backlash posing dangers to individual rights. While Barry is primarily concerned with enforcing principles of strict difference-blind equality to all individuals, Okin considers the potential dangers to women within minority communities in the era of cultural protections and rights. I remain skeptical about the value of either side of this critique, but its prominence within mainstream theoretical debates of multiculturalism warrants its mention. 5 By agreeing with Kymlicka that the adoption of official multiculturalism within Canada is not the product of a conservative backlash against individual rights, I mean only that I do not find them to be ‘conservative’ in the sense it is typically used in such debates. However, the framing of debate about multiculturalism around fears of the abuse of these policies by ‘traditional/conservative’ cultural elites, assumed by many commentators to be committed to gender subordination along with a host of other sins, is in itself significant and needs to be theorized about further. Work in this area has already been begun by Chandra-Talpade Mohanty (2003), Thobani (2007), Sherene Razack (2008), and others.
because of this relentlessly liberal logic and application that such policies are doomed to failure. In other words, I argue it is in large part the liberal character of cultural accommodation and its public support in Canada that prevents (or at least denies the need for) a substantive contestation of these ‘inherited’ cultural/ethnic hierarchies. The manner in which Kymlicka’s narrative, for example, treats these as natural, or as inherited rather imposed hierarchies, denies the political and artificial nature of these unequal relations and the cultural identities they delineate. As many post-colonial scholars have indeed observed, policies of liberal multiculturalism thus subtly reinforce racial hierarchies by enshrining cultural ‘diversities’ as a natural fact of Canadian life, outside of power and any active construction of these differences; all the while such ‘diversities’ are marked as Other against a silent, racially white and culturally ‘undifferentiated’ national ‘we.’

Echoing these post-colonial scholars, I argue that this liberal approach to cultural difference/accommodation fails to adequately take into account the active role the colonial state has played in ‘constructing’ and hierarchically managing these ‘new’ and ‘historical’ diversities. Nor is the massively unequal playing field against which such ‘accommodation’ occurs taken seriously enough. Indeed, ‘accommodation’ is used here to cover a host of sins from violent colonial dispossession and state sanctioned extermination efforts (both cultural and bodily) to explicitly racialized immigration criteria and its replacement with subtler, still highly discriminatory forms of border control in the ‘liberalized’ era.

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6 The conceptualization of a core – typically white/European/Anglo – Canadian identity, against which ‘multicultural Others’ revolve is common among post-colonial scholars, particularly emphasized in the work of Bannerji (2000), Eva Mackey (2002), and Thobani (2007).

7 In her analysis of Canadian immigration policy and specifically the effects of its liberalized policies following the 1960s and 1970s and into the Charter era, Sharryn Aiken (2007) concludes that immigration into Canada remains characterized as “a privilege rather than a right,” and demonstrates that “despite significant changes in Canadian immigration law over the past thirty years, we can still see the continuity of historic racism in the neo-racist stratification that remains embedded in the fabric of the law” (2007, 57, 97). As Aiken and other critics of Canadian immigration policy have argued, despite being ostensibly race neutral, the points system continues to filter immigrants along racialized lines, particularly aided by the highly discretionary
For example, when recounting this ‘long history’ of accommodating diversity in Canada, Kymlicka describes European settlers as simply having to reach a ‘modus vivendi’ with Aboriginal peoples, ignoring the ontological and spatial erasure of Aboriginal societies that took place when colonizing efforts shifted from resource extraction to settlement and eventually nation-building (2007a, 39). While Kymlicka later goes on to acknowledge the colonial nature of this relationship, this colonial relation is not a central part of Kymlicka’s analysis of the ‘Aboriginal diversity silo.’ Indeed, it is hardly mentioned at all, beyond a brief acknowledgement that past relations between colonizer and colonized, conqueror and conquered, may contribute to the lack of trust Aboriginals have demonstrated in the liberal-democratic institutions of their colonizers (2007a, 74). This is a tension, however, that Kymlicka seems confident may be overcome through the inevitable ‘gravitational pull’ of liberal-democratic institutions and principles (2007a, 73).

Likewise, when acknowledging the racially discriminatory immigration policies and nationalist discourse aimed at ‘Keeping Canada White,’ Kymlicka has confidence that such policies have been effectively discredited in the post-war period, replaced by genuinely ‘race-neutral’ liberalized forms of immigration policy (the points system) in the late 1960s and early 1970s (2007a, 44). Combined with this ‘race-neutral’ immigration policy in Kymlicka’s tale of liberal progress is the new multicultural mode of integration which is less forcibly assimilationist,

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nature of the selection criteria based on personal suitability and their independent status, which allows “biased immigration officers to make discriminatory decisions, and it allows the law, more broadly, to act as a tool for perpetuating racism” (Aiken 2007, 68-69). Resources for immigrant recruitment and processing are also allocated unequally, favoring developed countries over developing ones, and even the costs of immigration (landing and processing fees in particular) are not borne out equally on applicants – while applied to all, differences in currency exchange rates continue to vastly disadvantage applicants from the global South (Aiken 2007, 72; Thobani 2007, 99-98).

8 Early examples of racialized efforts to ensure the core whiteness of the Canadian nation include the Canada First Movement, which was based on the belief that Canada was a ‘Britain of the North,’ whose superior and unique national identity was derived from its northern location, its cold winters, and the superior ‘stock’ of the ‘northern races’ and was used as a basis to exclude ‘slave’ races from the South from admittance into the emerging Canadian nation (Mackey 2002, 30). Also see Berger (1966).
and at least formally recognizes the value of diverse cultural expressions in social (if not political) life and thus seeks to promote fair terms of integration.

Furthermore, from the post-war period onwards, Kymlicka observes, policies accommodating each of the three silos of diversity have been entrenched in the constitution, arguably marking them as fundamental to the ongoing Canadian nation-building project and outside of mere partisan politics. Within this optimistic narrative, Kymlicka even presents the relatively meager budget for the multiculturalism directorate within the Heritage Department in a positive light, suggesting this small budget reflects an overall governmental commitment to multicultural accommodation across departments (2007a, 45). Overall, Kymlicka is confident that “multicultural policies have permeated Canadian public life, with ripple effects extending far beyond their original source in one branch of federal government” (2007a, 46)

Even when acknowledging the hierarchical and undemocratic legacy of Canada’s ‘long history of diversity accommodation,’ Kymlicka sets a clear barrier between the old model and the fully liberalized, post-war era of multicultural tolerance and multinational accommodation (at least with respect to Quebec and to a more limited and uneven extent, Aboriginal nations). Indeed, following the discrediting of biological racism and its enforcement in state policy after the Second World War, Kymlicka paints a picture of steady progress towards liberalization in the Western world. He outlines three distinct waves of liberalization beginning after the post-war period, each inspired by the one that came before it.

The first wave, Kymlicka suggests, was constituted by a period of worldwide decolonization from roughly 1948 to 1966. Inspired by these colonial struggles came the second wave, composed of racial desegregation initiated by African American civil rights struggles in the United States between 1955 and 1965. Kymlicka argues the American civil rights revolution

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9 The institutional basis for multicultural policy within the federal government is now housed within the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, a move made by the Harper Conservatives (CIC 2012).
also inspired a similar and in some ways more fundamental transformative rights revolution in Canada, where the country changed rapidly from a more conservative political culture than that of the United States to one far more committed to liberal rights and democratic equality (2007a). Finally, in the third wave, according to Kymlicka’s narrative of liberal progress, came the realization that a full schedule of liberal rights required culturally differentiated accommodation and recognition.

In tracing the liberal roots of this rise in support for multiculturalism as official government policy in Canada, Kymlicka emphasizes that the nature of multicultural protections remained, at base, committed to the protection and promotion of individual rights. And so Kymlicka concludes that, “[j]ust as decolonization inspired the struggle for racial desegregation, so racial desegregation inspired the struggle for minority rights and multiculturalism,” and each of these movements are connected through their commitments to liberal-democratic rights and the equality of human beings, aimed at contesting ‘inherited hierarchies’ and lingering inequalities within imperfectly ordered liberal-democratic institutions (2007a, 58).

While I will later wish to challenge it, even accepting this narrative may tell us something about the de-radicalization of each subsequent ‘wave’ of liberalization. The assumption, particularly in the third wave introducing differentiated cultural rights, seems to be that the more fundamentally unequal and exclusionary racialized hierarchies that once defined even self-proclaimed liberal-democracies like Canada have been washed away by previous waves and that

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10 Triumphalist contrasts of this sort between the United States and Canada are, of course, common to Canadian political scholarship and particularly pronounced in discussions of ‘diversity’ accommodation. Where the United States is portrayed as having a historical legacy of violent extinction of Aboriginal populations, official slavery and the melting pot, Canada is defined through the ‘cooperative’ era of the fur trade and myths of the more or less grateful acceptance of British law and justice by child-like Aboriginal populations, the Underground Railroad and the multicultural mosaic. Mackey (2002) in particular has argued that such contrasts have been instrumental in defining the uniqueness of the Canadian nation-building project. Others, including Katherine McKittrick (2007) and Abigail Bakan (2008) have challenged this distinction particularly in terms of the Underground Railroad and the myth that no black slavery was practiced in Canada.
only small adjustments, largely recognition and integration based, are now needed. Indeed it is also interesting to note the level of finality Kymlicka assigns to each wave, each of which he suggests brought extremely rapid and fundamental shifts towards the more robust realization of liberal ideas of individual freedom and equality (be it political, cultural, or economic). For when describing the support for group-differentiated rights within Canada’s three diversity silos, Kymlicka concludes, “[o]nce we stop and think about this sea change in each policy field and notice the similarity in the timing of the changes, a different image of Canada’s diversity policies may come to mind – not so much a horizontal palimpsest, or a set of vertical silos, but rather a tidal wave” (2007a, 53, my emphasis).

In this way, each wave of liberalization is said to have effectively discredited racially and culturally hierarchical inheritances to the point where only the lingering and anomalous ill effects of these hierarchies are evident within liberal-democratic institutions in Canada and elsewhere in the Western world. In the case of the third stage, introducing multiculturalism and group differentiated rights, Kymlicka concludes, “multiculturalism went from being the bold idea of a few ethnic organizations in 1965 to the supreme law of the land in 1983, and it has since been reaffirmed – in 1988 and 1997 – with only minor changes in emphasis” (2007a, 46). This conclusion seems to suggest both a normative and a realpolitik endorsement of the effectiveness of multicultural policies to break down the prejudices and inequalities stemming from past reliance on racialized hierarchies.

Indeed, when evaluating the effectiveness of Canada’s diversity silos on the bases of liberalism, equality, and sustainability, Kymlicka finds much to celebrate. Kymlicka is particularly confident about the success of ‘citizenization’ efforts designed to develop and sustain a common commitment to liberal rights through civic education and political socialization, and finds that the ‘liberal expectation’ that there will be a convergence of popular support around
these liberal values is being borne out across the diversity silos.\footnote{In analyzing such ‘citizenization’ effects following the adoption of official multiculturalism, Gerald Kernerman (2005) develops a theory of ‘multicultural panopticism,’ which he argues encourages the display of the liberal character of cultural diversity, and later coevillance by ‘multicultural citizens’ to guard the limits of such expressions of diversity to this liberal character. Such a form of ‘diversity governance,’ Kernerman argues, “encourages certain types of citizen interactions by providing the categories and differences within which individuals and groups can negotiate their behavior and their relations with others… While multicultural coevillance particularizes citizens into their various categories, the common act of placing one’s diversity on display constructs and reinforces a more general basis for cohesion and unity. Multicultural panopticism is normalized as an ethically superior form of political interaction” (Kernerman 2005, 101, my emphasis).}

Kymlicka suggests that the success of this liberal expectation is particularly evident in the case of Quebec, which he notices has a political culture even more committed to progressive liberal principles than the rest of the country. According to Kymlicka this liberal expectation is showing signs of success within the ‘immigrant’ silo as well, particularly among second and third generation immigrant populations.\footnote{12 The ‘liberal expectation’ that divergence in values will lessen across generations of immigrants, until there is a successful integration of these ‘newcomers’ into the general, liberal political culture of Canada is also supported in the empirical work measuring trust, common values, sense of belonging, and other signifiers of ‘social cohesion’ in the work of Stuart Soroka, Richard Johnston, and Keith Banting (2007).}

Where populations are not liberalizing fast enough, he further notes, there are strong institutional and informal safeguards in place to ‘expose’ and ‘marginalize’ illiberal practices through liberal commitments to freedom of speech and freedom of information and of the press (Kymlicka 2007a, 65). As noted previously, Kymlicka admits that support for these liberal principles/institutions may be more uneven within the communities making up the ‘Aboriginal silo’ due to the colonial legacy of these policies/institutions, but Kymlicka suggests that the universal appeal of liberalism has the potential to overcome such concerns if practiced well.

On the equality measure, the picture is less rosy, although Kymlicka suggests that efforts to equalize economic and political relations between Quebec and the rest of Canada have been quite successful (2007a, 68). The Aboriginal silo, Kymlicka notices, is more difficult to assess, as there have been gains made towards self-government and recognition of treaties and land claims, but these have been uneven and the progress has been very slow, particularly in British
Columbia (2007a, 69). He also acknowledges that the institutional framework set up to address the Aboriginal population is unresponsive to the needs of groups outside of the “inherited bureaucratic categories and assumptions of the Indian Act, such as non-status Indians, the Métis and urban Aboriginal people” but suggests it is the categories, not the principles applied to them, that are in need of alteration (Kymlicka 2007a, 70).

The success of multiculturalism in enhancing the equality of immigrants and members of polyethnic groups is also mixed, as Kymlicka notices that those making use of multicultural funding are often those who might need it least (2007a, 70). Kymlicka is also somewhat critical of the way in which minority status remains attached to labels of disadvantage and dependency, thereby implying minorities are universally composed of those vulnerable populations who must seek special (and potentially still stigmatizing) protections from the state to sustain themselves.  

Many of these problems, however, may be solved through more nuanced categories of differentiation, according to Kymlicka, attending to differences in circumstances and needs, whether it be between ‘visible’ minorities and the majority, or across these minorities.  

On the matter of the sustainability of these various diversity policies, cast in terms of potential threats posted by such accommodation of diversity to national unity and social cohesion, Kymlicka remains optimistic that “well-functioning liberal-democratic institutions… generate their own bases of support,” in the sense of having a ‘gravitational pull’ (2007a, 73). Because these diversity policies are consistent with the framework of liberal constitutionalism and civil  

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13 When assessing the success of diversity accommodation policies in Canada, Kymlicka notes the criticism that these policies have the effect of ‘papering over’ enduring racial and cultural hierarchies without addressing substantive cultural, economic or political inequalities between and within ‘visible’ minorities and the ‘majority’ (2007a, 68). However, he does not deal with this criticism substantively, and has not, to my knowledge, done so elsewhere in his work.  

14 This emphasis on the importance of naming is interesting, in Kymlicka, as though once the correct categories of differentiation have been articulated, substantive matters of inequality and racism will be resolved. This type of preoccupation with categories to manage and rank difference is critiqued by Bannerji in particular, who writes, “the names keep proliferating, as though there were a seething reality, unmanageable and uncontrollable in any one name” (2000, 65).
rights, Kymlicka argues that group differentiated multicultural rights will not threaten the social cohesion or stability of the nation. What lack of trust in liberal-democratic institutions exists, according to Kymlicka, is more likely the result of the imperfect practice of these institutions, rather than a lack of commitment to the principles of liberal freedom and equality themselves (2007a, 76). Elsewhere in his work, however, Kymlicka emphasizes that such concerns about the threat ‘newcomers’ may pose to social cohesion and the liberal character of Canada’s political community are legitimate, generally made in ‘good faith’ by Canadians who have a right to know that multicultural recognition will not threaten their enjoyment of a full schedule of individual rights under liberal constitutionalism (1998, 60).

Ultimately, Kymlicka concludes that continuing tensions between individual and ‘collective’ rights and disagreements about how to navigate these are “endemic to civil rights liberalism, given its twin goals of reducing inherited status inequalities and upholding individual freedom” (2007a, 61). Generally, Kymlicka argues that the liberalization of all three diversity silos has been quite successful, and imperfections in the implementation of these liberal policies towards cultural diversity can be addressed through more contextualized application of categories of difference, better suited to attending to difference in needs and claims within and across these silos. I am suggesting, in contrast, that these ‘twin goals’ of liberalism are in fact incompatible, at least while being sought under the common banner of liberal freedom and the exclusionary subject upon which this freedom depends.

Furthermore, I argue that such an idealized view of the rise of multiculturalism (and other aspects of Canada’s accommodation of ‘diversity’) fails to address the ways in which official multiculturalism functions ideologically to promote Canada’s image as a nation of tolerance and diversity, while simultaneously serving as a ‘rescue’ of whiteness in the post-war period (Thobani 2007, 150). In contrast to Kymlicka’s idealized narrative, then, I echo Thobani and other post-colonial scholars in asserting that the development of multiculturalism in Canada has been at least partially motivated by and used to fuel the national myth of Canada as an especially tolerant and
Indeed, this narrative is fiercely protected and deeply embedded, while the lived experience of this national story of tolerance and inclusion remains available to select groups only – those primarily white, European subjects who are exalted\textsuperscript{16} as inherently worthy of the benefits of full Canadian citizenship and representative of the nation itself. These are subjects who, by virtue of this exalted status, manage the limits of multicultural tolerance, have shaped the Canadian polity in their image, and continue to see their needs and concerns reflected in national policy. Access to this exalted subjecthood, I argue, is filtered or coded through the application of culturally particular liberal standards, operating to subtly exclude along racialized lines by virtue of these differentially applied standards of who ‘has’ culture and who is seen to be ‘had’ by their culture to the point of backwardness or irrationality.\textsuperscript{17} Kymlicka’s emphasis on the instrumental value of cultural as a context of ‘choice’ for individuals arguably further reinforces this false division, providing a justification for state intervention where cultural communities cannot effectively demonstrate the liberal character of their beliefs and practices.

I follow Thobani, then, in suggesting that multiculturalism – as a policy and a philosophy in Canada – has emerged in part as a ‘rescue of whiteness’ that serves to maintain systems of white supremacy while erasing de jure enforcement of this supremacy through commitments to formal equality and recognition. Through the seizure of the power to define, celebrate, and consume the cultural Other, Thobani demonstrates the manner in which the project of

\textsuperscript{15} While I find Thobani’s critical reading of the rise official multiculturalism in Canada to be particularly compelling, Yasmeen Abu-Laban (2007) has similarly criticized Kymlicka’s narrative of liberal progress for failing to engage substantively with imbalances in social and political power, as well as for erasing the diverse narratives of minorities – particularly Aboriginal and colonial narratives – within his teleological account.

\textsuperscript{16} My use of the term ‘exalted’ borrows from Thobani’s register (2007).

\textsuperscript{17} The imagined divide between ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’ subjects is particularly pronounced within discussions of gender equality within multiculturalism contrasting Western women able exercise free choice to nonwhite and/or Third World women viewed as imperiled and shackled by tradition. For a representation of this, see Susan Okin (1999). As Sherene Razack observes, increasingly, “gender operates as a kind of technology of empire enabling the West to make a case for its own modernity and for its civilizational projects around the globe” offering the ‘rescue’ of this civilization to ‘imperiled’ third world women within and without national borders (2008, 18).
multiculturalism served as a mode of ‘rescue’ from the ‘crisis of whiteness’ that emerged in the post-war period (Thobani 2007, 145-47). Here, support for multicultural policies and a reconstruction of the Canadian national identity, defined as “urbane, cosmopolitan, and at the cutting edge of promoting racial and ethnic tolerance among Western nations,” served the dual purpose of further exalting the Canadian national as inherently superior to threatening cultural and racial Others cast as intolerant and primordial, while simultaneously responding pragmatically to the impermissibility of overtly racist government policies following WWII (Thobani 2007, 145, 148). In this way, multiculturalism smoothed over the transition from de jure to ongoing de facto white supremacy in Canada without substantially upsetting relations of racial privilege.

Thus, multiculturalism serves to sustain enduring realities of racial dominance – positioning the Anglo-white majority as the cultural core against which multicultural Others are defined and around which these ‘diverse’ cultural Others revolve – while, in the Canadian case, allowing for the very visible championing of tolerance as a quality inherent to the exalted Canadian national. By attaching the qualities of tolerance and accommodation of diversity to the inherent character of the Canadian national, and projecting these qualities back onto the colonial settler, multiculturalism functions to rescue and reaffirm the moral worth of the nation-building project. Rather than being formed out of a violent colonial past premised explicitly on the erasure (both spatial and ontological) of the Aboriginal subject, Canada’s national narrative becomes

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18 In her work, Eva Mackey (2002) emphasizes that the colonial nation-building project relied not only on the spatial and ontological erasure of Aboriginal subjects and societies from the landscape of what would become Canada, but was at other times equally predicated on the careful management of strategic representations of Indigeneity within Canada’s national imaginary. Such management provided a deeper sense of connection to the past within the emerging Canadian nation through the appropriation of cultural artifacts as part of Canada’s national heritage, and denied the depth and violence of the colonial project by depicting this project as a partnership between ‘benevolent settlers’ (bringing superior British values of law and justice) and ‘grateful savages.’ In a similar vein, Elka Winter (2011) has argued that the development of a ‘multicultural we’ defining English Canadian nationalism has relied strongly on strategic comparisons between this presumably tolerant English Canadian national identity and Quebec,
one of a steady progression towards liberal tolerance and civility through discourses of multiculturism.

By Thobani’s lights, then, “multiculturalism exalted nationals by rescuing their whiteness, giving it a new respectability,” through its supposed connection to tolerance of ‘cultural’ diversity, a commitment to gender equality, and a cosmopolitan, egalitarian ethic (Thobani 2007, 165). Indeed, as Kymlicka’s account shows, multiculturalism is typically presented as an extension of Canada’s long history of tolerance and as being a generally successful model for the accommodation of various (and potentially destabilizing) forms of diversity, thus covering over the construction of ontological distinctions between Settler and Savage and later Citizen and Immigrant that justified colonial violence, the expulsion and dispossession of Aboriginal nations, and racialized immigration policy which continue to underpin the asymmetrical expression of Canadian citizenship, despite formal reforms.

The success of such a narrative requires, again, a projection of tolerance and positive recognition of cultural difference onto the colonial past. In this idealized and ideological multicultural narrative, particular acts of violence and racial oppression can – when acknowledged at all – be projected onto an anomalous subset of white settlers unable to manage their prejudices, rather than being seen as central to the Canadian nation-building project or the which as a society has been characterized as by some as more communitarian than English Canada (and negatively presented as a threat to unity), while simultaneously being championed as a key example of the inherent capacity of English ‘Canadians’ to accommodate and celebrate the diversity of others. In some versions of this discursive process of English Canadian nation-building, Winter argues, the ‘immigrant Other’ is contrasted positively against sovereigntist Quebecois, where such immigrants may be strategically included as ‘better’ Canadians than those threatening the nation with collapse (see Winter 2011, chapter eight). The work of both Mackey and Winter on the strategic use of internal Others to construct the English Canadian nation as especially tolerant and accommodating of diversity complicates the narrative presented by Thobani and Bannerji in particular regarding the development of official multiculturalism as a form of containment of specifically racialized difference from above, but does not, to my mind, eliminate the value of Thobani and Bannerji’s own analysis. Instead, Winter’s attention to Quebec, in particular, adds contours which have not been substantively explored by Thobani and Bannerji, but which remain compatible with their main thesis regarding the use of multiculturalism narratives to manage diversity and celebrate the moral superiority of the English Canadian national.
rightful/‘true’ composition of the Canadian citizenry (Thobani 2007, 154). As Thobani writes, “instead of a critical examination and disavowal of the colonial experience, multiculturalism enabled a projection of the destabilizing effects of the crisis of white identity onto a small minority of recalcitrant whites who refused or were unable to mask their racisms. Its appeals for tolerance enabled a national amnesia regarding inconvenient histories” (2007, 154, my emphasis). This type of willful forgetting on the national level thus facilitates official multiculturalism’s ability to mask the “continuity of white privilege” by placing all persons on a formally equal playing moral field, erasing patterns of wealth, power and privilege that have been passed down across generations along ‘racial’ lines (Thobani 2007, 154). As Charles Mills (2007a) notes (in a critique of social contract theory that parallels Thobani’s critique of multiculturalism), this type of narrative – by merely asserting the formal equality and universal dignity of all persons – assumes the very thing that needs to be substantively argued for and established through political contestation and structural reform.

In contrast to Kymlicka’s naturalized and idealized account of Canada’s ‘diversities,’ Thobani’s critique further serves to emphasize the socially, politically, and politically constructed nature of cultural identity/community – as she argues categories of Settler and Indian, or later, Citizen and Immigrant, can only be understood relationally. Just as the colonial character of the white settler must be transformed into the exalted figure of the Canadian national, threatening Others must have their own qualities (read: inferiorities) constituted relationally out of a negative contrast with this exalted national. The image of the exalted, law-abiding, tolerant Canadian national, then, is created relationally and oppositionally in contrast with this Other, embodying the positive qualities the cultural or racialized Other cannot. Indeed, this Other is constituted as inherently possessing the qualities opposite to those of the exalted national subject, to the extent that this Other is thought to present a very real threat to this national subject, with the power to
potentially negate or undo the nation.\textsuperscript{19} Thus, through the adoption of official multiculturalism and the proliferation of these ideas in academic discourse and the ‘common sense’ of the majority, Thobani argues that multiculturalism has functioned not only as a mode of managing difference, but of constituting difference as well, shaping how cultural and racialized identities are perceived and experienced (2007, 145).

Through the historical amnesia and obfuscating power of idealized liberal multicultural narratives such as Kymlicka’s, earlier colonial narratives of Savage and Settler and distinctions between Preferred and Non-preferred ‘races’ within immigration policy explicitly designed to ‘Keep Canada White’ are reconstituted through the sanitized hierarchies of Citizen and Immigrant, Citizen and Citizen-plus.\textsuperscript{20} Similarly, although Kymlicka himself is not guilty of this, colonial violence and the ongoing imperial rule of ‘internal’ Others is often recast not as a narrative of brutal and ongoing conquest, but (if acknowledged at all) as a rationally motivated process necessary to the nation-building project.\textsuperscript{21}

Furthermore, through the ongoing – if informal – power of such distinctions in social and political life, the cultural homogeneity and whiteness implicitly attached to the true Canadian national remains the silent core against which all ‘difference’ is contrasted. And, while narratives of cultural tolerance and recognition have replaced explicit and once de jure racial distinctions and hierarchies within the ‘Canadian’ citizenry, multiculturalism has served to constitute cultural difference as the “most significant aspect of the nation’s relations with its (internal) Others,” limiting the scope of justice owed to these Others to positive recognition and formally equal

\textsuperscript{19} Kymlicka’s (2007a) careful emphasis on the power of liberalism’s ‘double-edged sword’ to effectively manage and constrain the claims cultural Others may make on the national community seems to support this critique.

\textsuperscript{20} See Cairns (2000).

\textsuperscript{21} Within colonial narratives, as Razack emphasizes, violence “is ‘fetishized’ as a weapon of reason and preservation of freedom of the citizens vis-à-vis the threats from outsiders – from internal enemies, and from those not yet fit for citizenship – slaves and colonial subjects” (2008, 15). For one such naturalized account of the colonial nation-building project, see Flanagan (2000).
integration (Thobani 2007, 149). The move towards official multiculturalism, then, serves to champion the moral legitimacy of the Canadian state – suggesting a generous level of accommodation for diversity – while greatly limiting the perceived need to address issues of structural domination and exploitation experienced by those marked as Other against this imaginary ‘core’ Canadian identity.

In a similar vein as Thobani, when identifying motivations behind the adoption of official multiculturalism in Canada, or what she calls ‘multiculturalism from above,’ Bannerji describes multiculturalism as an ideological solution to the colonial states’ “legitimation crisis” (2000, 73). In *Dark Side of the Nation*, Bannerji follows Marx and Benjamin in exploring ‘reactionary’ and ‘totalizing’ conceptualizations of culture and considers “the use of history as a mask of politics,” applying these insights to the adoption and practice of official multiculturalism in Canada (2000, 2). According to Bannerji, ‘elite’ or ‘official’ multiculturalism ‘from above’ operates as an “ideological apparatus of the state and its complementarity with the repressive apparatus of the state” (2000, 6). By Bannerji’s lights, such official multiculturalism becomes,

> a device for constructing and ascribing political subjectivities and agencies for those who are seen as legitimate and full citizens and others who are peripheral to this in many senses. There is in this process an element of racialized ethnicization, which whitens North Americans of European origins and blacks or darkens their “others” by the same stroke. This is integral to Canadian class and cultural formation and distribution of political entitlement.

(2000, 6)

Such a process involves pitting various ethnicities against each other in competition for recognition and government resources – undercutting the possibility of cross-cultural cooperation and resistance to the capitalist, heterosexist and imperialist state.  

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22 The suggestion that multiculturalism functions to position minorities against each other and reduce the possibility for cross-group solidarity has perhaps been made most frequently when characterizing the adoption of official multiculturalism as partly an effort to undercut Quebec (multi)nationalism by placing Quebec ‘distinctness’ on the level of all other cultural minorities (Moodley 1983), (Bannerji 2000), (Russell 2004), (Thompson 2008), and Winter (2011b), but arguably applies to the case of Aboriginal nations as well. Matters of land claims, treaties and
Within Bannerji’s analysis, which was in part the inspiration for Thobani’s, multiculturalism ‘from above’ originally served as a legitimation project emerging in the post-war period, strategically responding to increased third world immigration in the 60s and 70s and to moments of national identity/unity ‘crisis’ with respect to Quebecois separatism (2000, 9). Bannerji thus considers the timing of official multiculturalism in light of economic and demographic imperatives that led to the ‘liberalizing’ of immigration policy to allow for third world and non-white bodies to enter the nation (or at least the workforce) previously marked by hegemonic whiteness or Britishness. In this light, multiculturalism emerges as a strategy of ‘containment’ and ‘management’ of the threat posed by these Others, at the same time as their economic contributions are acknowledged as necessary to the ongoing nation-building project. Recognition of ‘multicultural Others’ also serves as a strategic means of undercutting more threatening concerns posed by national minorities – particularly the Quebecois – which have the potential to break up the nation.

For Bannerji, then, official multiculturalism serves two core ideological functions for the Canadian state. First, as a means of undercutting nationalist claims by both the Quebecois and self-government, indeed have political and economic ‘costs’ that go well beyond the recognition based model of liberal multiculturalism, a model which, as Kymlicka (2007a) emphasizes, has arguably permeated the ‘majority’ of Canadian’s common sense about matters of cultural justice. Thobani (2007) has suggested that the timing of these liberalizing reforms offered a more palatable solution to the demographic labor shortage emerging in this period than efforts to improve the economic capabilities of Aboriginals would have, as such efforts had the potential to lead to a further empowerment of Aboriginals to the point where increased claims for self-government could have been made, challenging the legitimacy and stability of the Canadian nation. Instead, liberalized immigration reforms tapped into nonwhite populations that had previously been excluded from Canada’s ‘preferred’ immigration criteria while still providing ‘Canadians’ with relative economic advantage by reproducing immigrants as sources of cheap labor through deskilling and decertification processes following admittance into Canada. Recent research has found that, despite over two decades of official multiculturalism ostensibly aimed at democratizing the terms of polyethnic inclusion into the political and economic national community, it will typically take nonwhite immigrants ten to twenty years to match employment earnings equivalent to what ‘Canadians’ make for such work (Wang and Lo 2007, 197, Aiken 2007, 73). Furthermore, this kind of discrimination is not limited only to ‘new’ immigrants, as research has indicated substantial earnings caps occur across racial lines for natural born nonwhite citizens as well (Pendakur and Pendakur 2007).
Aboriginal nations, and second, as a means of providing a normative framework from which to ‘manage’ and ‘contain’ the non-white/non-European immigrants who threaten to overwhelm or ‘flood’ the traditional Anglo-Canadian cultural community.

To establish this argument, Bannerji considers both the timing of the adoption of official multiculturalism and the socio-economic context of national disunity and racial inequality that multiculturalism’s adoption served to both naturalize and obscure. Unlike Kymlicka who portrays an intimate connection between the adoption of official multiculturalism and liberalizing waves of progress breaking down inherited hierarchies and enhancing liberalism’s full schedule of rights, Bannerji links multiculturalism’s adoption by the federal government to the economic and demographic imperatives of the Canadian state in this post-war period, as well as the pragmatic response to the ‘crisis’ of national unity posed by the Quebecois ‘Quiet Revolution’ and the increasing demands for national recognition and self-determination. As for the ‘immigrant’ populations the policy was ostensibly meant to serve, Bannerji writes,

There were no strong multicultural demands on the part of third world immigrants themselves to force such a policy. The issues raised by them were about racism, legal discrimination involving immigration and family reunification, about job discrimination on the basis of Canadian experience, and various adjustment difficulties, mainly of child care and language. [Multiculturalism] began as a state or an official/institutional discourse, and it involved the translation of issues of social and economic injustice into issues of culture.

(44, 2000)

In this light, rather than responding to the needs and realities of racialized immigrant populations, opening up the possibility of multiculturalism as an apparatus of political contestation, resistance, and solidarity, official multiculturalism became a means of managing and

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24 Richard Day (2002) has outlined the ideological use of what he calls the ‘Flood metaphor’ in depicting a sweeping tide of immigrants threatening to overwhelm Canadian culture. According to Day’s analysis, this metaphor has never been applied to European immigration waves, but instead, remains a means of highlighting the incommensurable differences and ‘threats’ supposedly posed to the Anglo-majority by these nonwhite ‘cultural Others.’ Day argues that this flood metaphor reinforces the idea that “incoming Others [are] not human subjects but natural objects, and [makes] it possible to consider state policy intervention as providing a ‘tap’ to control their ‘flow…’ With the help of the Flood metaphor, the diversity that threaten[s] Canada [is] simultaneously objectified, problematized, publicized, and rendered insoluble” (2002, 133).
containing the racialized others who could not be incorporated into the national community in the ‘ideological sense,’ because of their physical (non-white) identity and culture (Bannerji, 43, 2000). Thus, Bannerji concludes, multiculturalism was,

not a demand from below, but an ideological elaboration from above in which the third world immigrants found themselves. This was an apparatus which rearranged questions of social justice, of unemployment and racism, into issues of cultural diversity and focused on symbols of religion, on so-called tradition. Thus immigrants were ethnicized, culturalized and mapped into traditional/ethnic communities.

(45, 2000)

And so while not serving the substantive interests of those ‘multicultural’ others marked for recognition, management, and containment within official multiculturalism, the policy and its place within the popular consciousness of the Canadian national imaginary has served as both a form of legitimization for the colonial state – publicizing ‘liberal’ reforms to immigration policy and the fair integration of ‘diverse’ citizens while celebrating this diversity as a natural and enduring fact of Canadian life – and as a source of ‘rescue’ and international acclaim for the superior moral character of core, white settler and Anglo-Canadian majority. Indeed, because of official multiculturalism, the whole world now “looks up” to Canada, and the Canadian national imaginary is able to be formed around this false history of inclusion and tolerance, denying the reality that the Canadian citizenry is “[f]ractured by race, gender, class, and long-standing colonial rivalries” (Bannerji 2000, 74).

While enshrining principles of formal equality and positive recognition largely divorced from substantive reforms aimed at combating intersecting structural oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and ability, Bannerji concludes that official multiculturalism allows Canada to remain a “liberal democracy with a colonial heart” (2000, 75). By endorsing this conclusion, I argue with Bannerji that, “images of a multicultural mosaic tend to mask over histories of white privilege and engravings of conquest, war, and exclusion,” thus sanitizing the colonial past and serving to give an unwarranted historical legacy to the Canadian state’s generous ‘toleration’ of
Others through abstract and idealizing narratives of liberal progress and the myths connecting ‘inclusion’ with equality (Bannerji summarized in Dhamoon 2009, 6). 25

For Bannerji, the discourse of diversity depoliticizes and privatizes cultural identities and ensuing political and economic inequalities. Indeed, she argues that official narratives of diversity accommodation rely

on reading the notion of difference in a socially abstract manner, which also wipes away its location in history, thus obscuring colonialism, capital and slavery. It displaces these political and historical readings by presenting a complex interpretive code which encapsulates a few particularities of people’s cultures, adding a touch of reality, and averts our gaze from power relations of differences which continue to organize the Canadian public life and culture.

(Bannerji 2000, 51)

In this way, Bannerji’s critique demonstrates how multiculturalism “functions as an epistemology of occlusion which displaces the actual living subjects, their histories, cultures and social relations, with ideological constructs of ethnicity” (2000, 11).

Bannerji’s discussion of liberal multiculturalism as a legitimizing tool for colonial states has thus been echoed by Thobani’s later attempts to draw explicit connection between the adoption of official multiculturalism and the need to perform a psychological and institutional ‘rescue’ of whiteness and its structures of domination and privilege in a colonial setting such as Canada. Unlike liberal narratives of always already emerging tolerance and benevolence towards ‘difference,’ such post-colonial critiques tell a different story of Canada’s colonial nation-building project, a project premised on the dispossession and exploitation of Aboriginal bodies and land and later sustained through both explicitly and subtly racist doctrines of citizenship, settlement, and labor.

25 For an interesting challenge to this post-colonial critique of Canadian national identity as fundamentally shaped by colonial dispossession and white supremacy, see John Ralston Saul (2008), who defends a thesis defining Canada as a ‘Métis nation’ rather than a society of European inspiration or triumphalism, a reality which he argues is now occluded by ineffectual and anti-colonial elites.
While these post-colonial scholars suggest that this historical myopia is made possible through a theoretical preoccupation with culture that precludes an interrogation of power and whiteness, focusing on recognition and integration rather than antiracism, liberation, and the critical interrogation of white privilege and structures of domination and oppression, I argue a more compelling explanation for this masking is to be found within Mills’s theory of white ignorance, which I seek to apply to the ideological biases within such theorizing about justice and within liberal theory in particular. In other words, an application of Mills’s critique arguably helps to better explain why idealized theories of multicultural justice, like Kymlicka’s, fail to provide a substantive rejection of the historical and contemporary arrangements of power and privilege along racialized lines within Canada. Rather than being a matter of limited scope or the product of a set of particular intellectual inclinations, Mills’s work suggests that such biases embedded are the result of deeper (although perhaps unconscious) desires to maintain the privileges of the status quo, such that those who are privileged by this racialized status quo will experience a cognitive inclination towards remaining ignorant of the ways in which they are structurally privileged.

In his work, Mills uses the term ignorance “to cover both false belief and the absence of true belief,” and he is concerned with social, rather than strictly individualistic, notions of epistemology (2007c, 16). In his discussion of white ignorance as a deliberate brand of ignorance, willful forgetting, or “learning to see the world wrongly,” Mills emphasizes the

26 Such ignorance or forgetting may be called ‘willful’ in the sense of involving a choice not to interrogate one’s privilege. Such a choice is facilitated by biases within language and cognitive structures, helping to sustain this ignorance even, and perhaps, especially, among those who do not consider themselves actively prejudiced. Within the language of liberal tolerance and inclusion, such ignorance may be facilitated through assumptions of formal equality and colour-blind rights, obscuring structures of white privilege and nonwhite domination. Particularly within discussions of multiculturalism in Canada and within the study of ‘diversity’ within Canada more generally, this ignorance may be facilitated by coded language which structures these mainstream debates around accommodating and managing the claims made by ‘visible minorities’ and ‘ethnics’ – focused on recognition and celebration of ‘cultural’ diversity, rather than interrogating issues of racism, white supremacy and resulting inequality and discrimination (Peter S. Li 2007).
asymmetry between the epistemic position of whites and nonwhites, such that whites have the power to see or not see people of color, as they see fit (1997, 18). He writes, “what people of color quickly come to see – in essence, the primary epistemic principle of the racialized social epistemology of which they are subject – is that they are not seen at all” (2007c, 18). The power in this white gaze is asymmetrical, but also relational, and affects non-white’s self-perception as well.27 Mills cites W.E.B. Du Bois on this point, noting the common sense among non-whites of “always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (2007c, 19).

An important aspect of Mills’s argument concerns his emphasis on how cognitive structures perpetuate the effects of white ignorance and white privilege, regardless of a given cognizer’s racial prejudice or lack thereof (2007c, 27). For Mills, perception is structured by language, and because language itself is “socially mediated,” there is no possibility of ‘raw’ perception, no categories that individuals can use to order and make sense of their world that could be neutral, isolated from structures of white supremacy and white ignorance28 (2007c, 24). Individuals are thus constrained by these cognitive structures, and by the ideologies that help to support them, ideologies that are inevitably “shaped and inflected in various ways by the biases of the ruling group(s)” (Mills 2007c, 25). What this means, for Mills, is that while white ignorance perpetuates itself through strategic moments of forgetting, through processes that subtly serve to reinforce and sharpen the distinctions made between ‘full (white) humanity’ and ‘subhuman, animalistic (nonwhite) savages,’ this process is typically not consciously recognized. The project of structuring such ignorance may have begun consciously, sustained through once de jure racialized distinctions, but its contemporary manifestations need not be so.

Indeed, maintaining conscious ignorance of the processes perpetuating white supremacy is key to the project’s ongoing success. White ignorance, then, depends on cognitive structures

27 While I find Mills’s articulation of these ideas particularly compelling, his critique of the asymmetries of the white gaze is echoed in the work of Patricia Williams (1992), Sherene Razack (1998), and others.
and linguistic processes that work to ensure that white privilege has been “conceptually erased” from the cognition of those benefiting from it (Mills 2007c, 28). In an era promoting notions of ‘color-blind’ equality, and shallow celebrations of cultural diversity, this conceptual erasure can take the form of assimilating whites “as putative equals to the status and situation of nonwhites on terms that negate the need for measures to repair the inequities of the past,” thus conjuring up an equal starting point from which whites owe nonwhites no reparations or further structural reforms (Mills 2007c, 28).

In this way, the “evasive conceptual assimilation” (Mills 2007a, 98) of the status of white women and nonwhites into the privileged status of white men through liberalism’s commitment to the formal equality of all has the effect of obscuring ongoing, asymmetrical and hierarchical patterns of de facto structural privilege and oppression along group lines. I posit that liberal multiculturalism’s insistence on an abstract narrative trumpeting the achievements of the white polity’s tolerance and even celebration of ‘diversity’ within this formally equal framework only serves to exacerbate this inability or unwillingness to confront the inequalities that fundamentally structure social and political life as well as personal identity and moral psychology.

Indeed, even when promoting differential cultural rights, as was observed in Kymlicka’s narrative of liberal progress, there remains a sense of being post-racial and having triumphed over the worst of past prejudices, allowing for ongoing elision of enduring structures of racialized power. If racism and colonial violence are acknowledged, they are most likely, as Thobani’s analysis suggests, projected onto an anomalous and recalcitrant minority, making no impact on the national character of those full citizens who continue to benefit from this violence and oppression (2007, 150). In either case, there is a sense of having ‘done enough’ and a resentment
and backlash against further claims with respect to structural reforms and reparations. Indeed, such concerns are often cast as particularistic and self-interested, and therefore, private.

In this way, Mills’s analysis helps make visible the structures of cognitive and epistemological privilege embedded in mainstream treatments of cultural difference. My use of Mills in relation to both Kymlicka and his post-colonial critics seeks to explain the manner in which liberal theories of multicultural justice function ideologically to mask enduring white privilege within the discipline and the practice of multiculturalism. As Mills helps to demonstrate, contemporary ideal theory – and much of liberal theory more broadly – does not offer adequate prescriptions to address our highly unjust world. In particular, Mills argues that, by beginning with the assumption of a ground zero of equality and theorizing in the abstract about what principles rational humans would voluntarily select, idealized theories of justice fail to meet the needs of those who have been explicitly and implicitly denied access to full membership in the human community through processes of colonialism, forced assimilation, white supremacy and patriarchy (2007a).

By denying the central import of these different histories to racialized bodies, and failing to emphasize the manner in which these distinct histories will produce highly different concerns among persons, Mills (2007a) argues, idealized theories of justice do little to expand the experience of meaningful equality and justice to include nonwhite bodies. These shortcomings are particularly evident, he suggests, in the failure of mainstream political theorists to identify racial injustice as a central injustice of white settler states like the United States and Canada, and in the denial of white supremacy as a part of the ‘basic structure’ of these liberal democracies.

29 Such resentment and backlash may result even when the ‘costs’ of diversity accommodation occur on a much more limited scale. For example, when performing field research into the construction of a ‘core’ unmarked dominant national group (silently defined through whiteness) and its ‘multicultures,’ Mackey observed a common expression of resentment towards the funding of ‘special’ groups of ‘every nationality’ except this unmarked and thus normative Canadian-Canadian identity, along with a need to establish a ‘fine line’ between recognizing ‘uniqueness’ or difference and actually offering any ‘special privileges’ or ‘special rights’ to those marked as Other (2002, 104, 142, 148).
with colonial hearts. Moreover, these ideals are designed with the needs and history of a particular – white, male, able-bodied and middle-class – population in mind, and, as such, are often limited to the particular concerns of this privileged subset. Drawing from Mills’s critique of the necessary exclusions embedded within the mainstream social contract, I argue liberal egalitarianism more generally is an apparatus “originally designed for a population with a different history and facing a different set of problems” and so is largely limited to addressing the concerns of the privileged subset of white heterosexual males connoted with the rights and capacities of full humanity (2007a, 111).

What Mills’s theory of white ignorance further underscores is that this limitation is not neutral, but rather, is an ideological mechanism of white supremacy. On the latter point, Mills (2007a) suggests that mainstream political theory and philosophy’s preoccupation with ideals of justice, rather than attempts to provide normative prescriptions for injustice, is motivated by an ideological bias that reinforces the white privilege of the status quo, both in the discipline of political philosophy and in wider society. The first of these objections to the contemporary practice of ideal/idealized theories of justice in Mills operates as an ideological function of the second, in that the ideals produced by mainstream political theory will be ill equipped to deal with the realities of racial and gendered oppression they mask through strategic abstractions.\(^\text{30}\)

Mobilizing a naturalized and privatized conception of cultural identity and denying the ongoing impact of histories of colonialism and resistance that have shaped these cultural identities and communities arguably serves as one such form of ideological abstraction within theories of liberal multiculturalism that reproduces the inequalities of the status quo while distracting from the need to interrogate or fundamentally challenge these same inequalities through narratives of liberal progress and multicultural recognition.

\(^30\) For a different but instructive critique of the inadequacies of contemporary ideal theory, emphasizing the inability of ideal theory to adequately attend to matters of scarcity and noncompliance in a starkly nonideal world, see Colin Farrelly (2007). For a direct response to the criticisms of ideal theory made by Mills, see Adam Swift (2008).
The ideological justification for such abstractions recalls Mills’s theory of white ignorance, according to which, “the group interests of the privileged, and their resulting desire to maintain their privilege, will become both an ideational obstacle to achieving social transparency and a material obstacle to progressive change” (2007a, 99). Because of the very real barriers such cognitive biases may present, these need to be explicitly identified and theorized about. In this reading, then, “there is an additional category of cognitive obstacles that are generated by the vested interests in the established order of the dominant group, and their differential power over social ideation” (Mills 2007a, 99). By Mills’s logic, with the differentiated privileges attached to one’s social location comes a differential investment in maintaining these relations and one’s relative privilege within them. Those who receive both the material and psychological benefits accompanying white supremacy, in other words, have a far greater investment in denying the exclusionary and exploitative nature of this arrangement.31

One’s relative position in this hierarchy, I will attempt to argue more fully in subsequent chapters, points to one’s potential for moments of cognitive clarity, i.e. the potential to move beyond an epistemology of ignorance towards seeing the world as it really is (here implying a critical realist perspective,32 which relies on the objective ability of some positions to demystify and reject other ‘universal’ positions which are in fact based on principles of white supremacy and the division of bodies into sub/personhood). Maintaining a critical realist commitment to the reality and importance of social groups and the potential for subjective experience to have objective value helps to justify the inclusion of subjugated knowledges in public dialogue and

31 See Alcoff (2007) for a more in-depth analysis of the gendered intersections of this cognitive investment and motivation.
emphasizes the importance not only of recognizing differences but ensuring these are represented in political and economic positions of power. 33

In contrast, by failing to identify intersecting oppressions within the cultural majority, or to interrogate the necessity of ‘difference’-based exclusions in the maintenance of white privilege, theorists of liberal multiculturalism like Kymlicka apply culturally particular standards of value and justice onto those cultural Others whose ongoing exclusion remains the foundation of white material and psychological privilege. This uncritical application has the effect of denying the need to challenge racialized and heterosexist hierarchies within society while abstracting liberal standards from their own historical roots in white supremacist patterns of colonialism and slavery. This theoretical move obscures the fundamental ontological exclusions embedded within the liberal theory of the self and the subsequent discussions of which bodies are owed justice.

Indeed, in Kymlicka – when mentioned at all – impacts of ‘race’ and racism are treated as anomalous to the general character of the Canadian political community and as now (mostly) successfully divorced from its basic liberal-democratic institutional arrangements. Multicultural policy has, by Kymlicka’s lights, successfully permeated government institutions and the popular consciousness of the Canadian citizenry, achieving its goal of renegotiating ‘fair’ terms of integration for the cultural Others who – if not so well managed – could pose a serious threat to the stability, prosperity, and guiding moral foundations (liberal freedom and equality) of Canadian society. Indeed, much of the tenor of Kymlicka’s work, particularly Finding Our Way

33 While I adopt a critical realist stance, which assumes that differing subject positions within more or less privileged social locations lend themselves towards uneven motivation for self-reflection on one’s own privilege and relative willingness to disrupt the status quo, this assumption does not entail a universal commitment to the disruption of privilege on the side of the oppressed, nor does it imply an inability among the structurally privileged, for example, white males, to think critically and even reject their privilege. The logic of ignorance, as I adapt it from Mills, merely assumes that greater cognitive barriers tend to exist among the relatively privileged, although all privilege and subject formation is taken to be relational, rather than bounded or absolute within my account.
(1998), has the goal of reassuring the English-Speaking and supposedly exceptionally liberal and tolerant Canadian majority that the special rights and status granted to these cultural Others are safely within the bounds and limits of their own liberal commitments, and that no transgression outside these limits will be justified or permitted by the liberal multicultural framework.

The unproblematic application of liberal standards, and the slide between these culturally specific standards towards universalist pretensions also denies the intimate connection between the development of liberal ideals and the hierarchical ordering of persons along racialized and gendered lines (excluding women and non-white bodies from the fully rational and fully human community) that helped justify the European imperialist project and the colonization of what would become Canada. By highlighting this intimate connection, I mean to emphasize the enduring and necessary relationship found between these imperial ideas (and the hierarchy of persons they relied on) and the liberal self. It is equally important to emphasize such a connection, however, because of the ideological manner in which denying this connection between the development of imperialist projects and liberal values can be an important part of the legitimation process for colonial states.

A willful forgetting of the violent colonial past, replaced with a narrative of cultural accommodation and recognition, arguably goes a long way towards denying any such necessary connection between the imperial and ‘liberal’ character of colonial states like Canada and its racialized divisions of citizenship. Indeed, as was seen with Thobani and Bannerji, the legitimizing project of nation-building in colonial settings like Canada’s has been a major motivating factor in the adoption and promotion of official state multiculturalism. Here, official multiculturalism is intimately connected with the Canadian state’s ongoing attempts to shift its national image from a colonial settler state premised on white supremacy and the erasure of Aboriginal bodies both ontologically and spatially to an exceptionally tolerant, urbane and cosmopolitan liberal democracy.

Conclusion
In my ongoing efforts to highlight the necessarily exclusionary nature of the liberal subject, I trace the origins of this exclusionary subject to the imperial and patriarchal contexts in which principles of Enlightenment liberalism were developed. In this way, I mean to suggest that the core principles of liberalism cannot be wrested away from their exclusionary origins.

Rejecting the ontological divisions of Self (embodying the capacities and dignity of full humanity, a humanity which is necessarily constructed in wholly self-referential and exclusionary terms) and Other (the perpetually irrational, primordial, and threatening to Self and society) poses a fundamental threat to the exploitative privilege that makes ‘autonomous’ life possible for the liberal subject. Such ontological divisions, therefore, remain an essential building block of this subject’s realization and embodiment. If this is the case, formal extensions of equality and multicultural recognition cannot transcend the fundamental ontological divisions of race, gender, and sexuality written into the liberal subject. While now formally renounced, these divisions remain politically salient, impacting one’s material and psychological life.

The problem of liberal multiculturalism is therefore not simply the unjust application of the culturally specific standards of the ‘majority’ under the guide of universality or neutrality. Rather, it is these standards themselves that must be interrogated and, in many cases, rejected. They are not culturally specific and yet apolitical or harmlessly relativistic – they are in large part the ideological product of white supremacy, patriarchy, heterosexism and imperialism, serving as a flexible means of both justifying and covering over the ongoing impacts of these forces of domination within liberal-democracies and within the liberal subject itself. In this way, I argue,

34 In his work tracing the racialized hierarchies embedded in the development of Enlightenment liberalism conceptualization of the self, Mills argues that Immanuel Kant must be recognized as “the father of the modern concept of race” (1997, 70). While this aspect of his work is not typically focused on, Kant developed a colour-coded hierarchy based on ‘innate talent’ where ‘talent’ stands in for ‘nature’ and ‘white’ represents the highest position on Kant’s racial order (marking white subjects as the most rational and therefore moral), followed by ‘yellow,’ ‘black,’ and then ‘red’ (Mills 1997, 71). In this way, Mills suggests, “the famous theorist of personhood is also the theorist of subpersonhood,” marking inherent inferiority along racialized lines, although this distinction is far less known (1997, 70).
liberal theory cannot escape its own exclusionary logic – its ideals cannot be extended to all
because the realization of liberal selfhood and liberal democratic citizenship for some relies on
the construction and exploitation of some excluded Others – those deemed incapable or unworthy
of membership in the human community (or at least worthy of unfettered access to it in public,
political space) as the result of some naturalized (and, thus, privatized) ‘difference.’

The impossibility of meaningfully extending the liberal promise of universal equality and
liberty to previously excluded bodies is, I argue, particularly evident in the case of liberal
multiculturalism. Here, well-meaning and self-serving motivations alike have produced
obfuscating narratives of culture and recognition that have ultimately served to reproduce and re-
legitimize the status quo. The greatest achievements of multiculturalism in Canada have not been
borne out in substantive, structural remedies to intersecting inequalities of gender, class, race,
region or ability. Several decades of official multiculturalism in Canada have not produced a
systematic interrogation of oppressive forces of racialized domination and white supremacy that
operate as fundamental cultural and political structures in this society. Instead, official
multiculturalism has served to gain international recognition for the Canadian state as a leader in
cultural justice, and to reinscribe the ‘Canadian’ national as inherently tolerant of ‘diversity,’ a
tolerance which is premised on and championed through a negative comparisons with some
multi-cultural Other constructed as inherently intolerant or backwards. This is an Other, as
Thobani has argued, who is thought to be compelled by some natural/eternal difference to exhibit
those qualities of intolerance and prejudice that the national wishes to deny in himself.35

35 As Thobani demonstrates in her theory of exalted subjects, the relational development of the
categories of exalted citizens and threatening Others depends on negative contrasts between
citizens and outsiders. In the case of ‘master narratives of Canadian nationhood,’ she argues, “the
national is law-abiding where the outsider is susceptible to lawfulness; the national is
compassionate where the outsider has a tendency to resort to deceit to gain access to valuable
resources; the national is tolerant of cultural diversity where the outsider is intolerant, placing
loyalty to ties of kin and clan above all else; and more recently, the national is supportive of
gender equality where the outsider is irrevocably patriarchal” (2007, 5).
I argue that attempts to approach multiculturalism differently are doomed to failure when relying on anything but a fundamental rejection of the liberal ideals of self and (its instrumental relation to) culture. Anything short of such a fundamental rejection/deconstruction of this exclusionary subject and its attendant instrumental cultural belonging will have the effect of reproducing and resolidifying the status quo. For this reason, I make my critique of liberal multiculturalism on the basis of an interrogation and rejection of the exclusionary and exploitative logic of liberalism. In this effort, I attempt to draw to center stage what is often acknowledged by post-colonial critics of multiculturalism in passing – that liberalism has proven an inadequate vehicle for struggles against naturalizing and exploitative regimes of ‘difference’ because of the ontologically separate (from history, from context, and from other persons) and apolitical conception of identity the liberal subject relies on. And so, while Rita Dhamoon notices that the theoretical inclination towards cultural essentialism within Kymlicka’s liberal multiculturalism is partially the result of the “liberal need to categorize the self as a coherent entity” (2009, 22), and Bannerji has observed that “the liberal empiricist method of thinking in terms of single issues” has served the ideological purpose of denying the need to theorize about intersecting oppressions (1995, 52), I wish to put such criticisms center stage.

In so doing, I hope to trace the links between the fundamental ideals of liberalism and the impossibility of extending their promise to those whose bodies have marked them as unfit for the duties and privileges of autonomous self-direction. Liberalism was conceived of and is implicated in contexts of white supremacy, patriarchy, and colonialism. As a modified version of liberalism, I suggest Kymlicka’s liberal multiculturalist position (and the official state multiculturalism he endorses) is similarly implicated in and intimately connected to these patterns of colonialism, white supremacy and patriarchy as they continue to operate in the Canadian context. Sanitizing this history through an ideological reliance on carefully delineated theoretical

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36 For a more detailed account of the necessary connections between liberalism and colonial and imperialist projects of racialized economic domination, see Theo Goldberg (1993).
abstractions disguised as a moral commitment to universal equality and justice simply serves to
deny the enduring legacy of white supremacy and colonialism as politically fundamental aspects
of the basic structure of liberal democracies like Canada and as necessary to the logic of liberal
theories of justice.

What this analysis suggests is that, even if the motivations behind official adoption of
multiculturalism and their intellectual justifications and supports were well intentioned and
sincerely aimed at reducing inequalities among ‘diverse’ Canadians, there are theoretical and
ideological reasons why this liberal project is doomed to failure. Even if one rejects the intimate
connection between multiculturalism’s liberal roots and justifications and its ultimate failure as a
practical, political project aimed at changing the world for the better, the result of official
multiculturalism has been one of sustaining the structural oppressions of the status quo while
raising the moral legitimacy of Canada’s colonialist nation-building project. I strive, however, to
demonstrate both that there is such a connection between the failure of this project and its liberal
character and that analyzing this relationship helps point to the fundamentally exclusionary
character of liberal justice and selfhood.

In this effort, I do not presume to reveal many groundbreaking insights relating to what
the masking effects of liberal multiculturalism and their material consequences have been or how
liberal multiculturalism has failed in its own egalitarian premise – as this chapter has briefly
outlined, much of this important work has already been done by post-colonial scholars like
Thobani and Bannerji. What I hope to offer through my ongoing emphasis on the exclusionary
logic of the liberal subject and the ideals meant to facilitate this subject’s autonomous good life is
an explanation of why these exclusions remain necessary to liberalism even within explicit
attempts to extend the scope of liberal justice (as in Kymlicka’s liberal multiculturalism), along
with an interrogation of how this failure has remained largely unproblematized by the mainstream
academy. I will turn to an argument outlining the inherent limitations and necessary exclusions
embedded in such liberal articulations of culture’s instrumental value to individuals in the following chapter.
Chapter Four: Culture Matters

The reality of identities often comes from the fact that they are visibly marked on the body itself, guiding if not determining the way we perceive and judge others and are perceived and judged by them. The road to freedom from the capriciousness of arbitrary identity designations lies not, as some class reductionists and postmodernists argue, in the attempt at a speedy dissolution of identity – a proposal that all too often conceals a willful ignorance about the real-world effects of identity – but through a careful exploration of identity, which can reveal its influences on what we can see and know, as well as its context dependence and its complex and fluid nature.


We must also remember that liberalism, no matter who practices it, does not answer our real needs.

Himani Bannerji, *Dark Side of the Nation* (2000, p. 119)

While variation exists amongst the growing body of post-colonial literature critiquing liberal multiculturalism in Canada, the overarching claim shared by these theorists is that multiculturalism functions to mask, rather than address, enduring realities of structural subordination, problematically covering over intersecting gendered and racialized inequalities through hegemonic narratives of cultural recognition and inclusion. Here, liberal multicultural discourse is typically charged with a relying on a bounded and over-determined conception of cultural identity, which naturalizes and privatizes this identity along with other aspects of intersecting ‘difference.’ Relying on such a bounded and internally unified conception of culture, post-colonial critics suggest, denies the socially mediated experience of cultural identity and likewise ignores the external impacts contributing to the ‘development’ of ‘cultural’ communities, which they argue ought to be understood as hybrid, crosscutting communities with internally heterogeneous membership. Finally, post-colonial critics suggest, at the same time as culture is privatized and naturalized within multicultural discourse as a matter of strictly personal identity, it becomes simultaneously reconstructed as the only politically salient aspect of identity,¹ thus denying the

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contested/constructed nature of cultural identity and narrowing the focus of political inquiry to the exclusion of various other aspects of identity, including gender, sexuality, ability, class and race which may be equally important both personally and politically.

While not in disagreement with these criticisms in principle, I locate the failure of liberal multiculturalism not in its multiculturalism, but its liberalism. In this way, I suggest the initial masking of structures of domination and oppression that post-colonial theorists speak of is discursively performed through the liberal positioning of all individuals as formally equal moral beings, thereby assuming a basic level of equality already existing for all that need only be supplemented through the language of positive recognition of various forms of ‘difference.’ Such a focus on the supplementary role of recognition, then, by assuming that basic equality is already available to all, distacts from the need to address the ongoing, informal and unequal positioning of racialized citizens through more radical processes of decolonization, liberation, resistance and political activism and critique. Similarly, I suggest the inclination towards the naturalization and privatization of cultural identity within liberal multiculturalism stems not from the overemphasis on culture in itself, but is rather a product of the liberal commitment to the division of public and private selves and lives which justifies the privatization of ‘minority’ cultural practice/belief while largely erasing the majority’s own cultural particularities, presenting these as impartial values with universal appeal.

Instead of shying away from a central emphasis on culture, as some post-colonial scholars suggest ought to be done, I wish to highlight the ubiquity of culture – marking the dominant liberal-leaning Anglo-European majority in Canada as explicitly cultural, for example – as well as emphasizing the embeddedness in multiple and contested cultural horizons which all persons experience to some (varying but always important) degree. By emphasizing these two aspects of cultural membership together I mean to suggest that all persons can be thought of a cultural beings, produced by and productive of collective horizons of cultural belief and collective experience. In part, then, my focus on the ubiquity of culture serves as a response to those post-
colonialists, notably Rita Dhamoon, who critique the dominant liberal articulations of multiculturalism put forward by both Will Kymlicka and Charles Taylor for utilizing ‘culture’ to refer almost exclusively to non-Western groups while failing to recognize the culturally particular standards of the ‘majority’ in question (2006, 358).

In the case of Canada (and perhaps other ‘Western’ settler states), then, I am attempting to draw an explicit connection between the ‘dominant’ Anglo-European majority and the particular cultural content read into this majority’s supposedly neutral ‘liberal-democratic’ commitments, or its ‘civic’ nationalism. To my mind, the ‘cultural’ features of this liberalism include:

1) Its inextricable connection to and development within certain historical narratives – mostly notably those of Enlightenment progress and European exceptionalism, along with naturalized social contractarian accounts of the formation of society/ideal society based on ‘consent,’ and the reliance on myths of colonial ‘discovery’ and terra nullius to support imperialist ‘civilizing’ projects.

2) Its reliance on a central belief system: toleration (first religious, then later extrapolated to cover other ‘incommensurable’ differences), promotion of individual rights and freedoms, equality as sameness, public neutrality or impartiality as a political ideal, private diversity, and most importantly, the centrality of rationality as the source of human freedom and indeed human nature itself.

3) Its distinct account of the self (the autonomous, self-directed and self-interested chooser) and the form (if not also some of the content – measured by one’s perceived success at embodying this independent ideal) of the good life, which must be the product of choice narrowly and instrumentally defined.

4) Its linguistic component – while not defined in terms of one single language spoken, there is a distinct vernacular of individual rights and liberal constitutionalism that is particular and often exclusionary.

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2 The criticism as offered by Dhamoon – namely that culture has become a politically correct stand in for ‘race,’ and is used almost exclusively to differentiate non-Western subjects, who are considered culturally determined, from western subjects, who are presumably able to rationally choose among cultural norms, and are thus seen as committed to rational principles rather than irrational beliefs – has been similarly articulated by Anne Phillips (2007) in her text Multiculturalism Without Culture.

3 For a more in depth discussion of the differences between civic and ethnic nationalism, see Kymlicka (33, 2007c).
5) Its **Institutional components**: representative democracy, the capitalist economy (notably including the equation of freedom with the free market and the valorization of individual choice and consumption as the exercise of autonomy), and the welfare state – including a central focus on *public* education (and importantly the liberal emphasis on ‘citizenization’ efforts within public education to contribute to the *moral* education of citizens, with the corresponding assumption that issues like racism are best treated as the consequences of irrational individual prejudice or ignorance, which can be effectively combated through such moral (re)education) – along with the overarching commitment to public/private distinction as a means of ordering social and political life, defining which types of practices are permissible in each sphere.

And finally, and perhaps most fundamentally:

6) Its **epistemological components**: most notably the relating to the liberal, typically positivist approach to *objective* knowledge as dependent on the ability of the individual knower as rational and autonomous to transcend, objectify and otherwise distance themselves from the contextual and contingent. This exclusive focus on *reason* as the route to knowledge (and Truth) carries with it an assumption that individuals can and must exercise their rational capacities to comprehend universal principles transcending the particular, while choosing a plan of life from a critical and *objective* distance from these particulars. More broadly, the Enlightenment project within which liberalism developed carried with it an emphasis on positivist knowledge and instrumental reason, both of which are culturally particular and I argue limiting frameworks within which to comprehend the world and to identify and evaluate what counts as *knowable*.

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4 To my mind, such features of liberalism are rightly thought of as culturally particular and contingently related to the historical context(s) in which these ideals developed. Indeed, these features of liberalism match closely even with Kymlicka’s own definition of a ‘societal culture’ as being one which, “provides its members with meaningful ways of life across the full range of human activities, including social, education, religious, recreational and economic life, encompassing both public and private spheres” (1995a, 76). And, adding to this, at least within the Anglo-Canadian majority, these basic liberal commitments are strengthened by territorial concentration and a shared use of the English language, along with the language of individual rights and liberal constitutionalism. In emphasizing the cultural nature of liberalism, however, I do not mean to deny the reality of multiple and overlapping cultural horizons within which individuals are necessarily embedded. Instead, I assert the cultural nature of liberalism as a means of removing it from the pedestal of neutral and transcendent arbiter of cultural diversity (as it seems to be typically taken up in multicultural discourse) in order to include ‘liberal’ commitments and ways of viewing and knowing the world as simply one of many possible culturally distinct perspectives to be subject to critical attention, contestation and perhaps ultimate rejection or revision in multicultural dialogue and political debate.
While I will later attempt to more fully flesh out an alternative conception and defense of cultural identity and belonging, my aim in this chapter is to extend the analysis of post-colonial scholars beyond their critique of the theoretical preoccupation within liberal multiculturalism with matters of culture towards a more fundamental rejection of the liberal subject and the instrumental and fetishistic understanding of culture and community that Kymlicka, as a hegemonic representative of liberal multiculturalism, relies on. In this effort, I hope to provide a second layer of ‘theoretical excavation,’ adding to the conceptual clarity and explanatory power of these post-colonial insights, as well as potentially offering a remedy to some of the key criticisms launched against liberal multiculturalists by these scholars. In other words, I am not just concerned with identifying what the ill effects of liberal multiculturalism are; as the previous chapter has shown, post-colonial scholars have already performed much of this exposition stage admirably in the past two decades. To extend and supplement this analysis, however, I am concerned with first establishing why these observed ill effects and limitations are necessary and/or inherent failings of liberal approaches to justice and equality, rather than being anomalous to an otherwise effective liberal theory of justice; and second, with tracing how these ill effects are able to go largely unchallenged within mainstream theoretical debate on why and to what extent culture matters.

I offer my own critique of the inherently exclusionary nature of liberal ideals of culture and the self in part, then, as a way to clarify how these observed ill effects occur, as well as potentially responding to some of the key criticisms of culture as it is taken up by liberal culturalists such as Kymlicka. In particular, I suggest it is the primary focus on the (exclusionary) liberal subject as a disembodied and self-interested individual who may take up culture instrumentally that most hinders the ability of liberal theories of justice to utilize multiculturalism to help produce substantive equality for all. I argue it is this subject, and the instrumental use of culture Kymlicka assigns to it within his defense of multiculturalism, rather than culture itself,
which produces alienation, disrespect, and helps justify the privatization of politically salient and socially mediated aspects of personal identity within liberal discourses of multiculturalism.

In subsequent chapters, I mean to more fully demonstrate that my own critical synthetic (C.S.) approach can offer a clearer picture of what went wrong – and will continue to go wrong – with liberal articulations of cultural justice. By explicitly setting up my project as a means of separating culture from liberal articulations of its value, my approach seeks not only to critique liberal multiculturalism, but to offer an alternative account of culture’s value both subjectively and collectively, thereby retaining a concept of culture that may avoid and indeed may serve as an effective corrective measure for many of liberal multiculturalism’s mistakes, past and ongoing. To lay the groundwork for my critical synthetic alternative however, I will focus in this chapter on outlining prominent aspects of the post-colonial critique of liberal multiculturalism and responding to these objections by emphasizing their necessary connection to the liberal, rather than strictly cultural, aspects of such theories of diversity.

Post-colonial critiques of culture

In her recent work, Rita Dhamoon (2009) has consolidated past post-colonial insights critiquing liberal multiculturalism’s treatment of culture, identifying three related ways in which, “whether intentional or not, liberal multicultural theory obscures issues of power” (2009, 6). First, Dhamoon argues, liberal multicultural theory “reinvents the nation by forgetting the past and imagining the nation anew over the bodies of those who are marked as multicultural subjects,” thereby denying the power-laden and constructed nature of both the nation (as a colonial space of racialized exploitation and domination) and the ‘multicultural’ subjects on the periphery of this nation, who are presented as unproblematically defined by their ‘natural’ difference as cultural Others (2009, 6, my emphasis). As was shown in the previous chapter, Kymlicka’s theory is particularly prone to this type of collective forgetting, reimagining Canada as an always-already tolerant and steadily more progressive liberal-democracy.
Second, according to Dhamoon, “liberal multiculturalism expands the bounds of toleration but continues to assume the superiority of particular liberal values,” and, “by privileging liberal values, these theories continue to suggest that ‘different’ cultural groups should adopt the values of an already existing dominant culture” (2009, 7). Such assumptions about the superiority of liberal values must inevitably downplay liberalism’s “historical relationship to imperial and colonial ideas” (Dhamoon 2009, 7). This too is a highly problematic aspect of liberal multiculturalism. As I have previously argued, liberalism in fact cannot escape these exclusionary and exploitative origins, for its ideals are logically and constitutively embedded in them.\(^5\) I would add that this reliance on the superiority of liberal values is also deeply problematic because the acceptance and the adoption of these values arguably continues to stand in as a necessary demonstration of one’s sufficient ‘rationality’ in racialized colonial contexts like Canada.

Another harmful consequence of this assumption regarding the superiority of liberal values, as Dhamoon argues, is that it facilitates and helps justify state intervention into ‘illiberal’ minority cultures as a legitimate state activity. Thus Dhamoon argues thirdly that, “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 the state practices of governance that privilege some kinds of difference over others,” flattening out difference to strictly ‘cultural’ forms, and thereby hampering cross-cultural resistance and solidarity while serving as a form of legitimation for the Canadian colonial state and its efforts to ‘manage’ and ‘contain’ difference, funneling it into acceptable and state-sponsored forms (2009, 8).

In this way, Dhamoon effectively demonstrates that the reliance on culturally particular standards, promoted under the guise of ‘universally appealing’ liberal values of autonomy and

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individuality, continues to assume the superiority of liberal values as a means of evaluating and managing other forms of difference, and assumes further that, to be tolerated, cultural groups must liberalize and make their claims in the language of individual rights. Indeed, Kymlicka (2007a) approvingly calls this liberalism’s ‘double-edged sword,’ providing cultural rights to some groups, but along distinctly liberal lines that greatly restrict the scope and kind of claims that can be made. According to Dhamoon’s analysis, what is problematic about this ‘double-edged sword,’ in addition to this underlying demand of conformity to liberal values within a supposedly diverse cultural mosaic, is that such a commitment to the imagined superiority of liberal values presents liberal cultures, or dominant or majority cultures, as if they “were not fraught with social inequalities” and positions ‘inclusion’ as equivalent to ‘equality’ (2009, 6).

In her text, Dhamoon problematizes the concept of ‘inclusion’ for four related reasons. First, she suggests, “the language of inclusion depoliticizes the problem of power” by placing the emphasis on the supplementary and decorative role to be played by cultural minorities, focused on adding to rather than fundamentally transforming the ‘normative’ unmarked majority’s cultural character, and obscuring the exclusive control of the majority to set the terms of such inclusion (Dhamoon 2009, 37). Second, as previously noted, Dhamoon argues, “the goal of including Others into the mainstream falsely assumes that those who are currently included are equally included and that inclusion brings equality” (2009, 37). Denying this connection, Dhamoon goes onto emphasize that any existing sphere of inclusion “exists only in relation to a sphere of exclusion, [and] therefore, paradoxically depends on the continued denial of itself – it can be realized only if some subjects are excluded” (2009, 37). Third, inclusion often functions as a means of furthering “exploitation and domination” in the global marketplace – where multiculturalism is used to promote trade links, for example – as well as accessing cheap labor to promote the financial prosperity of the nation (Dhamoon 2009, 38). And finally, the emphasis on inclusion within liberal multiculturalism, again, has further legitimized the regulatory role of
the state, which must manage the ‘threat’ posed by such inclusion of difference – both to the
nation and to the ‘vulnerable’ within minority cultural communities (Dhamoon 2009, 38).

While I agree with Dhamoon that we must problematize the assumed connection of
equality and inclusion, I would argue that these are problems of liberalism, not multiculturalism
per se, at least not a multiculturalism reconceived as a critical means of challenging present
power-relations and exposing these as artificial and fundamentally unjust and necessarily
exclusionary. Yet, even if Dhamoon’s objections to the principle of inclusion within liberal
multiculturalism need not dismiss the value of non-liberal approaches to cultural difference, there
is clearly a vital need to detach narratives of ‘inclusion’ from those of ‘equality’ or, at the very
least, to move beyond the idea that the two can be unproblematically equated.

However, as Dhamoon is right to point out, it is the very collapse of this distinction between
inclusion and equality that enables the interventionist stance in part justified through liberal
defenses of cultural diversity like Kymlicka’s. Indeed, Kymlicka’s approach is focused primarily
on determining the ‘fair’ terms and limits of integration of cultural minorities into Canada’s
presumably egalitarian society. Furthermore, his strict reliance on liberal standards of value
allows Kymlicka (1995a) to suggest that when cultures do not provide a sufficient range of
options to their members, such that they fail to constitute frameworks for autonomous choice,
they may be subject to morally legitimate and even necessary interference and management from
the outside. This serves to flatten out and narrow difference in what I argue are both
disrespectful and epistemologically shortsighted ways. Moreover, as I attempted to demonstrate
in the previous chapter, what remains is an inextricable connection between the culturally
particular nature of liberalism’s supposedly ‘universal’ standards of moral and political
evaluation and the necessarily exclusionary and exploitative colonial contexts in which these
standards were originally developed, heightening the need to be suspicious of and ultimately to
reject many of these liberal standards and ideals.
However, by continuing to naturalize cultural differences as outside the scope of power, or as somehow untouched by the colonial settings in which cultural communities have developed and been subject to coercive attempts at extermination and assimilation, liberal theories of multiculturalism mask these colonial relations and deny the need to do more than positively recognize the particular cultural communities that satisfy liberal determinates of value. And, as Dhamoon has correctly emphasized, when communities do merit such ‘recognition,’ they open themselves up to further government intervention and even surveillance, and this management is, again, premised on the assumed superiority of liberal values and the right of governments to penalize those communities that are perceived to violate these values.

Indeed, Dhamoon argues that the central emphasis on culture within liberal multicultural discourse serves to legitimize and extend the interventionist reach of the Canadian state while simultaneously denying the colonial legacy of violence, expulsion and exploitation that has been fundamental to the formation of this state and the hierarchal relations still ordering its racialized citizenry (2009, 6). By relying on what is simultaneously a too narrow and yet an overdetermined concept of culture, Dhamoon argues, liberal theories of multiculturalism essentialize subjects and obscure the production of these by power. According to Dhamoon, fundamentally, this liberal focus on culture, “privileges one aspect of difference over others, obscures an understanding of the variation between and within cultural groups, and separates culture from other dimensions of political difference” (2009, 2).

Yet this is exactly why I seek to contextualize, politicize and radicalize the use of culture as a central explanatory device within my critical synthetic critique of and alternative to liberal multiculturalism. Such a critical focus emphasizes that culture operates both as an effect of power and as a productive source of resistance, solidarity and knowledge central to contesting

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6 As Gerald Kernerman’s theory of ‘multicultural panopticism’ suggests, however, this surveillance can occur both on the institutional and the interpersonal level, as individual subjects absorb the disciplining features of liberal multiculturalism and engage in ‘coveillance’ of their fellow citizens (2005, 99).
oppressive ascriptions of power and in facilitating good lives. But for Dhamoon and other post-colonial scholars, attempts to extend or alter the use of culture are doomed to repeat liberal multiculturalism’s past mistakes, and indeed, cannot but serve to mask issues of power and ongoing relations of racialized oppression and resistance by privileging cultural difference while denying the intersecting nature of oppression.

Indeed, when similarly critiquing the strategic use of cultural diversity⁷ as a means of obscuring unequal and racialized power relations in Canada, Bannerji writes,

The two ways in which the neutral appearance of the notion of diversity becomes a useful ideology to practices of power are quite simple. On the one hand, the use of such a concept with a reference to simple multiplicity allows the reading of all social and cultural forms of differences in terms of descriptive plurality. On the other, in its relationship to description it introduces the need to put in or retain a concrete, particular content for each of these seemingly neutral differences. The social relations of power that create the difference implied in sexist-racism, for example, just drop out of sight, and social being becomes a matter of a cultural essence. This is its paradox – that the concept of diversity simultaneously allows for an emptying out of actual social relations and suggests a concreteness of cultural description, and through this process obscures any understanding of difference as a construction of power.

(2000, 36, my emphasis)

Thus, multicultural discourses of diversity are said to hollow out relations of power, abstracting away from the impacts of racialized privilege determined by past colonialism and present cultural imperialism in shaping the experience of cultural identity and the physical movement of racialized bodies, whether through ‘voluntary’ immigration⁸ or as refugees. This type of approach to culture is also argued to cast cultural difference as a ‘natural’ disadvantage – connected to incommensurable differences or essences that must therefore be relegated to the private sphere. Such an approach, post-colonialists argue, is not only oppressive but also

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⁷ A similar critique of the supposedly neutral language of ‘diversity’ has been made by Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), who writes, “Difference seen as benign variation (diversity)... rather than as conflict, struggle, or the threat of disruption, bypasses power as well as history to suggest a harmonious, empty pluralism” (2003, 193).
⁸ The significance of the ‘voluntary’ nature of immigration – and the subsequent rights and protections owed to immigrants – especially in Kymlicka’s theory of multiculturalism, will be explored in the sixth chapter.
divisive, ignoring intersecting oppressions, intercultural or hybrid identities, and possible common ground for solidarity and resistance based on these intersecting identities. Thus, the liberal culturalist position is charged with theorizing culture as a bounded entity, overplaying similarities within the ‘group’ and downplaying similarities across groups (Dhamoon 2009, 21).  

Extending this critique, Thobani (2007) emphasizes the manner in which multiculturalism not only problematically naturalizes and depoliticizes cultural difference or diversity as a neutral value for liberal-democracies to protect in the private sphere, but in fact also works to create and solidify difference as well. Referring to what she calls the ‘communalizing power’ of multiculturalism, Thobani argues that official discourses of cultural diversity in Canada construct communities as neatly bounded, separate cultural entities, unchanged by the process of migration and dislocation. Such entities are perceived as untouched by either the external factors within which their cultural practices take place, which change the histories and destinies of the nation, or by the changing realities within the geopolitical order. (Thobani, 149, 2007)

At the same time as multiculturalism works to divide ‘minority’ communities into neatly bounded and manageable cultural categories, however, the communalizing power of multiculturalism also serves to solidify the Anglo-European national community, emphasizing its homogeneity in contrast to the ‘diverse’ cultural peripheries, and similarly inscribing inherent qualities (this time positive) to exalted national subjects.

Primarily in the case of those ‘multicultures’ whose diversity simultaneously supplements and threatens the supremacy of this core national ‘we,’ however, there is an emphasis on the ‘deep and unchanging’ nature of cultural difference, as these communities are presented with funding and recognition to ‘preserve’ their cultural traditions, making the value of these

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9 Post-colonial theorists are not the only scholars to make this type of criticism, however. Another prominent critique of the overly-bounded and essentialized conceptualization of culture, particularly within Kymlicka’s theory, has been made by ‘post-multiculturalist’ Seyla Benhabib (2002) and will be discussed in more detail in the sixth chapter.
communities in this case contingent on their ability to remain true to ‘authentic’ traditions and practices, as though these are outside of power and untouched by external influence (Thobani 2007, 159). As Thobani writes, describing the organization of state funding around official multicultural recognition and inclusion in Canada,

Through the politics of state funding for particular multicultural organizations, activities, programs, and events, the state asserted its determination of which practices were rightly considered part of the traditional culture of immigrants, worthy of being given visibility and promotion... The policy advocated that their strangeness was not only to be tolerated but also to be preserved and made cannibalistically available for the nation’s sustenance and enrichment.

(163-164, 2007, my emphasis)

In this way, by providing a link to tradition which can be enjoyed cannibalistically by nationals, multiculturalism “would also help counter the alienating and depersonalizing effects of the modern life of nationals within an industrial society” (Thobani 2007, 165). Furthermore, by emphasizing the traditional value of cultural communities and their instrumental benefit to national subjects, this approach to multiculturalism serves to ‘discipline’ members of these cultural communities to reproduce those more patriarchal and politically conservative aspects of cultural practices in caricatured forms for national enrichment (Thobani 2007, 166). 10

While I generally share these post-colonial criticisms of liberal multicultural theory and practice, I argue, again, that it is the ‘liberal’ rather than the ‘cultural’ end of such theories that is responsible for these observed ill effects. As I have already argued in the second chapter, a critique of the exclusionary liberal subject to whom culture is said to ‘belong’ in theories like Kymlicka’s, along with other fundamentally exploitative liberal ideals such as the public/private

10 This emphasis on the preservation of minority cultural communities such that they remain available for the cannibalistic enjoyment/consumption by the majority is an aspect of liberal multiculturalism, which is, admittedly, outside of Kymlicka’s project. Rather than assuming cultures will remain the same, trapped in tradition, Kymlicka instead assumes the inevitable ‘liberalization’ of any cultures that hope to prove viable and worthwhile to their members. It is, however, an important example of the unintended but inevitable ill effects of liberal conceptualizations of culture’s value. Here, it is the culture of Others, rather than one’s own, that is to be take up for instrumental use and enjoyment, but the central figure – the self-interested liberal chooser – remains at the core of this dilemma.
divide and its use in naturalizing some difference as outside of the scope of liberal justice, provides what is to my mind a better explanation of the failure of theories like Kymlicka’s to address matters of power, structural oppression and racialized injustice, than those primarily identifying this failure with liberal multiculturalisms’ theoretical preoccupation with the concept of culture.

Thus it is the liberal interpretation of culture, rather than culture itself, which I am aiming to problematize and ultimately reject. It is important to do so, I emphasize, in large part because of how culture operates within liberal multicultural discourse. Indeed, culture is not given independent value in theories like Kymlicka’s, but rather the value of culture is argued for backwards from an account of the liberal subject as an autonomous chooser. In this sense, the concept of culture is corrupted by its articulation in a liberal theory of value, and I argue the masking effects of such theorizing are best explained by getting to the root of this liberal account – that of the subject who utilizes culture in an instrumental and fetishistic manner – rather than through a critique and rejection of the concept of culture itself.

Indeed, rather than rejecting culture as a central mode of analysis because it places the emphasis on (naturalized) identity rather than politics, I wish to bring power and politics back into discussions of culture by relying on a critical realist\textsuperscript{11} account of the crucial connections between subjective experience and objective knowledge, along with an acknowledgement of the always-already power-laden effects of cultural differentiation as a matter of political/economic opportunity, while finally emphasizing culture’s constitutive importance as a source of personal identity, values and beliefs. While I agree with post-colonial scholars who argue that the liberal culturalist model distracts from issues of structural oppression and ongoing white supremacy, then, I argue that interrogating the manner in which such articulations of culture are mediated

\textsuperscript{11} More detail on the critical realist approach to cultural identity that I will be utilizing to demonstrate the potential objective epistemic value of subjective experience will be offered in the next chapter.
through the instrumental benefits they are said to offer individual liberal subjects best explains this sustained theoretical distraction. Suggesting that cultural identity and communities are products of power – produced and reproduced through structural relations of colonialism, capitalism, and racialized and gendered domination – does not discount the material and psychological consequences of this membership, and indeed, tracing the patterns of power that have helped constitute cultural identities and communities need not negate the meaningful and even constitutive connection some may feel towards these identities/communities.

While I thus wish to retain the central importance of cultural knowledge and identity, I agree with Dhamoon that culture must 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” if it is to have any positive normative potential or epistemological value (2009, 17). I would add to this, however, that before culture may be taken up in such constructive ways, the theoretical baggage of liberalism’s articulation of cultural justice must be cleared away. As such, I find it most illuminating to apply a critique connecting the ideological exclusions embedded in the study of ideal/idealized theory in general to the necessarily exclusionary nature of the liberal subject as a means of explaining the failures of the theory and practice of liberal multiculturalism in the Canadian context.

After this may be done, however, I maintain the need to utilize the concept of culture as a central unit of analysis, albeit one thoroughly divorced from its liberal articulations. Unlike Dhamoon, then, who argues we must focus on “the processes of Othering rather than… on the subjects marked as Others,” I argue theorists of cultural diversity must find a way to do both. To my mind, we cannot make sense of these processes without a simultaneous focus on the subjects who are produced by and also creatively resist them, and, as a consequence of this, greater space
must be made for – and greater epistemological authority rightfully extended to – these distinct voices.12

Despite this difference in approach, however, my own efforts are best seen as complementary, rather than oppositional, to the work of Dhamoon and other post-colonial scholars who have articulated similar critiques of the mainstream liberal discourse on multiculturalism. In my efforts throughout this text, I therefore attempt to add to the explanatory power of such critiques of liberal multicultural theory and practice, building from the analysis of these scholars relating to masking functions of multiculturalism, but attributing the location of such masking effects within the liberal rather than cultural aspects of these theories.

By grounding my analysis in a primary interrogation and rejection of what I argue is an inherently and necessarily exclusionary and unjust liberal subject, I emphasize again that liberalism is itself culturally particular in a way that is intimately connected to a history and contemporary practice of white supremacy and (neo)colonialism. I reject liberalism, then, as a mode of defining, managing, naturalizing and privatizing difference in various forms, ranging from once explicitly gendered, racialized, heteronormative and ablest exclusions to a now more nuanced and insidious set of informal hierarchical relations which continue to relegate some bodies and beliefs to the private while exploiting and managing these bodies in public.13 While the slide from issues of race and ethnicity to ‘culture’ – particularly cultural recognition rather than structural transformation and self-rule – has indeed harmfully contributed to a perceived

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12 A fuller discussion of how such distinct voices may gain a ‘just hearing’ in political dialogue and debate will be made in the seventh and eighth chapters.

13 In his efforts to theorize the intersecting oppressions of the Racial and Sexual Contracts, Mills has emphasized that many gendered exclusions from the public sphere noted by second-wave (typically) white feminists do not apply in the case of many nonwhite women whose ‘public’ sphere of work is often the ‘private’ sphere of white households (2007, 181-82). More generally, ‘liberalized’ immigration reforms in the Canadian context have been criticized as providing a source of cheap labor to further the prosperity of the nation while maintaining the economically subservient position of many nonwhite immigrants through deskilling and decertification processes. On this topic, see Bannerji (2000), Sharryn Aiken, 2007, Thobani (2007), and Krishna Pendakur and Ravi Pendakur (2007).
elimination of structural inequality or at least a distraction from these realities, I wish to wrest culture from this exclusionary and limiting discourse by insisting on the political and power-laden formation of cultural identity and its effects, both masking and enabling.

Liberal articulations of culture may indeed problematically take culture as ‘given’ and then assume that the inequalities facing different ‘cultural groups’ are similarly natural or inevitable, as post-colonial scholars like Bannerji and Dhamoon have suggested. However, emphasizing the fact that these groups are in part the relational products of historical processes of colonialism and white supremacy, patterns of immigration prompted by these processes, and finally as resistance and solidarity responding to these same processes, need not lead to a rejection of the concept of culture or even the ideal of multiculturalism so long as these concepts are separated from the liberal articulations of them that currently dominate academic discourse and public policy and applied to all – not just ‘non-Western’ or ‘minority’ cultures.

In this way, I argue that developing a relational, contextualized critique of liberal multiculturalism as it operates in Canada necessarily entails unpacking the specifically liberal justifications for cultural rights offered by and used as a means of legitimizing the Canadian colonial state. Although culture is certainly taken up in problematic ways within liberal theory generally, and Kymlicka’s in particular, I argue the reasons behind this problematic usage are, again, not inherent to the use of culture as a central mode of analysis, but rather are best explained by tracing culture’s instrumental connection to the defense of the independent chooser as the primary signifier of value within liberal theory. In this way, my own objections to Kymlicka’s theoretical focus on culture are rooted not in a rejection of the concept of culture in itself, but in the liberal articulation and defense of culture Kymlicka relies on.

I object to (or indeed reject) Kymlicka’s liberal articulation of culture for three related reasons. First, as I have emphasized thus far, it is instrumental. Second, it is individual in the problematic sense of relying on an exclusionary individualistic ontology for both the justification of cultures’ worth and as a means of setting limitations on the ‘fair’ distribution or management
of cultural rights and protections. And third, it is fetishistic\textsuperscript{14} in the sense articulated by Iris Marion Young (1990) when first critiquing the ‘distributive paradigm’ of (typically) liberal theories of justice, highlighting the problematic overextension of the distributive metaphor to rights and opportunities, which are better seen as processes rather than objects or things to be distributed fairly by governments. In the following section, I deal with each of these objections in turn.

\textit{Critiquing Kymlicka’s liberal articulation of culture}

To begin, I further explore my objections to Kymlicka’s instrumental use and defense of culture, touched on in the second chapter. Recall that, under a liberal system of justice, Kymlicka (1989a, 1995a) argues individuals in ‘minority’ cultural groups are owed cultural protections because cultural frameworks serve as enabling contexts for autonomous choice. According to Kymlicka, individuals make sense of, revise, and reject certain values and plans of life on the basis of culturally endorsed patterns. Positive recognition of cultural traditions helps to sustain a sense that the choices one makes, informed by these cultural patterns, are worthwhile, and, as such, supports individual self-respect as a precondition of autonomous living. While individuals must be free to reject or revise particular cultural beliefs or practices, Kymlicka argues that cultural norms, linguistic content, history and institutional structures form a set of background conditions against which individuals may autonomously select their own beliefs, develop a coherent and unified sense of identity, and adopt various plans of life.\textsuperscript{15}

I argue that this instrumental connection assumed between culture and autonomous choice is problematic a variety of ways. In particular, Kymlicka’s instrumental defense of culture

\textsuperscript{14} In drawing my use of this term from Young, I define ‘fetishistic’ quite narrowly to refer to the reification of processes like rights and cultural membership as ‘objects’ imbued with instrumental and enabling powers that can, as such, be distributed by states to their citizens. Taken up in this reified and objectified way, cultural difference can also be fetishistically desired and indeed consumed by privileged outsiders through processes of cultural appropriation.

\textsuperscript{15} In the fifth chapter, utilizing the work of Linda Alcoff (2006), I attempt to demonstrate that persons are more deeply embedded in these cultural ‘frameworks’ than Kymlicka assumes.
champions liberal standards of value in potentially alienating ways, suggesting that only those
cultural contexts that are visibly conducive to autonomous choice can be considered valuable or
indeed permissible. As Parekh (2000) has also observed, this approach to culture can have the
effect of dismissing cultural forms that challenge the hegemony of autonomy as the ultimate and
universal human good within liberal theory. In this way, the instrumental approach limits what
forms of cultural practice can be deemed valuable according to culturally particular standards of
liberalism while implicitly denying the legitimacy of the grounds on which cultural practices may
be valuable to their members beyond this instrumental utilization of culture. Such an approach
also, as Dhamoon (2009) rightly suggests, assumes the superiority of liberal values while
obscuring inequalities and exclusions that plague those even within the ‘majority’ of formally
equal liberal democratic contexts, thereby substituting inclusion for equality, even while the price
of this inclusion comes on unequal, culturally particular and highly racialized terms.

Despite these objections, however, this instrumental approach to culture - namely the
potential for cultural communities to operate as critical contexts promoting autonomous choice
and the contestation and revision of individual belief – provides a primary motivation for
Kymlicka’s uniquely liberal defense of cultural belonging. Cultures must serve as frameworks of
choice for their members, then, and Kymlicka (1995a) is careful to emphasize that these contexts
remain valuable and worthy of protection despite instances of internal changes to the cultural
character of these groups, or indeed even large-scale transformation of values within these
contexts. This emphasis on contexts over any particular cultural character often serves as

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16 In his text, Rethinking Multiculturalism (2000), Parekh goes to great lengths to emphasize the
hubris of liberal theories of multiculturalism with respect to the centrality of autonomy within
these theories. Denying the universal appeal of this liberal principle, Parekh argues in favor of a
‘thinner’ set of principles, such as well being, as a means of evaluating diverse cultural practices
and beliefs through respectful intercultural dialogue. A precondition of such respectful dialogue,
Parekh argues, is a greater level of humility on the part of liberals when assuming the appeal and
validity of their own culturally particular commitments to values like autonomy and individuality.
More will be said regarding Parekh’s critique of Kymlicka’s liberal biases within his defense of
multiculturalism in the sixth chapter.
Kymlicka’s response to those post-multicultural or post-colonial critics who charge Kymlicka with relying on an overly bounded and static conception of culture.

Unlike those critiquing Kymlicka for relying on an overly bounded and homogenous conception of culture, however, I contend that it is not cultural groups that Kymlicka assumes to be overly homogenous – but, rather, the individual members who make up these groups, who are expected to value and experience their cultural membership in similar, perhaps even uniform, ways. In other words, because all permissible cultures are meant to serve contexts for autonomous choice, this instrumental articulation of cultural belonging relies on a particular account of the subject and the conditions conducive to the promotion of flourishing lives and denies the legitimacy (read exclusively in terms of an insufficiently liberal character) of other defenses of cultural value.

Kymlicka’s instrumental approach, then, downplays the value cultural belonging may hold intrinsically or at least independently from its connection to the facilitation of autonomous choice for its members, and primarily establishes cultural membership as a largely personal, private good, rather than a political, collective and epistemological one. Minority cultures (if they meet the standards of liberal autonomy) may deserve some collective state protection, but this protection still relies on a highly individualistic account of what value culture may serve and how culture will be taken up or rejected by individual choosers. This serves to marginalize those who would bring their cultural identities and perspectives into the political realm – not simply to be positively recognized or to be cannibalistically enjoyed by the culturally unmarked members of the national majority through shallow forms of difference (dress, food, dance, music), but –

17 There is a growing critique of the commodification of culture within liberal articulations of multiculturalism, which arguably promote multiculturalism primarily in terms of economic competitiveness – recall for example Brian Mulroney’s statement ‘Multiculturalism Means Business’ (Abu-Laban and Gabriel 2002, 110-111) – and shallow ‘song and dance’ forms of multiculturalism (Bissoondath 1994). Indeed for Dhamoon, multiculturalism can be understood primarily as the commodification of race and ethnicity for pleasure (Dhamoon 2009, 5). While the consumption of exotic cultural foods or the appropriation of cultural patterns of life is one
in order to contribute actively to political debates from these perspectives as a means of sharing knowledge, challenging the injustice of the status quo, and mobilizing cultural communities as sites of collective solidarity and resistance.

Thus, at the same time as minority cultural expression remains largely superficial and decorative rather than political, adding *colour* and *flare* to the Canadian mosaic, even these manifestations of cultural difference are carefully regulated by liberal ideals and proscriptions of value, justifying state intervention into cultural communities through state funding and recognition, as well as through the normalizing gaze of the ‘national.’ In this way, the manner in which difference is expressed remains based on ideals of sameness and unity, with the bounds of inclusion and exclusion carefully drawn, establishing where difference may be permissibly demonstrated and valued in ways predetermined by the dominant cultural frame. In summary, (multi)cultural difference is considered permissible only if it can be shown to be conducive to liberal definitions of autonomous choice, and if moral judgments derived from minority cultural perspectives are kept out of public debate.

Particular to the Canadian context, furthermore, is the strategic mobilization and symbolic inclusion of such ‘permissible’ forms of difference as a means of legitimizing and furthering the nation-building project. In her work assessing the language of multicultural policy and the strategic inclusion of ‘diversity’ within the Canadian nation-building project, indeed, Eva Mackey (2002) highlights the emphasis within policy documents on both the *symbolic* nature of multicultural inclusion, and on the ability of multicultural policy to effectively to define and manage the *limits* of ‘permissible diversity.’ Such ‘permissible’ forms of diversity, Mackey concludes, are largely limited to those groups demonstrating a willingness to contribute to problematic strand of this critique. Thobani has further emphasized that, in multicultural contexts like Canada, what is *reviled* is equally as important as what is admired or desired in the Other (2007, 169). It is ultimately the exclusive power of the exalted national to decide between which cultural practices are valuable and which ones are annoying, noisy, irrational or disgusting that sustains the oppressive power-relations of the status quo under the auspices of state endorsed cultural inclusion and interplay.
national unity and the ‘colourful’ cultural mosaic. In addition to limiting the expression and recognition of cultural diversity to largely symbolic (and individual) rather than political forms, then, acceptable forms of diversity are defined within in multicultural policy as those contributing to the nation-building project, such that ethnic groups are “mobilized as picturesque and colourful helpmates and allies in the nation-building project” (Mackey 2002, 66).

I submit that this supplementary and decorative role, in addition to greatly limiting the radical potential of multiculturalism, positions such ‘multicultures’ as symbolic representatives of the moral legitimacy of the Canadian nation-building project, permitted to lend ‘colour’ and ‘flare’ to the national community with the qualification that the colonial nature of this nation-building project is not interrogated and the established systems of wealth, property and representation are not overly questioned. Here, again, such an analysis echoes the conclusion of Thobani (2007) and Bannerji (2000) that official multiculturalism serves as an ideological form of legitimation for the Canadian state without substantively disrupting pre-established and highly racialized (and gendered) hierarchies of power and privilege.

Thus, even when diversity is endorsed as a public virtue, as it is in Canadian multicultural theory and public policy, this practice remains deeply problematic. For as Kymlicka’s emphasis on liberalism’s ‘double-edged sword’ indicates, such displays of cultural difference remain carefully regulated through conscious and unconscious norms concerning what constitutes ‘real Canadian’ (i.e. liberal) values, thereby determining what may (or may not) shape public policy and be visible in public life more generally. In other words, displays of cultural diversity are meant to supplement, rather than shape or fundamentally transform, such ‘Canadian’ values and

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18 As critics of liberal multiculturalism have noted, furthermore, when expressions of difference have ‘costs’ both in terms of funding offered to cultural groups or in changes to employment policy (for example, affirmative action) these are typically met with backlash and resentment. For example, when performing field research into the construction of a ‘core’ unmarked dominant national group (silently defined through whiteness) and ‘multicultures,’ Mackey (2002) found a common expression among interview subjects regarding the need to establish a ‘bottom line’ marking the limits of cultural tolerance, emphasizing the need to ‘put Canada first’ and allow
the relations of power and privilege they were developed within and continue to subtly justify and sustain.

These culturally particular standards are also racially coded and exclusionary, marking the core white, Anglo-European subject as the true and ideal citizen of the nation. While such exclusions are typically racialized, however, they may also operate on other hierarchical axes as well – as when articulated in terms of religious clashes between ‘Western’ and ‘Islamic’ cultures – going beyond a simple white/nonwhite binary. For example, in *Casting Out* (2008), Sherene Razack traces the public reaction in Ontario in late 2003 to attempts made by the Islamic Institute of Civil Justice to allow for the use of ‘Sharia law’ in the settling of disputes under the *Arbitration Act* (1991). While accommodation of faith-based arbitration following 1991 was practiced by Jewish and Christian groups, the proposed inclusion of Sharia law as another form of faith-based arbitration was met with public condemnation, framed in terms of ‘civilization clashes’ between ‘Western’ modernity and ‘Islamic’ pre-modernity and the threat posed by such ‘pre-modern’ and fundamentalist Islamic practices within Canada’s liberal democratic framework. Such a reaction, not previously experienced by the use of the Act by other religious groups, Razack posits, points to a clear boundary between who may rightfully belong to and see their identity reflected in public space (2008, 167). Thus, demonstrations of cultural diversity in shallow, non-politicized and non-religious forms are typically permitted

expressions of diversity to supplement rather than actively transform the ‘core’ Canadian identity, along with resentment towards the funding of ‘special’ groups of ‘every nationality’ except this unmarked and thus normative Canadian-Canadian identity, and finally, a need to establish a ‘fine line’ between recognizing ‘uniqueness’ or difference and actually offering any ‘special privileges’ or ‘special rights’ to those marked as Other (2002, 104, 142, 148). As Bannerji similarly concludes, “As long as ‘multiculturalism’ only skims the surface of society, expressing itself as traditional ethnics, such as arranged marriages, and ethnic food, clothes, songs and dances (thus facilitating tourism), it is tolerated by the state and ‘Canadians’ as non-threatening. But if the demands go a little deeper than that (e.g., teaching ‘other’ religions or languages), they produce violent reaction, indicating a deep resentment toward funding ‘others’” arts and cultures” (2000, 79).
within carefully demarcated public spaces, but expressions going beyond these limited forms will often be met with resistance, whether overtly hostile or more subtly exclusionary.

While diversity is thus valued in superficial ways, as supplement and commodified exotica for the ‘unmarked’ national ‘we’ to cannibalistically enjoy, deeper differences over fundamental values are relegated to the private to make space for an imagined public unity and common national identity. Such relegation arguably relies on a liberal conception of the need to restrict discussion of fundamental values to the private realm due to the assumed incommensurability of such values. I argue, however, that this approach to difference is deeply problematic, for such a privatization of ‘minority’ values or practices reduces the opportunity for meaningful contestation of power and dialogue while discursively erasing the colonial and neo-colonial hierarchies embedded within the privileging of such core ‘Canadian’ values in the public realm.

Yet, even while liberal multiculturalists like Kymlicka acknowledge that this restricted public identity is not culturally neutral, their commitment to the connection between social justice and the need for a common national identity to justify domestic redistribution, along with the reasonable limits of justice given a presumably self-interested (or at best, disinterested) polity, leads to an endorsement of this cultural bias in public. Public expressions of diversity, in other words, in addition to the other restrictions already outlined, are permissible only so long as they

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19 For examples of such carefully demarcated public spaces made available for ‘multicultural’ expressions, consider the manner in which multicultural festivals or Folkloramas specifically designed for such non-political representations of ‘diversity’ are typically distinguished from the presumably culturally unmarked ‘Canadian-Canadian’ celebrations at community events like Canada Day festivals or Strawberry Socials. For a good discussion of this, see Mackey (2002).

20 The relegation of ‘incommensurable’ values to the private realm is typified by Rawlsian (1993) articulations of the need to establish conditions of reciprocity in debates over fundamental political issues, decisions about which are thought by Rawls to be rightly directed by ‘public reason’ (implying the obligation for individuals to convey their political commitments in terms of publicly recognized standards and values) while allowing for the retention of particularistic, ‘ultimate,’ and incommensurable values in private. While Kymlicka rejects Rawls’ ‘political’ liberalism in favor of a comprehensive commitment to autonomy in private and public realms, I suggest his model similarly seeks to privatize values or at least to modify them to meet the requirements of liberal constitutionalism and individualism in public.
do not threaten social cohesion. And, again, most often these expressions must be cast in terms of supporting and contributing to national identity, unity, and the legitimacy of the Canadian nation-building project in order to be permissible (Mackey, 2002; Bannerji, 2000; Thobani, 2007). What is not explicitly addressed in such defenses of cultural particularity, as a means of maintaining social stability, are the structures of privilege and oppression that are also safeguarded by these logics.

Thus, Kymlicka’s instrumental approach to culture serves as a means of legitimizing the imposition of liberal standards to evaluate the permissibility of cultural contexts based on whether or not they promote autonomous choice, ensuring that minority cultural communities seeking inclusion will do so on strictly liberal terms, while failing to recognize the potential for alienation from the national community this imposition may cause. This uncritical application of liberal standards within the instrumental approach to culture has also been used as a means of dichotomizing or ranking communities or individuals within them.21 Perceived access to the status of full rationality and indeed full humanity can go hand-in-hand with one’s ability to demonstrate such an instrumental use of culture, and when such a demonstration is not made or deemed satisfactory, intervention is justified and the inherently inferior character of the multicultural Other is implicitly reinscribed against the racially unmarked Anglo-European citizen, who is deemed uniquely capable of satisfying the ideal of the unified and autonomous liberal subject.

In order to demonstrate sufficient rationality (and therefore moral autonomy or ‘maturity’),22 individuals must be able to take up and instrumentally utilize culturally endorsed

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21 As noted in previous chapters, such ranking of communities is particularly evident within debates about the status of gender in multiculturalism and the danger cultural protections ostensibly pose to women within ‘minority’ communities. For a representation of this, see Okin (1999).

22 My use of the term ‘maturity’ follows the meaning put forward by Kant in “What is Enlightenment?”: that is, the equation of rationality with intellectual maturity and the imperative to ‘have the courage to use your own reason’ or ‘think for yourself.’
values and practices, and those who do not (or cannot, due to presumed cultural ‘constraints’) will be deemed less free, and, implicitly, less rational. In other words, culture may be used to facilitate choice, but if this precondition is not satisfactorily demonstrated, cultural membership will continue to be treated with suspicion, or, indeed, treated as a threat to the autonomy of individuals.

In her text, *Visible Identities*, Linda Alcoff (2006) traces this type of suspicion with regard to cultural and other socially mediated collective identities throughout various strands of Western political thought. According to Alcoff, within liberal theory and even many of its postmodern and psychoanalytic critiques,

> the aversion to cultural identity can be explained as a result of its conflict with reason: if people cannot disengage from their culture, even if this amounts only to an imaginative disengagement for the purposes of reflective critique, then they cannot gain the critical distance necessary for rational judgment, and thus even their allegiance to their culture cannot be rational.

(2006, 53)

In this way, “one’s cultural or social identity must be objectified and judged before a loyal attachment to it can be rational,” a position I argue is clearly exemplified in Kymlicka’s commitment to the instrumental value of cultural belonging as a means of adding significance to individual’s choices (Alcoff 2006, 54). Again, this is a contingent value that cannot be granted unless the particular cultural community to which one belongs passes the liberal litmus test of autonomous choice demonstrated by the ability of individuals to distance themselves from and critically evaluate cultural practices, where the moral legitimacy of the community (as it relates to its worthiness for state protection and survival) depends on its demonstrated willingness to facilitate such individual engagements with and oftentimes rejections of particular cultural narratives.

This ability to distance oneself and to rationally and dispassionately evaluate particular cultural practices (or indeed the form of whole cultural contexts or communities) reinforces the ideal of the liberal subject as self-interested and independent, from others, and from social
contexts. Indeed, Kymlicka’s primary example showcasing the ability of cultural contexts to change over time on the basis of internally directed and individually chosen transformation is the case of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, where Francophone Quebeckers engaged in a political, cultural and economic ‘revolution’ aimed at modernizing and liberalizing Quebecois culture to enhance, among other things, the economic competitiveness of the aspiring Francophone middle-class (Kymlicka 1989a). This transformation thus included a distancing of Quebecois identity from previously central practices and attachments, most notably the prominence of the Catholic Church and agricultural ways of life. Kymlicka valorizes this transformation due to its assumed connection to individual will and choice, reflecting the ‘true’ desires of Quebeckers who were no longer served by or saw themselves reflected in dominant religious cultural and rural narratives (1989a, 167). Such valorization obscures important institutional supports and strategic advantages available to the intellectuals and civil servants presumably on the ‘vanguard’ of the

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23 In Reconciling the Solitudes, Taylor (1993) traces the development of contemporary French separatism to feelings of inadequacy and lack of recognition felt by the Quebecois intelligentsia after the Quiet Revolution. He describes the economic and intellectual climate in Quebec as one beginning to hit its liberal stride, emerging out of the traditional doctrines of Catholicism and rural life that had dominated its political culture previously to embrace many of the modern ideals of economic achievement, social progress and democratic mores already established outside Quebec. With this new awareness came a desire to prove oneself, Taylor argues, felt strongly by Quebec’s intellectual and professional class. Taylor writes, “in so far as they identified as French-Canadians, they were nagged by a sense of collective inferiority in those fields that they prized” (1993, 14). According to Taylor’s analysis, then, it was therefore essential that Quebec distinguish itself in those areas, that as a society it produce reforms and improvements, and importantly that those achievements would receive recognition outside Quebec. These developing feelings in the Quebecois intelligentsia were coupled with a sense of growing resentment towards the dominance of Quebec big business by English Canadians, which only increased the desire to break out of the shadow of their Anglophone neighbors and make a name for Quebec in Canada and internationally. Although Taylor is careful to note that giving “too rational and utilitarian” an account of motivations for French separatism would be a mistake, he does cite this as a major contributing factor (1993, 13).

24 Examples of these institutional supports and strategic advantages may include federalism itself, as a constitutionally guaranteed means of power sharing between provincial and national territorial units, as well as the size and concentration of the Quebecois population within the province of Quebec. As many commentators on diversity in Canada have emphasized, many of the political and symbolic advances made promoting Quebec minority nationalism have been pragmatically necessitated by the reality that only Quebec – unlike Aboriginal nations, or
Quiet Revolution, and fails to account for the manner in which a ‘linked-fate’ determined by shared European ancestry and visible whiteness continues to privilege the political legitimacy and practical gains made by proponents of Quebecois self-determination and autonomy in Canada.

Moreover, even this (often grudging and largely symbolic) extension of the rights and privileges of nationhood to Quebec – popularized following the Quiet Revolution and the visible ‘liberalizing’ of its ‘societal culture’ – was won only after the Quebecois began to formulate their demands in a distinctly liberal language and only after those ‘cultural’ practices that were once central were objectified and rejected in favor of more ‘modern’ and individualist commitments. Transgressions of the liberal character of Quebecois identity, such as the sign laws that have restricted the usage of English on Quebec businesses, continue to be held up by some commentators as reasons to deny any further recognition and enforcement of Quebecois self-determination, whether symbolic or otherwise, in a way that also points to the necessary connection between the ability to objectify and individualize culture and the perceived moral right to maintain it. Such a view of the instrumental nature of cultural membership thus remains premised on a distinctly self-interested and independent ideal liberal subject, and those cultural communities that do not – or will not – provide the conditions under which members may unproblematically conform to this ideal will be subject to ranking, not only on the basis of their permissibility, but on their modernity as well. Unwillingness to transform ‘illiberal’ communities from the inside will operate as a mark of the inherently oppressive nature of that particular context, often signaling its ‘backwardness’ as well.

A better understanding of how this ranking might occur can be developed through attention to my second objection to Kymlicka’s liberal use of culture – that it relies on a problematically individualized social ontology. Indeed, for Kymlicka, culture belongs to, and is

‘polyethnic’ groups – has the present size and demographic concentration necessary to potentially ‘break-up’ the country through official separation.

25 For a discussion of the implications of language laws in Quebec for individual rights, see Taylor (1993).
valued because of its *use* to, the liberal individual. Communities have no independent moral value, but they are, as the above points have emphasized, instrumentally valuable to individuals. On their own, then, cultural communities are owed no special protections. But as contexts for individual choice, some collective protections may be afforded to cultural communities to reduce the risk of external, unwanted assimilation by institutionally privileged majority cultures.

As an ideal, then, the liberal subject remains pre-cultural, disembodied, unified, rational, and (therefore) autonomous. Yet this ideal has not been – and I argue, cannot be – applied evenly to all persons. While once explicitly meant to apply the rights and capabilities of full personhood only to (property owning) white men, liberal articulations of justice and freedom have since shifted to a formal extension of these rights to all in a way that arguably denies the ongoing impact of de facto hierarchies of rationality and indeed humanity along racialized, gendered, ablest and heterosexist lines. In liberal multiculturalism, despite attempts to generate a robust and flexible extension of both individual and collective rights accounting for the full range of human needs and experience, these exclusionary hierarchies remain.

In the case of liberal evaluations of permissible and impermissible cultural communities and identities, those who are thought to *have* culture but are not determined by it – typically those in the ‘majority,’ unnamed as white/European – are hierarchically distinguished from those who are deemed to be almost entirely directed by culture. Such culturally determined subjects are stamped with an eternal cultural essence that (it is assumed) can be read onto their bodies and life histories by privileged white knowers due to their visible Otherness. Their difference is perceived to be both ‘visible’ and ‘natural,’ and yet must also be subject to investigation and management by the culturally unmarked or ‘invisible’ majority.26 Beneath such assumptions,

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26 Razack (2008) offers an extreme example of this process in her discussion of racial profiling and the issuing of security certificates to detain noncitizens without evidence and to condemn them in closed trials in the post-911 era. In particular, Razack considers the production of the ‘dangerous Muslim man’ as incapable of reason – a necessary requirement for participation in the human community – an indeed, as a threat to those who are guided by reason and tolerance. The
there the line is drawn between those deemed capable (and worthy) of being self-directed individuals and those who are considered unable to access such freedom unless subject to intervention and ‘rescue.’

Such a false division, or rational hierarchy, abstracts such liberal evaluations away from considerations of unequal power and structural racism and sanitizes the ongoing effects of such exclusionary hierarchies by conceptualizing them as natural, cultural differences. Through this process, such multicultural Others are marked as culturally incapable of autonomous choice in ways that mask the necessary exclusion of some bodies from liberal freedom (recalling that, when freedom for some is purchased through the denial of this freedom to others, as the independence of the liberal subject demands, this freedom is necessarily rather than contingently exclusionary). Yet, what is so often lost in this liberal discourse on multiculturalism is that, when assessing cultural frameworks, it is crucial to emphasize that these liberal standards and ideals – even that of autonomy with its pretensions as a universal human capacity and value – need to be placed

identification of these ‘dangerous’ men, Razack argues, is facilitated by the kind of ‘race thinking’ that allows particular individuals to be – reasonably, the logic goes – profiled, such that the visible appearance of ‘looking Muslim’ can be enough to assume a set of values that are beyond reasons and outside the scope of critical revision. As a result of this profiling, and often little else, perhaps besides secret evidence and some reference to generalities drawn from ‘life history,’ such men can be excluded from the human community, and from any protection the law might offer – simply based on the possibility that their profile and assumed values might cause them to be a terrorist. No actual terrorist acts need be demonstrated, only the assumption of there being a reasonable possibility of a predisposition towards such acts, based on the logic of race thinking and profiling. Importantly, Razack traces this kind of logic back to colonial modes of thinking – which justified the suspension of the law when punishing colonial subjects who were considered beyond the scope of the law because they were deemed inherently incapable of obeying the law, given their irrational and unpredictable natures (2008, 31). Also key, as Razack emphasizes, is the assumption that, while whites are able to remain individuals, viewed as capable of rational justification for their principles, such ‘dangerous Muslim men’ become understood only as members of a group, defined by the assumed inclination of their group towards violence (2008, 33). This equivalency between individuals who look Arab and demonstrate the requisite life history and religious beliefs and the group membership these identifying factors presumably gesture towards, also provides for a sense in which these subjects are incapable of changing their views, because these assumed beliefs are like an ‘infection’ that cannot be shaken. Thus, rather than self-reflective individuals, those who fit the correct profile become inherently and irredeemably ‘Monster-terrorists’ driven to commit acts of violence as a consequence of psychological forces (Razack 2008, 47).
within their own culturally and historically particular context(s), as the product of specific political projects and, as I suggested in the previous chapter, colonial invasions and settlements. But, again, my analysis points to a need to reject liberalism and the specific value culture is said to hold for individuals within liberal multiculturalism, rather than necessitating a need to reject the concept of culture itself.

Finally then, as I also argued in the second chapter, the individualistic ontology of Kymlicka’s liberalism is ill-equipped to address matters of structural oppression because it denies the collective impact of such oppression as well as the relational, contested nature of cultural communities and identities. Here, I draw from Iris Marion Young’s (1990) theorization of the concepts of domination and oppression, both of which she argues operate on the level of social groups, rather than individuals.27 According to Young, oppression and domination are structural in the sense that moments of domination and oppression need not be the function of individual choices or politics, but rather, can be seen as a consequence of unquestioned norms and institutional practices. Thus, institutions (cultural, economic, political) reproduce oppression, at

27 In her work, Young identifies ‘cultural imperialism’ as one of her ‘five faces of oppression.’ She writes, “to experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it as Other” (1990, 58-59). In this way, cultural imperialism “involves the universalization of a dominant group’s experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm” against which all other ‘difference’ is evaluated (Young 1990, 59). By explicitly marking liberalism as cultural and particular (rather than universally appealing to transcendent and ahistorical human values or capacities), I suggest that liberal multiculturalism can be understood as a technology of cultural imperialism thus understood. Liberal multiculturalism promises recognition and inclusion by enforcing the imperative to liberalize and publicly display the liberal character of cultural identity in order to be deemed worthy of protection. In this way, because Kymlicka’s model does not recognize or protect culture on its own terms, but filters any value culture may have through liberalism’s own culturally particular standards, his model functions as a sanitized form of cultural imperialism – interrogating and evaluating both the authenticity and permissibility of cultural practices on its own terms exclusively. As Goldberg similarly concludes, “If there is any content to the charge of cultural chauvinism, it does not lie simply in the refusal to recognize the values of the other (in this case non-European and non-Western) cultures; it lies also in the refusal to acknowledge influences of other culture’s on one’s own while insisting on one’s own as representing the standards of civilization and moral progress” (1993).
times through well-intentioned liberal practices, in a manner which suggests that oppression
cannot be eliminated by changing a few rules or extending these principles to previously excluded
bodies. Instead, institutional overhaul – rather than the reform of individual behavior through
moral (re)education, for example – is necessary.

As collective objects of domination and oppression, Young defines social groups as
fictions of social relations – suggesting, in other words, that social groups become meaningful
and distinct largely in relation to each other. Members may share a specific affinity relating to
their shared experiences or way of life, and this may prompt them to associate with one another,
but such group affinity is defined in terms of a shared sense of identity rather than a shared set of
attributes. Despite emphasizing this important distinction between socially and relationally
formed ‘identity’ and a naturalized set of ‘attributes’, however, visibility can play an important
role in imposing group membership through external Othering, as has already been suggested
through Thobani’s (2007) conception of the relational development of exalted subjects identified
through their visible whiteness contrasted by nonwhite threatening Others.

By suggesting that cultural communities can be similarly thought of as developed
relationally under structures of domination and oppression, I do not mean to downplay the
importance of such communities to their members, but instead, to argue along with Young that it
is the individualist, static social ontology liberal theories of justice like Kymlicka’s rely on that
best explains the gap between liberal ideals of equality and the inability of liberal
multiculturalism to identify and provide remedies to these social, structural forces.28 As David
Theo Goldberg similarly notes, critiquing the liberal inclination to reduce most if not all social

28 Young’s conceptualization of social groups as relational fictions has the further benefit of
carrying with it a strong anti-essentialism bent, emphasizing the crosscutting, fluid and shifting
conception of group membership/identity. This emphasis on multiple, internally contentious
sources of identification thus challenges the liberal conception of ‘unified’ individuals who may
rationally distance themselves from cultural contexts in order to autonomously select particular
cultural practices and beliefs as central or not to their sense of self.
issues to matters of individual concern (understood to be the consequences of individual choice),
“making individuals the exclusive focus of reform is likely to have little enduring
socioinstitutional effect” when attempting to combat structural forms of oppression such as
racism, and arguably, other forms of oppression and domination that necessarily act on collective,
rather than individual, grounds (1993, 228).

The problematic nature of this individualistic ontology is further expressed in the
fetishistic understanding of culture as a primary good in Kymlicka, and constitutes my third
primary objection to his liberal articulation of the concept. In Kymlicka, culture is to be
classified under the same basic ‘distributive’ logic as other institutional objects of liberal justice –
that is, culture is understood to be a primary social good in the Rawlsian (1971) sense and
therefore, is to be fairly distributed to individuals as a means of reasonably planning and
effectively pursuing their life plan(s). This understanding of culture is fetishistic in the sense of
treating culture as a thing or object to be fairly distributed, rather than as a set of enabling and
disabling processes or conditions. Even though Kymlicka speaks of cultures as backgrounds or
contexts of autonomous choice, his instrumental approach, combined with the language of
primary goods, still serves to objectify particular cultural practices, institutions, histories, and
languages as tools to be taken up or disposed of by individual choosers as a mark of their
sufficient rationality.

Such a fetishistic conception of culture combined with an individualistic social ontology
has the further effect of reifying current institutional practices aimed at ‘managing’ culture as
natural and given, and allows the consequences of white supremacy and heterosexism to be
perceived as issues of individual discrimination rather than structural domination. Again, I argue
that it is this specifically liberal conceptualization – rather than the use of culture as a central
mode of analysis itself – that produces these masking effects. Indeed, in practice, such an
understanding of culture as a primary good translates almost exclusively into the need for liberal
democratic governments to merely ‘level the playing field’ between minority and ‘majority’
cultural groups by providing added government protections and supports to enable members of minority cultural groups to sustain their cultural frameworks against the influence of the majority, which is already lent powerful institutional support by the national government through education, national holidays, official language laws and so on. These protections remain contingent and largely symbolic however, and again, the terms of inclusion and recognition are set primarily by members of the ‘majority’ along their own culturally particular standards and justifications. Thus, I submit that it is in part this distinctly liberal approach to culture as a primary good (yet still offered on unequal grounds to minority nations versus ‘polyethnic’ groups) that serves to obscure the relational and shifting experience of cultural identity and masks the power structures that shape the meaning and impacts of any given form of cultural membership within dominant strands of liberal multiculturalism.

In this way, I argue Young’s criticisms of the static fetishistic social ontology of what she calls the ‘distributive paradigm of justice’ can – and ought to – be applied to Kymlicka’s account of liberal multiculturalism, particularly due to the influence of Rawls on Kymlicka’s theory. Like other representatives of this distributive paradigm of justice, I argue, Kymlicka’s liberal culturalist framework “gives primacy to substance over processes, [and] moreover, tends to conceive of individuals as social atoms, logically prior to social relations and institutions” (Young 1990, 27). Kymlicka’s instrumental approach to culture as an object of choice for autonomous individuals, I submit, fails to “appreciate that individual identities and capacities are in many respects themselves the products of social processes and relations” already shaped by structural oppression and domination in a way that greatly limits the potential for liberal multiculturalism to

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29 In particular, by conceiving of the need for positive recognition and protection of cultural frameworks as an extension of Rawlsian self-respect (considered to be the most fundamental primary social good), Kymlicka conceptualizes culture as a good that must be distributed (or perhaps more generously, engendered) by just institutions, while in contrast, Young argues that “none of the forms and not all the conditions of self-respect can meaningfully be conceived of as goods that individuals possess; they are rather relations and processes in which the actions of individuals are embedded” (1990, 27).
serve as an effective means of reform and critique of the status quo (Young 1990, 28).

Ultimately, I argue that Young’s insights can be used to suggest that in order to do more than simply challenge who gets what within a distributive paradigm of justice, and to look critically at the forces of power that determine (along culturally and racially hierarchical lines) that some people will always get more, the structural logics of these relations of power must be interrogated in a way that current distributive and individualistic theories of justice like Kymlicka’s cannot even fully conceive of as necessary.

In contrast to Kymlicka’s instrumental, fetishistic, and individualized conception of culture and subsequent articulations of multicultural justice, I attempt to theorize culture as the product of power at the same time as viewing it as a valuable epistemic resource and a potential source of positive identity. Indeed, it is because cultural identity is the product of interactions between internal histories of resistance and solidarity and external interventions operating on culturally, racially, economically and politically unequally terrain that I argue culture is such a valuable source of emancipatory knowledge and critique. Attention to the concept of culture, as an object of study and political debate, as well in terms of lived experience and government practice, is important because so much is done and justified in the name of protecting (or indeed, creating) the cultural character (purity, unity, harmony) of the national community. This is particularly relevant in the Canadian context. Indeed, at the level both of dominant and ‘multi’ cultural communities, the policing of cultural borders (both spatial and epistemic/moral) have both material and psychological impacts that must be critically analyzed.

Doing this effectively involves casting off the limitations inherent to viewing culture through a liberal lens, but need not require abandoning the concept of culture altogether. Divorced from its instrumental, fetishistic and individualized meanings within liberal theorizing, culture can be seen as a relational, contested and politically mediated construct with important epistemological and liberatory utility. Taking the concept of culture up in this way resists the liberal move towards abstracted cultural categories and decontextualized relations of power and
privilege along named and unnamed ‘cultural’ lines that mask racial hierarchies and other structural oppressions. It resists the privatization of cultural identity and the naturalization of relations of gendered and racialized inequality as matters of cultural essence or cultural choice (thus justifying a lack, for example, of economic or political participation by cultural Others on the basis of a perceived unwillingness to assimilate due to cultural loyalty or even backwardness). It denies the boundedness of cultural communities while emphasizing that such communities can serve as crucial sites of solidarity, safety, and resistance for their members.

And finally, my own critical synthetic approach, to be developed in the next chapter, suggests that culture is political in at least two ways: 1) Cultural membership has political impact – both in terms of how one perceives oneself and the political context in which one is situated, and in terms of the political opportunities and representation one experiences; and 2) cultures are at least partially the dynamic product of political structures which constitute and solidify some cultural practices as authentic and/or central, while marginalizing others, and which operate in hierarchical and exclusionary ways. By my lights, culture is epistemologically valuable in these same ways and ought to be taken seriously as a source of political resistance, contestation, innovation and transformation.

By explicitly beginning with an interrogation and rejection of the unified and disembodied liberal subject as a rational and self-interested chooser, I maintain that my critical synthetic approach to multiculturalism resists the cooptation and deradicalization critics of culture like Dhamoon suggest are inextricably linked to accounts of identity/difference that use culture as a central (albeit contested) unit of analysis. As such, I disagree with Dhamoon’s conclusion that “the narrow scope of culture cannot… be countered by an additive approach or by extending the meaning of culture,” as she argues, that “[b]oth responses simply replicate liberal trends to overdetermine the separation between aspects of difference and/or to see all differences through the lens of culture” (2006, 36).
To the contrary, in the remaining chapters I will seek to demonstrate the advantages (both analytic and normative) of my critical synthetic approach, as a method of theorizing the value of cultural experience and identity that avoids many of the shortcomings inherent to liberal articulations of culture and its value. In the fifth chapter, I will briefly sketch my synthesis of critical realist and critical race theory as such an alternative approach to the study and value, both politically and epistemologically, of multiculturalism. In the sixth chapter, building from this outline, I will demonstrate the advantages of this alternative approach through a critical interrogation of the categories of cultural ‘difference’ – specifically Kymlicka’s division between ‘polyethnic groups’ and minority nations – that continue to dominate mainstream discussions of multiculturalism while operating in a hierarchical and falsely distinct manner. In the seventh and eight chapters, I will outline some procedural guidelines and potential sites of public, democratic debate in which meaningful epistemic cooperation and critical interrogation of the intersecting structural oppressions of the status quo may occur, relying on principles of dialogue and radical testimony and a blurring of the liberal commitment to the public/private divide. Ultimately, by challenging the instrumental rationale used to justify culture’s worth in liberal multiculturalism and explicitly conceiving of cultures as relational sites of epistemic resources and sources of positive collective identity, my critical synthetic approach offers an alternative lens through which to view the claims made by culturally distinct groups, while still being attentive to the socially constructed and power-laden nature of these groups, taking seriously the uneven terrain within such claims are made.
Chapter Five: The Critical Synthetic Method

If experience, however, enables only a partial view (and isn’t all knowledge partial?), this vantage point can also serve as the basis for either a distorted or enlightened view of reality. What becomes important, then, is reflexivity, that is, an acute awareness (however contingent) of contradictions between positionings and positionality that prepare us, make us ready so-to-speak, to seek new understandings and explanations that can point the way to emancipatory practices and, by the same token, unmask false antagonisms. The important distinction to remember is that experience is concrete and knowledge is theoretically based. At bottom, is seems to me that, in formulating a “critical realist” framework, what one seeks is a theoretical explanation or account of the concrete, both past and present.


In the previous chapter, I argued that Kymlicka’s account of the instrumental and fetishistic manner in which culture may be taken up by autonomous choosers both flattens the potential range of public and political expressions of diversity, and limits the scope of multicultural justice by relying on an individualistic social ontology, one which obscures structural forces of oppression and racialized domination. In this chapter, I wish further this line of critique by demonstrating that Kymlicka’s liberal culturalist position also problematically relies on a false division between internal/external selves and world that artificially separates individuals from their social and cultural contexts, even as such individuals are understood to instrumentally assess the relative value assigned to cultural practices within these contexts to formulate their life plans. I wish to highlight this problematic division as a means of setting up a final key distinction between Kymlicka’s liberal approach to diversity to my own critical synthetic method. It is important to do so because, by my lights, it is in part the unity ascribed to the ideal liberal self, as a coherent whole separate from the external world and the Other, along with the equation of rationality with the ability to transcend one’s particular context, that helps explain the failure of liberal multiculturalism to articulate and reject ongoing and oppressive hierarchies of race and culture still implicitly (and at times explicitly) determining ‘permissible’ forms of diversity and difference under the current practice of multiculturalism in Canada.
Approaching this critique of the liberal subject in somewhat a different way, Linda Alcoff usefully summarizes the classical liberal position on cultural belonging and its perceived threat to rationality and autonomy, both of which are typically coded as primary markers of modernity and civilization:

In classical liberal political theory, the initial state of the self is conceptualized as an abstract individual without, or prior to, group allegiance. It is from this “initial position” that the self engages in rational deliberation over ends and thus achieves autonomy by freely choosing, rather than blindly accepting, its doxastic commitments, including its cultural and religious traditions. As Kant developed this idea, a person who cannot gain critical distance from and thus objectify his or her cultural traditions cannot rationally access them, and thus cannot attain autonomy… this distancing ability also became a key part of the global, European-centered teleology of intellectual and moral development, defining the terms by which societies were labeled advanced or backward.

(2006, 21-22, my emphasis)

What this passage from Alcoff importantly emphasizes is the normative connection between such a detached rational chooser and the imperial and white supremacist ends it has been used to justify; ends which are arguably obscured (and at times furthered) by the ongoing use of this liberal subject (and the culturally particular standards that follow with it) as a primary means of determining the relative value of particular cultural communities or the permissibility of ‘their’ practices within contemporary liberal articulations of multicultural justice.

Such a reliance on culturally particular standards and, indeed, a culturally particular view of the self, remains a weakness of Kymlicka’s approach, despite his call for greater recognition of the importance of maintaining a variety of cultural frameworks for individual choosers. While variety is valued instrumentally for autonomous choosers in his account, Kymlicka retains the core idea of a liberal subject whose freedom is measured by their ability (or lack thereof) to critically distance themselves from cultural beliefs and ‘horizons of significance’ in order to rationally deliberate on, select from, and reject these beliefs. Failure to distance oneself in this manner, furthermore, remains a mark of unfreedom or lack of autonomy in Kymlicka’s and other liberal models, and at times is used to justify intervention into cultural communities.
Moreover, Kymlicka’s foundational insistence made in *Liberalism, Community and Culture* that “no life goes better by being led from the outside” assumes a rigid binary distinction between self and other, and self and world, that denies all subjects embeddedness, not just, as communitarians have suggested, in a particular cultural community to which they thus owe allegiance, but within a particular historical, economic, and political context more broadly (Kymlicka 1989a, 12). As Wendy Brown writes, in such a liberal conceptualization, “[r]ather than a universe of organizing ideas, values, and modes of being together, culture must be shrunk to the status of a house that individuals may enter or exit” (2006, 22).

While such criticisms of the disembodied liberal subject and its instrumental relation to culture are now familiar, I would further emphasize, in contrast to this disembodied view, that one’s relative position within various hierarchies of race, gender, class, and so on (which are given specific meanings only within historical and cultural particular contexts), has great impact on one’s ability to effectively claim epistemic authority and indeed, to accurately know and perceive the world. Failure to attend to this fact only obscures the shared (as well as divergent, conflicting, hierarchical) horizons of experience that give meaning to the processes of both resistance and domination that all individuals operate within, thereby limiting the ability of subjects to accurately interpret both themselves and their world, which seems an intuitively

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1 Bhikhu Parekh (2000) has also argued that Kymlicka’s concept of ‘living one’s life from the inside’ comes from a distinctly Protestant ontology. According to Parekh, “the idea of living one’s life from the inside is essentially Protestant, and played only a limited role in classical Athens and Rome, medieval Europe, Catholic Christianity and non-western civilizations. The interiorisation of morality that it presupposes is conspicuous by its absence in some of these societies. ‘Inside’ and ‘outside’ are vague spatial metaphors and need to be more fully spelt out if they are to carry the weight Kymlicka places on them” (Parekh 2000, 106, my emphasis). The connection Parekh draws between Kymlicka’s liberal conception of the self and Protestantism highlights a key factor contributing to liberalism’s cultural particularity. While important, the work of Parekh, and also notably that of Brown (1995), to deconstruct liberalism’s claims to universalism by exposing the liberal subject and core principles of liberalism as the product in large part of bourgeois, Protestant values is not the central focus of my critique.
necessary starting point when attempting to improve it and to reclaim, in the case of structurally marginalized identities, a positive sense of self.

There is a need, then, to reconceptualize the idea of cultural communities as something other than mere instrumental ‘frameworks of choice’ to be taken up by disembodied choosers, as they operate throughout Kymlicka’s theory. As an alternative, I favour an account of the more constitutively embedded nature of human experience, in which cultures are better understood, not as instrumental frameworks but, as ultimate horizons limiting the range of vision one has, at the same time as they may illuminate certain situated truths of identity and experience. According to Alcoff’s interpretation of such constitutive horizons of experience,

The horizon of our cultural tradition… is not a mere instrument of vision, but the condition in which vision occurs… it has content as well as location: one cannot see the sun if one’s horizon is located underground, but one might take the subterranean shadows for a kind of sun if one is so disposed. The horizon is a substantive perspectival location from which the interpreter looks out at the world, a perspective that is always present but that is open and dynamic, with a temporal as well as physical dimension, moving into the future and into new spaces as the subject moves.

(2006, 95, my emphasis)

I argue that this conceptualization of cultural horizons offers a useful challenge to Kymlicka’s assumption that individuals can and should move within cultural frameworks instrumentally, picking and choosing from a variety of culturally endorsed values and ways of life as though these are tools useful but wholly external to the self. Such horizons, I contend, must be seen as the product of a dialectical interplay between self and world, self and Other, which are both constitutive of identity and epistemologically valuable, even as they at times may also serve as epistemic limitations on individual perceivers.² The embeddedness within such cultural

² While emphasizing the constitutive nature of cultural horizons in the production of subjects, I am not saying that people cannot or do not reject cultural norms, or that leaving a cultural community is impossible, although traces of these past commitments and practices will no doubt remain and influence how one views oneself and the world. I mean only to emphasize the emotional (and often financial) costs, the real pain and disorientation that may come along with such processes of change and contestation. Despite this difficulty, later in this chapter, I will promote a critical realist and dialectical conception of the self in order to highlight the
horizons that Alcoff speaks of also pushes for a blurring of the lines between self and Other and self and world, recognizing that these are not easily distinguishable nor independent. As Alcoff has argued elsewhere, indeed, the ‘internal’ is “conditioned by, and even constitutive within” the ‘external,’ and thus, “subjectivity is itself located,” thereby contesting the metaphysical distinction between ‘internal/external’ Kymlicka’s theory of the self seems to rely on (2000, 337).

Here, then, I remain committed to a conception of cultural membership that can be both an important source of objectively valuable epistemic insight, defined within specific historical/social contexts, as well as being constitutive of personal identity in ways that may be either positively enabling or harmfully restrictive in turns. Additionally, although we may seek to recognize that such ‘cultural’ identities are in large part the product of contingent historical facts and often the oppressive relations of white supremacy, heterosexism, and colonial dispossession and exploitation, I do not wish to go so far as to say that such identities are reducible to these structural forces and therefore ought to be dismantled, deconstructed, refused, or transcended.

Instead, although not reified as fixed or attached to an enduring and singularly ‘authentic’ essence or set of practices, cultural positionality must be understood as an important source of positive identity, emotional well being, self-respect, solidarity, and further, as a potentially illuminating site of objective knowledge. Subjective experience may help illuminate objective truths when such knowledge is derived from politically, economically, and socially salient transformative power of identity in dialogue, in part as a means of rejecting the idea that subjects are wholly determined by their cultures. Responding to challenges to become aware of one’s own cultural privilege (rather than its benign neutrality) will likely also prove a painful and difficult process, but one that all subjects have a positive responsibility to attempt to undertake. This process must be informed by a critical awareness of one’s contemporary and historical context, and cannot rely on individual, atomized transcendence of cultural privilege, but must be part of a struggle actors across various social locations engage in collectively.

\footnote{I conceive of ‘positionality’ as it has been outlined by Rosaura Sanchez, namely that it is one’s ‘imagined relation or standpoint’ relative to the structural positioning to which one is subject (2006, 38). In this way, positionality may refer to one’s conscious relation to, or perspective on, their structurally determined social location. As Sanchez puts it, one’s positionality constitutes one’s active “reflexivity vis-à-vis” a particular social location or “positioning” (2006, 38). A dialectical understanding of selves and social structures assumes the potential for radical transformation of both.}
cultural ‘identities’ and situated against an identifiable social location. Importantly, such a critical realist approach to the epistemic value of experience and the embeddedness of subjective identity includes the need to strongly reject those liberal accounts of the self which continue to connect the achievement of rationality (and therefore autonomy and indeed morality) with the individual’s ability to step back from and instrumentally select cultural practices and beliefs which are external to the self to the extent that they can be objectified and commodified in this way.

Moving forward to conceive of multiculturalism as a means of providing for a more radical and substantive appreciation of difference and diversity, to my mind, thus entails a necessary rejection of the ideal of the liberal self as a rationally autonomous chooser, capable of mastering culture and utilizing it to more effectively pursue their own self-interest, an ideal which arguably operates at the core of Kymlicka’s liberal culturalist position. It also entails a critical dismantling (partial, at least) of the liberal commitment to the private/public split, which arguably has negative effects not only on shared political projects and the overall epistemic credibility of a particular community – be it national or otherwise, by denying authority and space to some voices – but on the mental health and self-respect of subjects as well. Such a stark division between the public and private realm may indeed have the effect of producing a split-subject who must perform a public self identified with the valorized qualities of the liberal self-interested chooser.

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4 ‘Postpositivist’ critical realist Paula Moya suggests that identities are best thought of as “theories” providing more or less accurate accounts of the social categories and structures that constitute the “real” (2000, 41). As better or worse theoretical explanations of the social world subjects inhabit, some identities are more “epistemologically and politically salient” than others (Moya 2000, 93). Identities are thus thought of as ‘indexical’ in the sense of referring outward to social categories and locations that have real political, economic, and emotional impact on subjects, and which provide accounts of structural forces of subject formation and cultural interplay that may be epistemologically useful. In other words, identities “refer outward” to “relatively stable and often economically entrenched social arrangements,” and the realist insight suggests that those identities shaped and most negatively affected by unjust and oppressive social arrangements will have unique insights into these by way of their location within them (Moya 2006, 99).
while seeking refuge from this persona in private, potentially contributing to a greater disengagement from public, political life.

However, despite my commitment to the constitutive and, at times, enabling nature of cultural identity, resulting in a need for these identities to be expressed more robustly and/or substantively in the public realm, I conceive of my own critical synthetic method as a means of putting the political and power-laden nature of cultural membership and cultural production into sharper relief – placing these aspects centre stage rather than naturalizing and obscuring them in favor of a supposedly ‘neutral’ account of ‘diversity’ (as in many liberal models). Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I will further outline and seek to defend my own critical synthetic model as such a positive alternative approach to multiculturalism.

I begin with a brief rehearsal of the key concepts of critical realism that I have drawn upon to develop my own critical synthetic approach. According to the critical realist perspective

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5 Reflecting on the detachment of impartial reason from passion, feeling, and the body, Young suggests that, under norms of individual self-mastery and respectability, “‘Assimilation’ into the dominate culture, acceptance into the rosters of relative privilege, requires that members of formerly excluded groups adopt professional postures and suppress the expressiveness of their bodies. Thus emerges for all who have not lost the impulses of life and expression a new kind of distinction between public and private, in bodily behavior. My public self is my behavior in bureaucratic institutions, sitting, standing, walking ‘correctly,’ managing my impression. My ‘private’ behavior is relaxed, more expressive in the body, at home with my family or socializing with members of the group with which I identify” (1990, 140). In this way, the public/private distinction contributes not only to a cognitive dissonance between public and private selves, but a material, embodied disconnect as well.

6 For a communitarian critique connecting heightened individualism to a detachment from public life, see Taylor’s *Malaise of Modernity* (1991). For Taylor, “the atomism of the self-absorbed individual” mitigates against the possibility of cultivating a political culture that values participation and collective duties (1991, 9). See also Moore (1993). Alternatively, post-colonial critics have identified the private sphere as a potential site of refuge from the racisms endemic to the public sphere and as a place to practice cultural identities free from the distorting liberal lens they must be expressed through in public.

7 While I favor the label ‘critical realist,’ this position is often identified in the literature as ‘postpositivist realism’ or even postpositivist critical realism. This theory, first articulated by Mohanty (1997), has been taken up by others working within literary and ethnic studies in the United States, and in addition to Mohanty, I draw much of my account of critical realism from Paula Moya (2000, 2002, 2006). Much of the development of critical realism can be seen as motivated by a rejection of postmodernism, particularly the skepticism relating to identities, experience, and “truth” within postmodern theory.
I adapt from Satya Mohanty and others, multiple cultural knowledges are valuable as ways of being and experiencing the world, offering critiques of culturally informed structural injustice, as well as presenting alternative conceptions of the good life that have potentially objective merit. Such subjective experience (inevitably developed and constitutively embedded within cultural contexts) provides a kind of cognitive ‘raw material’ with which to think critically about one’s social world in the critical realist model. Importantly, this ‘raw material’ is not free from bias or interpretation, but rather, experience is always interpreted theoretically, mediated by one’s context and previously developed sense of identity. Indeed, Mohanty emphasizes that, “personal experience is socially and theoretically constructed, and it is precisely in this mediated way that it yields knowledge,” both for oneself and perhaps ultimately for others as well (2003, 393). In this view, cultural diversity, and particularly experiences and knowledges spoken from the standpoint of oppressed or ‘minority’ cultural groups, may lend unique insights into structures of privilege and dominance within liberal institutions.

In Mohanty’s account, then, “[e]xperiences can be ‘true’ or ‘false,’ and can be evaluated as justified or illegitimate in relation to the subject and [their] world, for ‘experiences’ refers very simply to the variety of ways humans can process information” (2003, 393). In light of this view, Mohanty argues that theorists of identity and difference must develop an account of subjective identity “in which experiences would not serve as foundations because of their self-evident authenticity but would provide some of the raw material with which we construct identities” (2003, 393). Such a critical realist position entails the necessary rejection of the view that our emotions or feelings about the world and ourselves are our “innermost” possessions, which again sets up too rigid a dichotomy between self and world. Instead, our emotions and self-perceptions “provide evidence of the extent to which even our deepest personal experiences are socially

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constructed, mediated by visions and values that are “political” in nature, that refer outward to the world beyond the individual” (Mohanty 2003, 394, my emphasis).

For Mohanty, then, accounts of identity must always be ‘theoretical’ in a sense, as narratives offering a particular (rather than universal) perspective on a given context or event. In this way, “our experiences do not have self-evident meanings, for they are in part theoretical affairs, and our access to our remotest personal feelings is dependent on social narratives, paradigms, and even ideologies” (Mohanty 2003, 395). Likewise, in her efforts adapting and expanding Mohanty’s theory of experience, Paula Moya suggests that the relationship between identity and experience is not one of one-to-one correspondence or simple clarity, but is rather ‘theoretically mediated’ through an individual’s interpretation of that experience (2002, 50). Experience is still socially and politically constructed, in this interpretation, but is nonetheless real, as are the identities stemming from it. Identities are constructed, according to Moya, because they are based on interpreted experience and theories that attempt to explain the social and natural world, but they are also real, in that they refer outward to “casually significant features of the world” (2002, 86). Because of the important casual link between identity categories and socio-political and economic outcomes, while “all the knowledge we can ever

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9 More on what I mean by “real” will be said later in the chapter – but to briefly anticipate that argument, I will say here that what I am referring to within “the real” is an understanding that there is, indeed, a natural world independent from human perception, and that there exist social structures which dialectically produce identities of both penalty and privilege, identities which are attached to structural advantage or disadvantage, depending on the context and issue at hand. When I speak of “identities” as “real,” I do not mean to refer to any authentic or eternal essence, but rather to a conception of socially mediated and dialectically produced identities which have real impacts politically, economically, and socially, for all subjects. By accepting that all knowledge is mediated by theory, this view of “real” experiences and “real” identities does not assume that such identities or experiences are fixed, immutable, biologically (or even socially) determined, but only that they are developed in a dialectic relationship between identification by others and reflexive self-identification, and will be real in terms of their effects on life chances, beliefs, perceptions, and actions for all subjects.
have is necessarily dependent on theories and perspectives,” this does not mean that a critical realist account of identity need take on a relativistic or solipsistic bent (Mohanty 2003, 395).  

Instead, a critical realist perspective begins from the assumption that some experiential accounts (of identity, of the world) will still offer better or clearer perspectives, producing theoretical explanations that hold more purchase for individual subjects. Such experientially developed theories may serve to add coherence and/or clarity to an individual’s own sense of self, or may help illuminate an individual’s embeddedness within a particular ‘social location,’ which is given context-dependent and socially mediated significance, both personally and structurally. For example, one may come to experience feelings of anger through consciousness-raising processes illuminating one’s oppression, but in such instances, anger operates as a “theoretical prism” through which to more accurately or correctly view one’s self and world (Mohanty 2003, 395). And within a critical realist theory, the potential justification for, or ‘objective’ merit of emotional expressions, derived from subjective experience, may be evaluated with reference to one’s social location. Put differently, as theoretical explanations of one’s self and position in the social world, identities may be evaluated based on how well they ‘refer’ to the “verifiable aspects of the world they claim to describe,” that is, to the structural positionings and social categories constituting one’s overall social location (Moya 2002, 87).

Much of the work Mohanty has done to outline a critical realist theory of experience is, indeed, directed specifically toward critiquing at length the moral and political dangers of relativism. See in particular Mohanty (1997).

This view – particularly the claim that certain identities will produce epistemically superior insights into structures of society, particularly oppressive ones, inevitably assumes that there are, in fact, “truths” about the socio-economic order that are better captured by those in some subject positions than others. In his defense of critical realism, Mohanty is very explicit about the theory being based not only on the existence of ‘truths’ about the economic and political order, but on the ability of subjects to identify these truths with varying levels of epistemic clarity depending on their social location, while they may share these insights with others based on some basic conception of common rationality. In this way, the theory continues to rely on a universalist ethical foundation, with resulting assumptions about human nature, truth, and the potential to meaningfully debate ideals like justice and equality. Indeed, the defense of cultural diversity as a form of epistemic cooperation assumes some form of basic, shared rationality among all subjects, potentially opening the theory up to a critique that its universalist pretensions rely too heavily on
By social location,\(^{12}\) I mean here to refer to one’s relative structural position within hierarchies of race, class, gender, sexuality, and so on, that operate within the social and political relations of all societies. For the purposes of this project, I am particularly interested in analyzing how these structural positionings function within liberal democracies, despite formal commitments to the universal equality of all persons within these regimes. However, one’s social location does not determine knowledge in the sense that all knowledge can be reduced to it, or that one’s particular perspective, although derived from a given social location, cannot be altered or given different significance in varying contexts. Rather, as Alcoff suggests, “social location is the site of mediations and is itself indexed to a particular (rather than universal) ethical engagement or interest with the issue at hand as well as a particular foreknowledge operative for certain persons in certain contexts and not for others” (2006, 96).

Despite their socially mediated nature, then, experiences measured against and within social locations “are crucial indexes of our relationships with our world (including our relationships with ourselves) and to stress their cognitive nature is to argue that they can be susceptible to varying degrees of socially constructed truth or error and can serve as sources of objective knowledge or socially produced mystification” (Mohanty 2003, 396, my emphasis). And finally (but crucially) then, within critical realism, “to have a cognitivist view of experience is to claim that its truth content can be evaluated, and thus potentially shared with others” in a way that seeks to lend greater epistemological authority to those speaking from specifically identified social locations (e.g., the structurally oppressed), without suggesting that the lessons derived from these specific locations and experiences cannot be shared, transmitted, and understood by others who are differently located (Mohanty 2003, 399).

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\(^{12}\) Social location may be similarly thought of as one’s “positioning,” within social, economic, and political structures. Such “positioning” is always relational, in that “one is always situated with respect to other locations, enabling individuals to become aware of differences between and commonalities among positionings” (Sanchez 2006, 38).
Thus, all knowledge is mediated by theory and experience, but this does not prevent such knowledge from having potentially transformative appeal and even objective value. Instead, this critical realist perspective helps explain why those hoping to effectively study the politics of identity and difference ought to abandon (fruitless) attempts to abstract away from relevant subjective experience (moving to a more objective, transcendent, ahistorical perspective) in our theorizing. Such attempts will inevitably fail, and continue to reproduce the injustices and inequalities of the status quo. And so, from a critical realist perspective, it is argued that we cannot hope to transform the world until we understand it better, not through abstractions, but through a careful and nuanced contextual analysis of the social processes of identity formation and positioning which shape one’s experience and can potentially offer critical insights and transformative interventions into the structures in which we are objectively located. In this way, “the possibility of interpreting our world accurately depends fundamentally on our coming to know what it would take to change it, on our identifying the central relations of power and privilege that sustain it and make it the world what it is” (Mohanty 2003, 397).

Rather than assuming that objective political principles can only come through attempts to abstract away from subjective contingency through searches for transcendental, impartial rules which all rational agents may ‘reasonably’ agree to, the critical realist position I adapt from thinkers like Mohanty and Moya suggests, fundamentally, that both identity and knowledge are dialectical. That is, critical realism assumes that the structures of society both shape and are shaped by the categories with which we make sense of our subjective experiences and cultural identities. Likewise, identities are themselves the relational products of ascriptive identification and self-identification, understood as the dialectical interplay between how one is identified by others and how one consciously interprets one’s own identity and experiences (Moya 2002, 87). In this way, attending more closely and seriously to the manner in which collective identity categories and cultural communities are both produced by, and productive of, the social structures they operate within, may prove an important set of epistemic resources to those seeking to bring
about more ethical conditions for the persons who identify with or are identified by virtue of marginalized cultural identity markers.

Such a dialectic conception of the self thus helps us understand how identities are relational products of ascribed social categories (positionings) and one’s subjective, personal relation (positionality) to these positionings. By emphasizing that the positioning of subjects through asymmetrical social categories attached to social locations, as well as one’s subjective relation to them, are both crucial and dialectical contributors to one’s identity, the critical realist position is able to provide an account of subjects who are neither essentialized into reified and ‘natural’ essences, nor individually transcendent of cultural contexts or horizons. Instead, the critical realist position I defend conceives of subjects as constitutively embedded within, but not wholly determined by, their particular cultural contexts; and yet, these are subjects for whom social positioning inescapably contributes to a creative and powerful interplay between their subjective identity and their outer world, through which identity is made comprehensible to themselves and others. As Moya writes, identities are “indexical – that is they refer outward to social structures and embody social relations” and as such, provide important insights into how these relations may be transformed into more equitable and free conditions for all persons (2006, 97).  

13 A careful reader may here ask how this capacity for such critical examination of one’s subject position, emotions, experiences, and for both personal and structural transformation, is different from the liberal ‘distancing’ model, which also assumes the centrality of self-reflection and revision. I would suggest that the difference comes down to how subjects are themselves defined. Within liberal theory, I argue, the subject is assumed to have a unified rational core – a static rational ‘me’ – that remains separate from social relations, and for whom knowledge is gained through transcendence of context and inward contemplation of ends. In contrast, by conceiving of subjects dialectically, my C.S model argues that to gain clarity on themselves and their ends, subjects must be both inward and outward looking. Understanding cannot come through merely internal reflection, and particularly not when this reflection is coupled with the belief that objectivity comes through a transcendence of context and particularity. Instead, by conceiving of subjects as culturally embedded and dialectically constituted, my C.S model assumes that processes of self-reflection and transformation must also turn outward to trace the social structures and categories that help shape one’s identity and perception, contributing to intuitions about justice, human flourishing, and the good life. Moreover, while my use of concepts like
In order to take collective identity categories seriously, and to make room for their potentially transformative power in the political realm, then, this dialectical nature of identity formation must serve as important point of contrast to the abstracted liberal subject. The critical realist commitment to the transformation of political relations and the identity categories that are produced by and productive of these political relations is arguably given less critical weight by the liberal subject, particularly through the separation of the public and private life of the liberal subject. In relating the individual only contingently and extrinsically to their ends, the liberal subject remains, at core, a rational chooser, outside the scope of such transformative change. The liberal commitment to a chooser who is at least theoretically understood to be prior to or only contingently and instrumentally related to their cultural context thus results in a static core – static in that it does not allow for the same potential for transformation through public dialogue and the dialectical interchange between identity and structure that a critical realist perspective provides. Moreover, as Alcoff’s (2006) earlier critique demonstrates, a reliance on such a static and transcendent rational core has had highly exclusionary and normatively incoherent effects, artificially separating self from world, and relating the subject ahistorically and abstractly to its own context and socially significant categories of identification. Such an articulation, I have attempted to argue throughout this text, provides an exclusionary and impoverished view of the

these may appear as little more than a new form of liberalism, I wish to emphasize that concepts like justice, reflection, and human flourishing do not belong to liberal theory in any ultimate way. Indeed, part of my point in challenging the liberal subject as inherently exclusionary and as contributing a philosophically impoverished and narrow view of human life is to suggest that liberalism cannot meet the promise held in its ideals of liberty, equality, justice, and autonomous self-reflection. The realization of such ideals remains available only to some privileged subject positions within liberal theory. Indeed, I have suggested that they have not – and cannot – be meaningfully extended to all without reconceiving the subject at the core of liberal theory, and by significantly altering the structural/economic arrangements currently perpetuating oppression and exclusion within western liberal democracies. However, my model wishes to retain ideals like equality and justice, and the assumption that human flourishing will be enhanced by cultural diversity, again, assumes that some universal account of human nature can in fact be identified. I will attempt to address these issues in subsequent chapters. In particular, more on the dialectical subject – meant to serve as a positive alternative to liberalism’s exclusionary and detached subject – and how it relates to the potential realization of failed liberal ideals of justice and equality, will be said in the seventh and eighth chapters.
self and identity, and I argue that subjects are better understood as the dialectical and relational products of history, social positioning, self-identification and positionality, and the broader political, cultural, and economic contexts within which the subject lives and moves.

This view of selves as relational and dialectic products, developed by Moya (2000, 2002, 2006), suggests a way of viewing cultural communities in a similarly relational manner, and touches on the account of social groups articulated by Iris Marion Young (1990), which I briefly outlined in the previous chapter. Such a view of relational cultural communities and dialectic selves suggests that, rather than reinforcing cultural categories as markers of incommensurable difference as a means of relegating this difference to the private realm, a radical and critically realist multiculturalism ought to reform and transform these categories through public, critical debate of difference. Indeed, as Moya writes, “insofar as we cannot get there except from here – the transformation of identities that are central to the arrangement and functioning of society will be a necessary part of our epistemic and political project” (Moya 2006, 97).

This transformation cannot occur if “difference” remains a means of relegating person’s subjective experiences and most deeply held moral commitments into the private sphere, and will only be possible if greater respect for and attempts to understand the motivations behind such commitments are given space for critical dialogue and testimony in the public realm. 14 Ultimately, “taking a realist approach to identity is critical to the project of working toward a more egalitarian society. Only a realist approach effectively registers the dialectical (as well as historically – and culturally specific) nature of identity construction – an adequate understanding of which is essential to our ability to work toward the transformation of socially significant identities” (Moya 2006, 97).

Moreover, valuing the epistemic status of subjective experience for dialectical subjects need not take the institutional structures (or more broadly the historical/cultural context) that

14 More on the nature of such dialogue and testimony will be said in chapters seven and eight.
shape such experience as given or natural. On the contrary, such an approach must seek to
calculate and interrogate these socially constructed and often oppressive structural relations.

With this in mind, a critical realist perspective can help to identify those social locations that limit
a clear perception of the world, just as it emphasizes the epistemic insight of marginalized
identities as a necessary means of effectively identifying oppressive relations. In his work,
indeed, Mohanty (2003) emphasizes that there is epistemic value to experience even when one’s
social location combines with subjective perception to occlude or mystify one’s privilege or
oppression within that broader social context. Just as experience can illuminate instances of
structural oppression, a critical realist approach also seeks to highlight the ways in which
particular locations can also inhibit perception.

Such gaps in knowledge point to the epistemological dangers of uninterrogated privilege,
and can serve as evidence that hierarchically ordered social locations may both limit and enable
knowledge depending on the situation at hand, promoting the need for greater public and political
contestation of such social locations and the unequal structures they operate within. As Mohanty
suggests, “social locations facilitate or inhibit knowledge by predisposing us to register and
interpret information in certain ways. Our relation to social power produces forms of blindness
just as it enables degrees of lucidity” (2003, 400, my emphasis).

Thus, when voiced from an objectively identifiable social location\textsuperscript{15} (often of privilege),
subjective experience can at times inhibit knowledge in the same way that experiences may at
other times serve as a vital source of genuine and reliable knowledge. One’s uniquely situated
and socially mediated identity – whether understood as explicitly cultural or not – provides, then,
an unique source of knowledge to the subject, but can also prevent knowledge in a more active or

\textsuperscript{15} The question of who performs such identification, or how its ‘objectivity’ is determined, is a
difficult one to answer. My inclination is to suggest that such evaluation must itself be subject to
processes of public and political dialogue and contestation. Some basic and grounded sense of
operating within a shared world of institutions and social structures, furthermore, must help
identify relevant interests and stakeholders in such discussions. More will be said about this issue
in the eighth chapter.
willful sense, as indicated by Mills (1997, 2007a, 2007c) in his theory of ‘white ignorance’ (outlined in chapter three). According to Moya, “the epistemic status of different identities can be evaluated by seeing how well they work as explanations or descriptions of the social and natural world from which they emerge. The epistemic value of particular identities can be revealed by seeing how well they ‘refer’ to verifiable aspects of the world they claim to describe” (2002, 87). Those identities that fail to capture crucial institutional or structural arrangements of oppression and injustice may, in this sense, be said to provide poor theoretical explanations for the subject’s social world.

In the case of the structurally privileged, one’s embeddedness in a dominant social location can distort one’s perception of the world, potentially warping one’s intuitions about what principles of equality and justice may entail, for example. Or, as Alcoff (2006) suggests in one example demonstrating the inevitably situated natured of all knowledge, two subjects (a servant and a queen) may inhabit the same space (in this case the castle in which they both live), but their particular experiences in, and needs for, a given shared space will greatly alter their perception of it. In Alcoff’s example, the servant will have a more intimate knowledge of the castle’s back passageways and kitchens, and will view the space primarily in terms of the work that needs to be done, while the queen will be concerned with the aesthetics of the space, or with the potential for it to serve as a site of socializing and entertainment (2006, 96).  

It is, of course, not only that the knowledge of the castle and experiences of it that will be different for each subject. To the degree that power functions to maintain their relative positions of dominance and subordination, it can be safely assumed that the knowledge of the servant will have greater ‘epistemic value’ or privilege. She will know more from her position of servitude – to the degree that she has been able to analyze her social location as a consequence of social, economic, cultural, political structures – about how oppression functions and how power operates. Without such an analysis of power and a subsequent assumption that some marginalized subject positions offer superior epistemic insights into issues of social justice, this example from Alcoff fails to capture the full benefit of a critical realist approach to the varying epistemic value of differentially located subject positions. Simply discussing different knowledges of the castle itself, and its purposes for either work, in the case of the servant, or entertainment, in the case of the queen, without an analysis of power, does not speak specifically about the potential for power relations to be effectively illuminated by those most disadvantaged and excluded by them. Even
Likewise, from within their social location, economically privileged, able-bodied and heterosexual Anglo-European-Canadians may be able to comfortably perceive the space of the nation as an open, welcoming and broadly egalitarian one, while those marked as Canada’s Others may (more legitimately) experience the nation as an ongoing site of colonial dispossession, heterosexism, and white supremacy. Accessing the legitimacy of knowledge claims derived from subjective experience, then, depends in large part on a comparative analysis of competing claims made by those speaking from differently located social identities. One’s social location, in this sense, will both enable and occlude the potential for objective knowledge of one’s self and world. In light of such a critical realist analysis, I suggest we must conclude with Mohanty that, “objectivity in historical and moral inquiry can be found not by denying our perspectives or locations but rather by interrogating their epistemic consequences” (2003, 400). Thus, “cultural decolonization often involves an interrogation of the epistemic and affective consequences of our social location, of historically learned habits of thinking and feeling” (Mohanty 2003, 401).

Furthermore, by viewing cultural communities as ‘laboratories,’ engaging with different historical and linguistic structures in an effort to identify and design social structures that are conducive to human flourishing and the pursuit of (necessarily multiple) good lives, the critical realist position calls not for the elimination or privatization of difference, but rather the political and public exercise of it. This commitment to conceptualizing the public expression of (at times, radical) difference as an important epistemological resource rejects the view that, even within an officially multicultural society like Canada’s, nonwhite and/or ‘Third World’ (constructed as without such an additional analysis of power, however, it remains to my mind a useful example. Indeed, while a strong impetus behind my defense of critical realism comes from the potential for demystification of unequal power relations and oppressive categorization of subjects to be made by those directly and negatively affected by them, the general thrust of the argument – that those differently located will have access to varying levels of epistemic clarity – extends beyond questions of justice or oppression to advocate for the epistemic benefit of these divergent social locations and resulting knowledges to all aspects of human life, be it political, social, aesthetic, or otherwise.
minority or external, non-citizen) logics of being and belonging must remain private, if tolerated at all. Such identities and practices are too often constructed in dominant theoretical discourses as necessarily irrational and the product of unchosen belief, in contrast to the ‘rationally’ chosen principles of dominant (white, European) liberal cultural groups, as previous chapters have attempted to make clear.

In asserting the epistemological value of subjective experience, the critical realist position thus rejects transcendent impartiality as both an impossible and a morally repugnant ideal. Broadening the public and political to more substantively include distinct cultural perspectives and the expression of difference, then, is a matter both of respect – by engaging in public dialogue and assessing claims contextually, rather than through appeals to false universals reflecting dominant cultural positions – and of broader moral and epistemological necessity. Such a project necessarily entails an overt extension of full personhood to all, and full (rather than merely formal) citizenship to all living within the borders of a ‘multicultural’ state like Canada’s. It also requires recognizing and affirming the importance of cultural communities to which persons may belong in a variety of meaningful and overlapping ways. These are ways that must, importantly, go beyond the instrumental and fetishistic utilization of culture Kymlicka’s liberal theory of multiculturalism defends.

As an alternative, I follow Moya in conceiving of ‘cultures’ as broadly encompassing “preferred ways of living,” and “learned habits” of communication and codes of behavior, and view subjects as the dialectical products of ascriptive cultural identification or ‘positioning’ and one’s relational positionality with respect to such positioning (2002, 157-58). Here, ‘cultures’ must be similarly understood as the dialectical products of a variety of conflicting cultural and historical narratives generated from ‘within’ the group, as well as being the product of unequal negotiations between, and relational development alongside, other cultural groups and external forces. ‘Cultures’ will be practiced and expressed in differing contexts by diverse subjects, themselves located within a variety of other social categories (gender, race, class, age, sexuality)
that all help shape their own sense of identity and the degree of personal identification with their cultural roles, beliefs, values, and so on. As Moya suggests, individual subjects’ relation to or positive identification with an identity or group will vary, due in large part to the ‘theoretically mediated’ nature of both experience and identity, as well as due to conflicting narrative interpretations of that group’s core values and intersecting positionings, cultural or otherwise (2002, 90).

While thus offering an extremely valuable alternative to Kymlicka’s liberal culturalist position on ‘diversity,’ critical realist scholarship also has significant gaps that I hope to fill through my ongoing synthesis of critical realism, post-colonial theory, and critical race scholarship. To my knowledge, a substantive and comprehensive defense of multicultural diversity has yet to be fully articulated within critical realist theory, despite Mohanty’s (1997, 2003) excellent efforts to develop a preliminary framework. Much of the scholarship responding to and refining Mohanty’s position, moreover, is focused on theorizing about categories of “experience” and “identity” in general, rather than attending explicitly to the cultural nature of both, as I am interested in doing within my own account.

Moreover, by also drawing from critical race and postcolonial scholarship, my reformulation of the critical realist position asserts the epistemological value of cultural diversity, but goes further than past critical realist theories, emphasizing the need to deal explicitly with the manner in which such cultural and ‘racial’ ‘diversity’ has been used to justify the unequal division of economic, political, and social advantage, along with determining who is granted full membership in the human community (in other words, determining who is granted full epistemological and moral authority). I also distinguish my position through a greater contextual specificity and attention to the Canadian discourse of culture and difference, and see ‘radical multiculturalism’ as having wide ranging political implications, moving beyond the emphasis on
merely providing ‘analytical clarity’ to categories of identity and experience, or accounts focused on multiculturalism in the classroom, as often found in critical realist scholarship.\(^{17}\)

Ultimately, my own ‘critical synthetic approach,’ seeks to draw connections between who is granted privileged epistemological authority and the relative position one occupies within ‘racial’ and cultural hierarchies more explicitly and comprehensively than other critical realist theorists have typically done, while grounding such an account in the Canadian context of ‘official’ multiculturalism. In this way, differences in experience are not to be taken uncritically, or as necessarily all created equal. Nor are these differences to be treated as ‘natural’ or ‘authentic’ in the sense of having a fixed or unified essence. However, assessing the legitimacy of competing claims or differing perspectives must be based on mutual respect, and an effort to evaluate the epistemological merit of subjective experiences in a manner that examines both the subject’s social location and the historical factors that may have contributed to this location.

Racialized, cultural and gendered identities must all be taken seriously as (often inextricably intersecting) systems of categorization that have served to establish moral hierarchies extending full personhood to some while denying it to others. An ethical politics of difference must acknowledge this legacy and attempt to disrupt and dismantle such hierarchies, but need not entail a similar deconstruction or rejection of these socially mediated identities themselves. In a discussion of multiculturalism, this process must necessarily include challenging the epistemological authority of the disembodied liberal individual to determine the normative legitimacy of a ‘minority’ cultural group. It includes the need to reject false dichotomies of civilized/barbaric, nature/reason, individual/collective. In a more overtly critical realist vein, however, diversity (cultural or otherwise) also needs to be taken seriously as a vital source of both subjective well-being and objective knowledge. Subjective experience, again, can provide knowledge that is objectively true of the world (helping to identify what structures of privilege

\(^{17}\) In his contribution to the critical realist anthology *Identity Politics Reconsidered*, John Kuo Wei Tchen notices similar gaps within present articulations of the theory (2006, 197).
and differential treatment operating within it are *wrong* and must be corrected), and can also point towards ideals that, while drawn from cultural particularity, may ultimately have more universal merit or appeal.

This account of the epistemic value of cultural perspectives thus challenges the liberal commitment to the public/private divide at the same time as it calls for explicit attention to the socially constructed and dialectical nature of these cultural perspectives. I make this theoretical shift not to relativize or negate the value of cultural perspectives, but rather to lend greater epistemological authority to them. While both dominant and marginalized cultural perspectives are relationally produced by unequal social forces and institutions, members of marginalized groups are understood here to have privileged insights into the forces that simultaneously construct and disadvantage them. And, unlike members of dominant cultural groups, marginalized Others are arguably less likely to have an investment in masking the hierarchical relations that disempower them, while those materially and psychologically privileged by the status quo may have strong incentives to maintain this ongoing occlusion of their own power and privilege.

In the case of some socially privileged groups, then, there will be structural incentives against, and cognitive difficulties in, perceiving clearly the injustices of the reality within which they are privileged or when attempting to correct for them. The manner in which social location may intersect with personal identity to produce instances of subjective and structural blindness is partially outlined by Alcoff (2007) in her essay, “Epistemologies of Ignorance – Three Types.” Here, Alcoff attempts to study the willful and structural production of ‘white ignorance,’ first articulated by Mills, through outlining three key concepts.

First, relying on the work of Lorraine Code (1993), Alcoff considers “our general situatedness as knowers” in order to emphasize that different individuals, occupying distinct social locations, will have access to different levels of knowledge and possess moments of epistemic advantage and disadvantage in a relational, contextually variable manner (2007, 40-41).
Second, turning to Sandra Harding’s (1991) work on feminist standpoint theory, Alcoff highlights the ways in which membership in particular social groups, like the individual effect of social location, can effect how cognizers understand their social world. Because group membership can lead to common experiences of oppression, or positive moments of solidarity, this aspect of an individual’s cognitive map will prove “epistemologically relevant,” particularly because individuals will form belief sets as a product of these shared experiences that will subsequently “inform their epistemic operations such as judging coherence and plausibility” (Alcoff 2007, 45).

In terms of this second point, based on shared experiences and motivations among group members, Alcoff suggests that, as members of a dominant group, males, for example, may lack experiences of marginalization that might lead to a greater epistemic potential to critique accepted “social conceptions,” or have a lack of motivation to pursue “all the ramifications of social

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18 While not identical, the critical realist position I develop from Mohanty, Moya, and others bears important resemblances to standpoint theory, particularly the central emphasis on the need to speak from experience in political and otherwise public contexts. According to Harding, one of its leading theorists, standpoint theory emerged ‘organically’ out of feminist concerns with sexist and androcentric research methods and results, and a belief that the best feminist research projects should start “from women’s lives.” The theory draws from Marxism, historical materialism, and the critical sociology of the Frankfurt School (Harding 2008, 114-15). Experience is considered more theoretically mediated, however, in my critical realist position, than is typically the case within standpoint theory. As Alcoff suggests in her reading of Harding, however, what is perhaps most useful about the contribution made by standpoint epistemology is the insight that, while critical interrogation of one’s context and social location is always required for a given location to produce privileged insights into the social world, “on balance, members of oppressed groups have fewer reasons to fool themselves about this being the best of all possible worlds, and have strong motivations to gain clear assessment of their society” (Alcoff 2007 44). Because they must negotiate between their own perspective and those of dominant subjects with power over them, subjects in marginalized social locations – if they are enabled to critically evaluate their location through critical reflection and dialogue with others – may have privileged insights not only into the implications of their own social location but as to the effects of the positioning of privileged subjects, and the structures that disadvantage them in specific and ongoing ways. When making such an argument with respect to epistemic privilege, however, it is important not to essentialize the oppressed as “nonideologically constructed subjects” speaking authentic truth – here, the critical realist emphasis on identities as theories than can be tested, rather than essences, is helpful to keep in mind (Alcoff 1991, 22, summarizing Gayatri Spivak).
justice” (2007, 48). On the other hand, the third aspect of Alcoff’s argument, relating to structural positioning, further suggests that certain forms of group dominance – particularly relating to race and racism – will produce “a type of subjectivity that forms patterns of perceptual attentiveness and supplies belief-inducing premises that result in a distorted or faulty account of identity” and the world one lives in (2007, 49). Going beyond a mere lack of motivation to interrogate distorted perceptions of the world and resulting measures deemed adequate to attain justice for all, Alcoff thus relies on a such a structural model, suggesting that the structural position an individual occupies will also strongly impact their susceptibility towards ignorance, and will affect their willingness (or lack thereof) to attempt to think beyond this ignorance. In the case of racialized ignorance perpetuating white supremacy, according to Alcoff, “ignorance is not primarily understood as a lack of positive motivation or experience as the result of social location – but as a substantive epistemic practice that differentiated the dominant group” (2007, 47).

Thus, Alcoff suggests that, for example, (most) men will be less inclined to raise critical questions about their positioning in domination over women, while “the structural argument argues that whites have a positive interest in ‘seeing the world wrongly’ to paraphrase Mills” (2007, 47). Rather than a lack of incentive to think critically, as is perhaps the case with males, whites are described as having a substantive and active interest in maintaining the ignorance that allows them to perceive themselves to be innocent of racial privilege while simultaneously maintaining that privilege.19 While these insights may prove a useful set of guidelines, I do not mean to suggest that identities are fixed within specific social locations, nor that one’s beliefs can always be accurately predicted from them.

19 This distinction between a lack of incentive to interrogate their own privileged perspective on the part of males, and the positive motivation to see the world wrongly on the part of whites, hinges on Alcoff’s understanding, following Mills, of whiteness as a political system of domination producing patterns of willful ignorance and historical amnesia. This level of structural ignorance is not assigned to gendered difference in Alcoff and Mills, although both are careful to notice that the category of whiteness needs to be broken down to address differences in class, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender.
Indeed, in attempting to theorize the epistemic value of cultural membership and social location, I mean to emphasize rather than underplay or ignore the political, contested, and internally heterogeneous and crosscutting nature of such membership and the perspectives derived from it. Within my critical synthetic approach, I view cultural communities as ‘relational fictions’ in the same sense Young uses to describe social groups more generally, and, as such, conflicting perspectives may develop along intersecting aspects of identity, whether cultural or otherwise. While only developed/experienced relationally, however, the dialectical identity that stems from membership in such cultural communities is nonetheless real, as all subjects are constitutively embedded within such communities as hermeneutic horizons that focus, and at times limit, their perspectives and interpretations of the world.

Thus, although socially constructed and far from internally coherent or homogenous, cultural identities may be understood as ‘real’ in at least three related senses. By my lights, these are: 1) as a real source of meaningful knowledge regarding self and world, which may entail a similarly real and lasting commitment to the (intrinsic) value of culturally developed beliefs and ways of life; 2) as a real site of resistance, solidarity, and political contestation for its members – who may experience similar modes of oppression and domination by those who perceive them as Other, thus contributing to a shared sense of identity; and 3) as having real political, economic and social consequences – particularly in the case of those ‘visible’ or ascriptive identities attached to the body in a way that leads to negative and stereotyped presumptions about who one is, and what

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20 The reverse may also be true for structurally privileged, and ‘normalized’ majority cultural membership, at least in terms of generating a weak, but not insignificant, sense of shared identity and ‘linked fate.’ As Thobani’s (2007) discussion of ‘exalted subjects’ indicates, indeed, the majority identity is equally relational and dependent on Others for both its value and much of its content for its members, defined in a negative relation suggesting what defines us is how we are different from (and superior to) them.
one believes, on the basis of this perceived embodiment of a particular cultural/ethnic/racial identity.\textsuperscript{21}

By virtue of this alternative understanding of cultural identity/communities as relational fictions, sites of crosscutting identification, and as constitutive horizons of all knowledge, my critical synthetic approach to multiculturalism relies on a critique of what is excluded or undertheorized in Kymlicka’s instrumental liberal defense of multiculturalism on one hand, and on the positive reconstruction of cultures value as an epistemic resource (albeit one steeped in unequal relations of power and privilege), on the other. Another advantage of my approach is that the critical synthetic model, unlike the liberal culturalist position, which has been criticized for its narrow focus on ‘ethnic’ and national groups,\textsuperscript{22} is able to effectively identify groups who are read as non-ethnic groups as ‘cultural,’ at least in the sense of serving as sites of collective knowledge and alternative modes of being and belonging that shape personal identity and may potentially have objective epistemic value. I argue that such knowledges and alternative approaches to the good life, and to personal identity, must be publicized and politicized if we are to have any hope, first, of getting a clearer picture of the shortcomings and inequalities endemic to the social ‘realities’ of the status quo, or, second, of effectively seeking remedies for these inequalities. For this reason, the ‘cultural’ and collective character of personal identity and experience must be emphasized and interrogated rather than marginalized or rejected.

In this way, I call for the use of ‘multiculturalism’ in a broader and more radical sense than is typically employed in Canadian discourse, going beyond ‘ethno-religious’ forms of difference to encompass other forms of collective community membership as well. I wish to widen the range of multicultural discourse, then, both in terms of the \textit{kinds} of groups considered eligible for

\textsuperscript{21} This process may fall under what Sara Hackenberg (2004) has referred to as ‘visual fetishism,’ whereby “we imagine we can ‘see’ difference, and that we always ‘know’ the racial, gender, class, or sexual orientation group to which someone belongs. We fetishize what is visible as if it contains the ‘truth’ of the person – revealing inner thoughts, capacities, and attitudes even though we understand, on some level, that we may well be mistaken” (Moya 2006, 107)

\textsuperscript{22} For an excellent representation of this critique, see Dhamoon (2009).
multicultural accommodation (e.g. Queer or Deaf communities/culture), and in terms of the scope of such accommodation. Such an extension of scope will be particularly manifested in a publicized and politicized acknowledgement of the broader epistemological value diverse cultural perspectives may offer as a crucial means of moving closer to providing justice and equality for all. In so doing, my method rejects the explicit focus on ‘temporal and spatial’ dimensions of culture, as being centrally salient in determining the scope and content of legitimate claims made on the basis of cultural justice, and stresses the ‘intersectional’ nature of identity and oppression, contra Dhamoon’s critique that overuse of culture in theorizing matters of difference may result in the occlusion of other forms of difference (2006, 23). And here I draw a strong connection between a critical realist account of the value of experience and a critical race or Millsian critique of the ideological abstractions from historical injustice endemic to the study of ideal/idealized theory – emphasizing that we must first know the world if we are to seek principles that will improve it.

Accessing this radical potential embodied in my critical synthetic method must necessarily entail a loosening of the strict liberal requirements of multiculturalism. I suggest this, not as a means of smuggling in ‘traditional’ or conservative principles – but rather as a means of challenging oppressive and insulting dichotomies between illiberal and liberal or minority and majority, which assume the superiority (and at times universal appeal – see the ‘liberal expectation,’ touched on in chapter three) of these culturally particular and oftentimes exclusionary principles. If such a project is to be successful, theorists both supportive and critical

23 In the case of Kymlicka (1995a), we may think of this in terms of the demanding criteria by which he defines ‘societal cultures,’ which must demonstrate ‘deep and relatively stable’ differences from other cultural groups, and must possess the necessary size, concentration, and institutional completeness, if a given cultural community is to deserve the right to reproduce itself. In the case of another liberal culturalist, Charles Taylor, this bias towards cultural groups of a large size and geographical concentration, as well as ones exhibiting substantial longevity, is clear in his criteria that only groups which have “animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time” are worthy of some sort of state-sponsored protection and reproduction (66, 1994).
of multiculturalism alike must stop assuming that ‘illiberal’ is synonymous with bad or backwards or even barbaric. To give intercultural dialogue a chance of doing more than reaffirming the superiority of the liberal majority’s values and ways of life, substantive and principled objections to these values must be given space in the public and political realm – contesting even ‘fundamental’ aspects of liberal/Canadian life. Part of this work will be done in uncovering deep-seated and at times unconsciously accepted prejudices and biases, along with naturalized inequalities within this set of majority principles. But the value of a more open-ended, politically and epistemologically radical multiculturalism is not limited to this type of dissent or critique, despite the fundamental nature of this uncovering/contesting role.

It may also contribute to a more basic and collective engagement with the mysteries and imperfections of our shared world and of the human experience. The idea that no cultural group or society has found the complete set of answers regarding how to produce flourishing lives and just institutions implies some logical commitment to the ongoing necessity of expressing and debating radically different perspectives on the self and the good life. Pushing beyond a formal liberal commitment to freedom of speech, conscience, or other individual rights, however, I argue for a more robust and political expression of difference derived from collective cultural experience and subjective identity. Such an expression requires, again, a substantive challenge to the liberal public/private split, and, as was argued in the previous chapters, the distinctly exclusionary and colonial nature of liberal standards further necessitates their public contestation and at times rejection.

However, my arguments in favor of the potential for objective knowledge and valuable approaches to the good life to be meaningfully derived from subjective cultural experience need not overshadow the critical role of a more radical multiculturalism in identifying and interrogating the systemic biases and hierarchical privileges endemic to the status quo, which are differentially attached to one’s visibility, identification, and affinity/membership within a variety of culturally marginalized or privileged groups. Indeed, one commitment need not exclude the
other, and in principle I seek to weight these equally in my critical synthetic defense of such ‘radical multiculturalism,’ although in particular contexts, of varying degrees of racialized and gendered stratification and domination, for example, one aspect of this defense may be given more weight depending on the political, epistemological and moral projects at hand. In general, I see this approach to cultural diversity as a valuable means of opening up public/social space for the expression and contestation of cultural values and knowledges which may offer insights about equality and justice crucial to all, even those who must see their privilege challenged and, in many cases, resisted and dismantled.

In the next three chapters, I will attempt to demonstrate the normative and analytical advantages of such an alternative approach to the politics of cultural diversity, by further contrasting my critical synthetic approach to multicultural dialogue and accommodation against Kymlicka’s hegemonic liberal culturalist model. While not looking closely at specific claims made by individual cultural groups, I will critically examine the dichotomous categories of ‘polyethnic’ immigrant groups and ‘minority nations,’ which are typically employed within liberal multicultural discourse based on a distinction originating from within Kymlicka’s influential work.

In contrast to Kymlicka’s dichotomous model, I will defend a reconceptualization of cultural difference operating along a continuum, following the recommendations of Young (1997a). From this endorsement of a continuum method, which resists the hierarchical ranking of difference Kymlicka’s model entails, I will offer an alternative set of procedural guidelines for multicultural accommodation, dialogue, and radical testimony. The guidelines for such accommodations, dialogue, and testimony are based not on a categorical division between nations and polyethnic groups, but are instead focused on subjective experience, social location, historical injustice, and the potential for objective epistemic contributions to stem from distinct cultural perspectives, thereby establishing conditions for political and egalitarian dialogue through which
to evaluate the claims made by ‘minority’ cultural groups within the Canadian context and beyond.
Chapter Six: Categories and Continuums

The names keep proliferating, as though there was a seething reality, unmanageable and uncontainable in any one name.

Himani Bannerji *Dark Side of the Nation* (2000, p. 65)

This chapter proceeds as a challenge to Kymlicka’s defense of group-differentiated cultural rights, which is based on a hierarchical dichotomy between ‘polyethnic’ immigrant groups and ‘minority nations’ in which the justice claims of minority nations are privileged above all other ‘cultural’ groups. My main critique is divided into two parts. I argue, first, with Bhikhu Parekh (1997, 2006), that Kymlicka’s model is both theoretically and normatively inconsistent, here challenging the restrictions on ‘voluntary’ immigrants and their subsequent rights owed, which seems in contradiction to Kymlicka’s general account of cultural belonging as a primary good. And, second, with Iris Marion Young (1997a), I suggest that Kymlicka’s model is unnecessarily dichotomous and hierarchical, offering only integration and separation as potential options for cultural minorities within his liberal culturalist model, thereby reducing the potential for intercultural exchange and excluding some of the most important groups in need of cultural justice and accommodation. Prior to considering and adapting these critiques from Parekh and Young, however, I will outline Kymlicka’s defense of his group-differentiated schedule of multicultural rights, and briefly explore ‘post-multicultural’ objections from Seyla Benhabib (2002), relating to the ‘reductionist sociology’ allegedly at the heart of Kymlicka’s definition of a ‘societal culture,’ and his ‘overly bounded’ and static conception of culture more generally.

Drawing from, and responding to, the above criticisms, this chapter will conclude by briefly introducing my alternative critical synthetic method (C.S) for a ‘radical’ multiculturalism.¹ Such an approach is aimed towards defending the necessary expansion of the scope of

¹ This conceptualization of ‘radical’ multiculturalism is more prevalent in American debates, where multiculturalism has not been institutionalized, as it has been in Canada in its state-based, top-down form. Detached from this statist approach, multiculturalism can serve as a radical call ‘from below,’ as Bannerji (2000) suggests when comparing the Canadian and American contexts with respect to diversity discourses.
multicultural accommodation and justice, operationalized through an egalitarian and substantive intercultural dialogue and a general widening of the public and political/economic sphere to include diverse cultural perspectives and knowledge’s.\(^2\) Within my C.S method, I attempt to articulate some of the basic conditions and procedures that might help to make such dialogue possible.\(^3\) Importantly, support for such dialogue and for an expansion of cultural justice broadly understood, I argue, must not be based not on a firm dichotomy between minority nations and polyethnic groups and the separate rights owed to each, a practice which I suggest supports false barriers between groups and often leaves out key cultural groups seeking justice.

Instead, my C.S model proceeds by viewing cultural claims on a continuum, differentiating between degrees rather than kinds, of both the differences at hand, and the degree, rather than dichotomous kind, of subsequent accommodations required. I draw this concept of a continuum from Young (1997a), who proposed it in her reply to Kymlicka following the publication of *Multicultural Citizenship* (1995a). To Young’s proposal, I will add three evaluative criteria, meant to help guide the procedures (although not the outcomes) of an expanded or radical form of intercultural dialogue. To briefly anticipate that argument, these criteria are:

1) The *epistemic value* of a given cultural perspective: through my emphasis on multiculturalism as a form of both radical critique and an invaluable form of epistemic cooperation, my C.S model is committed to the public/political expression of cultural perspectives as a means of sharing knowledge across difference. Putting this principle into practice requires public forums in which such perspectives may gain a respectful hearing, and here there is an emphasis not simply on

\(^2\) This commitment suggests there ought to be a greater inclusion and accommodation of difference, among other areas, in the workplace – particularly relating to ‘merit’ standards, credentials, and decision-making procedures. See Young (1990). But I am also thinking more broadly about widening the overall range of behaviors, beliefs, perspectives and practices that may be included within a reconceptualization of the ‘public.’

\(^3\) While I attempt to lay some groundwork for the sites and procedures of this dialogical process in the seventh and eighth chapters, as well as in the conclusion, these are tentative recommendations, recognizing that much must be done – materially, cognitively, emotionally – to establish conditions where previously excluded knowledges could receive, in the words of Sara Ahmed, a “just hearing” (2004, 200).
‘rational’ dialogue guided by the norms and values of the so-called ‘majority,’ but on radical testimony⁴ and impassioned speech as well.

2) The social location of the subject who claims to be speaking from a distinct cultural perspective, here attending to the general, structural positioning of the subject and group. Here, the emphasis is on listening to the types of accommodations actually being requested and the reasons for their perceived necessity, spoken from a variety of individual, subjective perspectives within a cultural group, looking not just at ‘cultural’ aspects of their location, but also attending to differences with respect to gender, age, class, sexuality, and so on.

3) Considering the historical injustices and patterns of contemporary structural oppression or privilege to which this location may be attached. These three criteria are established and justified with reference to critical realist arguments supporting the potential for subjective experience to contribute to objective knowledge, and the overall epistemological value of cultural diversity, conceived of as a grounding premise of my C.S model.

While briefly introduced in this chapter, my C.S model for multicultural dialogue and accommodation will be more fully explained, and its advantages expressed, in the seventh and eight chapters. Here, I mean only to demonstrate the need for an alternative model for multicultural accommodation by highlighting the weaknesses of the hegemonic liberal method articulated by Kymlicka, and to offer a preliminary sketch of some basic procedural guidelines and justificatory rationale for such an alternative.

Before outlining my own alternative, then, I will first consider Kymlicka’s categories of cultural difference, along with several of the most prominent and compelling critiques of his model. Since the publication of Multicultural Citizenship in the mid-nineties, Kymlicka’s definition of ‘societal cultures’ – and his subsequent categorical distinction between polyethnic groups and minority nations – has been the subject of much debate and contestation, and more has been said about these categories than can be covered here. Throughout this chapter, I will attempt to draw on what I consider to be some of the most compelling and prominent of these

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⁴ The meaning and use of ‘testimony’ in my model will be outlined in the seventh and eighth chapters.
criticisms of his model, while blending these criticisms with insights from my own C.S perspective.

Kymlicka’s defense of group-differentiated rights is outlined most systemically in Multicultural Citizenship, and it is from this text, and his later work defending the theory in Politics in the Vernacular (2001), that I will primarily develop an account of his position and begin to critique it. In Multicultural Citizenship, Kymlicka’s approach to applying multicultural rights is somewhat contextual – as evidenced by his distinction between polyethnic and national minorities, and the various forms of rights (funding to support and express cultural heritage in the case of polyethnic groups, and guaranteed representation and the potential for self-rule in the case of national minorities) that may be afforded to these differentiated groups. However, while attending to differences in context relating to the form of incorporation into the larger polity at hand, considering the ‘forced’ incorporation in the case of minority nations, and the ‘voluntary’ nature of incorporation for polyethnic groups, Kymlicka is still attempting to justify these differentiated rights according to abstract principles of liberalism: namely a commitment to individual autonomy and (formal) equality.

On one hand, Kymlicka defends group-differentiated rights in part through the argument that, in order to treat cultural groups equally, it will not always be possible to treat them the same. But, on the other hand, his general defense of multiculturalism – that culture provides an important autonomy building role for individuals and thus ought to be promoted as a primary good – applies to all persons in principle, although perhaps not pragmatically, as my discussion of Kymlicka’s distinction between polyethnic groups and nations will make clear. It is the interplay

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5 In his more recent work, Kymlicka (2007b) has remained committed to the efficacy of the group-differentiated schedules of cultural rights offered under liberal multiculturalism, saying, “[t]he logic of liberal multiculturalism cannot be captured in the form ‘all minorities have a right to X’ or ‘all persons belonging to minorities have a right to X.’ Different types of minorities have fought for, and gained, different types of minority rights, and this group-differentiated targeting is key both to understanding the challenges involved in adopting liberal multiculturalism and to evaluating its successes and limitations to date” (2007b, 79 my emphasis).
between these principles, abstract and supposedly universal on one level, but used to defend a particular and mutually exclusive set of rights for ‘polyethnic groups,’ on one hand, and the more fundamental category of ‘minority nations,’ on the other, that is of particular interest to me.

In his attempt to develop a differentiated account of the cultural protections owed to ‘polyethnic groups’ versus ‘national minorities,’ Kymlicka argues that, “nations are basic units of liberal political theory,” and he goes on to suggest that ‘societal cultures’ as he defines them – spanning the full range of public and private activities, with a distinct history, language, and set of more or less complete institutional arrangements – will almost always be nations (1995a, 93). For ‘forcibly incorporated’ minority nations like Quebec, Kymlicka suggests, the societal culture remains a valuable context for choice for its members, and, in order to ensure equality and to promote conditions of autonomy, such contexts ought to be protected, at times entailing rights to collective autonomy or self-government.

In contrast, Kymlicka argues, “[i]mmigrants are not ‘nations,’ and do not occupy homelands. Their distinctiveness is manifested primarily in their family lives and voluntary associations, and is not inconsistent with their institutional integration” into the nation-state and culture (1995a, 14 my emphasis). In this way, while valuing some forms of public expressions of cultural distinctness (typically those which may add richness and ‘flare’ to the already existing ‘national’ culture and/or those designed to combat explicit moments of discrimination against minority groups within this national culture), in the case of non-national ‘polyethnic groups,’ the enjoyment of cultural identity and its full expression is to be left largely up to private associations and the home.

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6 The value of national or ‘societal’ cultures is derived in large part due to a nation’s institutional completeness within Kymlicka’s account. For example, Quebec has maintained its distinct civil law tradition, and has control over immigration, language laws, and other areas designed to help protect and promote the French language and Quebecois culture, helping it to remain a viable and rich context of choice for its members. The geographical concentration of Quebecois within the province is also a reason cited for why Quebec, as a more fully functional ‘societal culture’ should continue to receive such powers and protections.
Kymlicka thus generates and defends a dichotomous set of categories, outlining powers of self-government and special representation which may be rightly owed to national minorities, while promoting integrationist strategies for ‘polyethnic groups’ which have been the result of voluntary immigration. In his writing, Kymlicka explicitly rejects the concept of a continuum outlining degrees of difference, instead of such a division in kinds of cultural groups, partially on the grounds that his is a ‘forward-looking’ theory (1995a, 25). In other words, Kymlicka accepts that there are limitations to the efficacy of his categories, which many ‘hard cases,’ like refugees and asylum seekers, defy. But, as these exceptions are typically the result of “past injustices and inconsistencies,” he argues that a well developed theory and practice of multicultural justice will have already corrected for them, or in principle should not be defined by them, at minimum (Kymlicka 1995a, 25).

For Kymlicka, all other things being equal, in contrast to the minimal value assigned to membership in a non-national cultural group, the diffusion of a common national culture is deemed necessary for three related reasons in liberal democratic states: 1) It is a functional requirement of the modern economy, “with its need for a mobile, educated, and literate workforce;” 2) it reflects the need for a high level of solidarity within democratic states; and 3) the diffusion of a common culture is required by the modern commitment to equality of opportunity, made meaningful through access to a common education, language, and so on (1995a, 77).

Here, again, a national culture is deemed more valuable than an ethnic one, and, of course, only

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7 While attempting to promote values of equal opportunity and full participation in political and economic spheres is certainly laudable, I would echo Young’s (1997a) critique, which suggests that Kymlicka’s view wrongly assumes that economic and political integration, necessary for the equitable functioning of complex modern economies that Kymlicka speaks of, is necessarily overlapping or equivalent in all cases to cultural integration into a national identity. A continuum model, as I will later argue, allows for a flexibility in terms of the degree of cultural integration desired, but remains strongly committed to substantive political and economic integration, and of course, promotes cultural dialogue and exchange, if not always integration.
ethnic and national groups constitute ‘cultural’ ones at all, in his model. Given this lexical priority of the nation above that of less institutionally complete ethnic communities, Kymlicka concludes that “while there are many aspects of their heritage that immigrants will maintain and cherish, this will take the form not of re-creating a separate societal culture, but rather of contributing new options and perspectives to the larger Anglophone culture, making it richer and more diverse” (1995a, 78-79). Importantly, however, this ‘majority,’ or the state power representing it, continues to fully determine the scope and nature of such contributions, evaluating their worth in often exclusively self-referential terms.

Kymlicka ultimately suggests that a liberal approach to cultural rights assumes that, “individual freedom is tied in some important way to membership in one’s national group,” indicating here that the normative emphasis in his theory is not on accommodating various forms of cultural membership and diversity per se, but is more narrowly focused on that of differentiated national membership and on ensuring that all persons have access to some (non-achievement based nor racially coded) national culture (1995a, 52, my emphasis). Polyethnic groups are not nations, and, as such, must integrate into established ones, largely for pragmatic, rather than principled, reasons. Kymlicka writes,

> for a culture to survive and develop in the modern world, given the pressures towards the creation of a single common culture in each country, it must be a societal culture. Given the enormous significance of social institutions in our lives, and in determining our options, any culture which is not a societal culture will be reduced to ever-decreasing marginalization.

(1995a, 80)

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8 In *Finding Our Way* Kymlicka considers, but ultimately remains skeptical about the possibility of including non-ethnic groups within multiculturalism (1998, 103). While recognizing that there are cultural features to gay and lesbian groups and among the Deaf, Kymlicka suggests that extending multicultural accommodation to these groups will do more harm than good, leading to “misunderstandings and false analogies,” and thus overextending the scope of multiculturalism, which functions well as a policy and practice aimed at immigrant groups, in his analysis (1998, 103). Furthermore, in considering gay/queer and Deaf ‘cultures’ for multicultural accommodation, Kymlicka largely focuses on determining which side of the dichotomy they fall on, ultimately concluding that these groups have more in common with polyethnic immigrant groups, and therefore should be subject to ‘fair’ terms of integration, at best (1998, 98).
Thus, societal cultures become largely synonymous with national cultures in Kymlicka’s account, and it is these he seeks to most robustly defend.

In order to further justify this pragmatic distinction between the self-government and other representational powers owed to minority nations in order to maintain distinct societal cultures, on one hand, and the integrationist and supplementary cultural rights offered to ‘polyethnic groups,’ on the other, Kymlicka further maintains that there is a principled difference between forcibly incorporated national minorities and what immigrant groups want, or should rightfully expect, due to the voluntary nature of their arrival. Such voluntary arrival is considered both normatively and pragmatically different from the forcible incorporation9 of a minority nation by Kymlicka’s lights (1995a, 96). As for ‘hard cases’ like refugees, who cannot plausibly be said to have arrived voluntarily, Kymlicka simply suggests that such persons or groups are their former government’s responsibility, writing: “the injustice was committed by their home government, and it is not clear we can realistically ask host governments to redress it” (1995a, 99). Even when recognizing that the plight of refugees (and many immigrants) is “at least partly our responsibility,” Kymlicka places pragmatic limits on what these groups can expect, and suggests that, if the international system were just, immigrants and refugees would have no pragmatic or principled claims to cultural accommodation by the majority national culture (1995a, 99).10 Such a ‘forward-looking’ approach is not considered in the case of forcibly

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9 In challenging this distinction on the polyethnic side, I do not mean to dismiss the importance of the nature of incorporation of particular ‘national’ groups. When such incorporation is the result of conquest, as in the case of Quebec, or colonialism, as in the case of Aboriginal nations in Canada and other settler states, these histories remain of crucial importance.

10 In fairness, when considering the issue of ‘hard cases’ such as refugees, Kymlicka does suggest, within a footnote to Multicultural Citizenship, that affluent states which fail to meet their global redistributive obligations thus forfeit their moral right to exclude (1995a, 224, n.18). This is an important point, but one not expanded on or incorporated substantively into his theory.
incorporated national minorities, which in some cases may be similarly considered a product of our presently and historically unjust international status quo.\footnote{It should be acknowledged, however, that Kymlicka (2007b) has recognized that his categories may see their conceptual value limited to Western liberal-democracies, and may not apply as well for minorities in post-colonial emerging nations, where a powerful minority sometimes oppresses a majority, for example.}

This bias towards nations runs throughout his theory. Indeed, even Kymlicka’s discussion of the best approach to dealing with ‘illiberal’ groups is biased heavily in favor of the nation, when he expresses skepticism about imposing liberal values internationally or domestically, but primarily with respect to national minorities. According to Kymlicka, “[i]n the end, liberal institutions can only really work if liberal beliefs have been internalized by the members of a self-governing society, be it an independent country or a national minority” (Kymlicka 1995a, 167). On this subject, Kymlicka concludes that there is “relatively little scope for legitimate coercive interference” (Kymlicka 1995a, 167). Instead, Kymlicka encourages liberal reformers to lend support to any group efforts aimed towards transforming the illiberal culture from the inside, as well as offering incentives and pushing for stronger international mechanisms for protecting human rights (1995a, 168-69). Ultimately, Kymlicka answers yes to the question of whether the state must adhere to non-interference with respect to these illiberal minorities, while still offering state support for their cultural survival, at least in the case of national minorities. In the case of rights for polyethnic groups, on the other hand, Kymlicka argues that it is far more legitimate to compel these groups to adhere to liberal principles (1995a, 170).

In noticing the inconsistency of this approach, we may again recall that Kymlicka defends a liberal form of multicultural accommodation due to the premise that societal cultures are important contexts for the development of autonomous choice for individuals. He writes,

Liberalism rests on the value of individual autonomy – that is, the importance of allowing individuals to make free and informed choices about how to lead their lives – but what enables this sort of autonomy is the fact that our societal culture makes various options
available to us. Freedom, in the first instance, is the ability to explore and revise ways of life which are made available by our societal cultures.

(Kymlicka, 2001, 53)

Yet while culture may in principle play an autonomy-building role for all subjects, according to Kymlicka, only national cultures will be societal cultures, providing institutional completeness and a range of meaningful options for their members. It is this strong connection drawn between autonomy and culture which Kymlicka uses to justify not only a schedule of minority ‘accommodation’ rights, but also to emphasize the importance of nation-building within the ‘majority’ culture as well, therefore explaining his commitment to liberal nationalism along with liberal culturalism.\(^{12}\)

While minority nations ought then to be provided with the opportunity to engage in competitive nation-building practices, enjoying some of the same institutional and linguistic advantages as the majority nation, such robust rights are deemed inappropriate for immigrant groups, according to Kymlicka’s analysis. If these types of opportunities were even offered to immigrant groups, indeed, “immigrants would just have a shadowy existence at the margins of society, denied both equality in the mainstream, and the means to develop and maintain a flourishing societal culture alongside the mainstream” (2001, 54). Emphasizing the ‘onerous’ nature of nation-building efforts, especially in minority contexts, Kymlicka concludes, “the historical evidence is that the capacity and motivation to undertake such an ambitious nation-building project is only found in national minorities, rather than immigrant groups” (2001, 159). For example, to sustain itself as a minority nation, Quebec has needed substantial powers over immigration, education, language laws, and government employment (Kymlicka 2001, 158).

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\(^{12}\) Indeed, much of Kymlicka’s discussion of English/French Canadian relations suggests that more nation-building – particularly related to developing a strong English-Canadian national identity – could help ‘reconcile the solitudes,’ to borrow Taylor’s (1993) phrase, seeking to balance national unity through equalizing these two Canadian nationalities. For a more on his defense of English Canadian nation-building, see Kymlicka (1998). For other defenses of projects designed to foster a strong sense of ‘English-Canadian’ national identity as a response to Quebec and Aboriginal nationalisms see Resnick (1994) and Angus (1997).
Attempting to offer these sorts of powers and protections to polyethnic groups would be unwanted in many cases, principally unwarranted due to the voluntary nature of immigration, and, finally, pragmatically unfeasible.\textsuperscript{13}

Yet, for anyone contesting minority national rights, Kymlicka argues “the burden of proof surely rests on those who would deny national minorities the same powers of nation-building as those which the national majority takes for granted,” ignoring those who may seek to challenge both, and thus relying on assumptions relating to the centrality of the nation held within a liberal theory to justify a larger schedule of rights and powers owed to national minorities than those which ought to be made available to ‘polyethnic’ or ‘immigrant’ groups (2001, 29). Immigrants are, again, owed fewer protections for a variety of reasons, beginning with the fact that they are assumed to have come over more or less voluntarily, and have no widespread assumptions that their cultures will be brought over with them in a robust form,\textsuperscript{14} including institutional and linguistic practices, although some other forms of cultural expression and protection from discrimination should be expected (Kymlicka 2001, 30).

In other words, in the case of immigrants, Kymlicka argues, “[t]hey have accepted the assumption that their life-chances, and the life-chances of their children, will be bound up with participation in mainstream institutions operating in the majority language” (2001, 30). Again, because such immigrants have made this decision ‘voluntarily,’ there is both a principled and a

\textsuperscript{13} In seeking to challenge this connection between institutional completeness and viable cultural membership, I would suggest that, if culture were no longer conceived of as either best kept ‘private,’ on one hand, or as operating productively only when integrated into a nation-state’s institutional apparatus, on the other, then Kymlicka’s normative reliance on institutional completeness and territorial concentration may be weakened. This is the goal, in part, of bringing ‘private’ cultural identities more fully into public and political life, where they may potentially gain greater currency and broad-based support, as well as positive ‘recognition.’ Self-government or collective autonomy need not always be tied to ‘nation-building’ in the liberal sense used by Kymlicka, in other words.

\textsuperscript{14} In his critique of Kymlicka, Joseph Carens (2000) has suggested that such expectations may be the result of adaptive preferences on the part of immigrants, at least in some cases, a point which is certainly worthy of greater consideration than it typically receives within the multicultural literature.
pragmatic reason to restrict them to a lesser schedule of cultural rights and protections. Ultimately, he argues, such differential treatment within a group-specific schedule of minority rights “reflects different aspirations, and a different sense of legitimate expectations” (Kymlicka 2001, 51).

Finally, for Kymlicka, there is also a realpolitik reason for emphasizing the strong distinction between minority nations and polyethnic groups, namely that it helps avoid the ‘slippery slope’ argument that multiculturalism will lead to an overabundance of ‘special’ rights granted to all kinds of cultural groups, producing social fragmentation and balkanization (2001, 59). To avoid this danger, he argues, “we need to show that ethnocultural groups do not form a fluid continuum, in which each group has infinitely flexible needs and aspirations, but rather that there are deep and relatively stable differences between various kinds of ethnocultural groups” (Kymlicka 2001, 59 my emphasis).

Critiquing this conceptualization of the relatively ‘deep’ and ‘stable’ differences between cultural groups, which subsequently justifies their differentiated schedules of rights in Kymlicka’s work, Seyla Benhabib argues that such an account rests on “faulty epistemic premises,” resulting in a “reductionist sociology of culture” (2002, 4). Such an account arguably treats cultures as “clearly delineable wholes,” and thus risks reifying cultures as separate entities, overemphasizing their boundedness, distinctness, and internal homogeneity, while potentially legitimizing repressive demands for group conformity, and fetishizing them in ways that discourage critique of ‘authentic’ practices or roles (Benhabib 2002, 4). Importantly, Benhabib emphasizes, any sense of unity or coherence within a culture is inevitably established by outside observers and community elites, who tell particular narratives about the meaning and centrality of particular cultural practices, roles, and so on (2002, 5).

\[\text{15 For Benhabib, the concern is that, if cultural rights have been justified based on ‘deep’ and ‘relatively stable’ differences, such differences may ultimately be both exaggerated and forcibly maintained in order for cultural groups to continue to receive accommodation.}\]
In addition to these general objections, Benhabib seeks to problematize Kymlicka’s conceptualization of ‘societal cultures’ in particular, arguing that there are, in fact, no cultural groups meeting his thick definition. She writes,

Kymlicka has conflated institutionalized forms of collective public identities with the concept of culture… There is never a single culture, one coherent system of beliefs, significations, symbolizations, and practices, that would extend “across the full range of human activities.” I am arguing that there cannot be such a single principle of societal culture, and also that at any point in time there are competing collective narratives and significations that range across institutions and form the dialogue of cultures.

(Benhabib 2002, 60)

From this, Benhabib concludes that Kymlicka’s “definition of societal cultures is holistic, monochromatic, and idealistic in that it confuses social structure with social signification” (2002, 61). Instead of basing a justification for group-differentiated rights on the supposedly clear and stable differences between cultural groups, a reality Benhabib wishes to challenge, for her, “it is claims about justice, about democratic inclusion and exclusion that justify our disparate treatment of groups” (Benhabib 2002, 63, my emphasis).

Furthermore, Benhabib challenges Kymlicka’s privileging of minority nations on principled grounds, suggesting that, “Kymlicka cannot maintain the strong distinction he wishes to draw between national minority rights and the rights of immigrant groups,” which, again, privileges the category of the nation and views cultures as overly bounded and internally homogenous wholes (2002, 61). Like Parekh (1997, 2006), whose criticisms of Kymlicka will be considered momentarily, Benhabib observes that if Kymlicka’s liberal defense of cultural membership is related to autonomy and establishing a meaningful range of choices for individuals, “then, objectively, there is no basis for the theorist to privilege national cultures over immigrant ones, or the cultures of religious groups over those of social movements” (2002, 66).

Within Kymlicka’s theory the only logic seems to be that of the ‘voluntary’ nature of immigration, on the basis of which immigrants waive their right to a full expression of cultural membership, and the conflation, as Benhabib observes, of institutional structures with culture.
Because immigrants leave their socio-economic institutions behind, they are assumed to voluntarily waive the right to cultural reproduction and substantive cultural expression in the public sphere, which will continue to be dominated by the ‘national culture’ immigrant groups are expected to integrate within.

Somewhat counter to Benhabib, in my own criticisms of Kymlicka’s theory, I have attempted to emphasize that it is not cultures themselves which Kymlicka assumes to be homogenous or bounded, but rather, that it is individual subjects who are homogenized in his theory, which is focused on defending cultural contexts for individuals who will take up and instrumentally make use of cultural traditions and practices through an extrinsic relation to these practices, and who, under such a liberal theory, will value cultural belonging primarily as a means of expanding choice and thus enhancing autonomy. However, Benhabib’s efforts to highlight the normatively, theoretically, and empirically untenable separation between polyethnic groups and minority nations, along with her attempts to trouble Kymlicka’s definition of ‘societal cultures’ and its focus on institutional completeness, are well-taken, as are her general recommendations to conceive of cultures, not as delineable wholes, but rather, as a series of conflicting narrative structures subject to much internal contestation, hybridity, and heterogeneity (2002, 8).

Another important critique of Kymlicka’s liberal culturalist model comes from Parekh (1997, 2006) who begins by challenging Kymlicka on the narrow manner in which cultural contexts may prove valuable to their members within his liberal defense of multiculturalism, ultimately charging Kymlicka with emphasizing the ‘autonomy-building’ role of culture over a

16 See chapter two.
17 I also highlight Benhabib, in part, because she is a strong representative of the ‘post-multicultural’ approach, which has emerged to critique the holistic and bounded nature of liberal multiculturalism and Kymlicka’s theory of culture in particular. Others who have made excellent contributions in this area include Nancy Fraser (1997, 2001), Sarah Song (2005), and Anne Phillips (2007).
‘community-building one,’ and with incoherently defending the rights of national minorities over other cultural groups (1997, 56). Parekh writes,

Kymlicka… requires that all individuals should relate to their culture in an identical and largely liberal manner. For him individuals should freely and self-consciously affirm their membership in their cultural communities. They should reflect on it critically, locate it within a range of options, and decide freely whether they wish to subscribe to it.

(1997, 59)

Parekh emphasizes that this is one way to look at the value of cultural belonging, but far from the only one, and indeed, suggests that this autonomy-building view is incompatible with other conceptions of cultural membership, such as Hindus and orthodox Jews, who may “view their culture as an ancestral inheritance to be cherished and transmitted as a matter of loyalty to their forebears,” or Catholics and other religious communities, who may “ground their culture in divine self-revelation and view it as a sacred trust to be preserved in a spirit of piety and gratitude” (1997, 59). Yet, due to the centrality of Kymlicka’s emphasis on the autonomy-building role culture may play for individuals, thus warranting cultural accommodations for minority groups, cultures that do not fulfill this autonomy building role are implicitly marked as inferior in Kymlicka’s account, and will be subject to ‘liberalizing’ measures – at least in the case of polyethnic groups. Thus, according to Parekh, Kymlicka problematically “homogenizes all cultures and reduces their diverse modes of self-understanding and self-appropriation to a single liberal model” in a disrespectful and potentially alienating manner (1997, 60). This criticism is similar to the one I made above, relating to the homogenization of subjects and how they ought to relate (autonomously, instrumentally) to their cultural contexts.

In addition to noticing these general but important limitations of Kymlicka’s theory, Parekh’s critique is helpful in terms of problematizing the instrumental and narrow manner in which Kymlicka stresses the importance of one’s own culture and its autonomy-building role, to the expense of a more wide-ranging defense of cultural diversity itself. Beyond defending a
basic level of diversity conducive to providing a sufficient range of choice, Parekh argues,

Kymlicka’s model fails to coherently promote the value of cultural diversity. He writes,

Kymlicka does not fully recognize that just as we need “our” culture, we also need others in order to appreciate the individuality and the strength and limitations of our own. In other words, he emphasizes the value of culture but not of cultural diversity, of our culture but not a plurality of interacting cultures.

(Parekh 1997, 61)

Cultures must conform to liberal ideals, particularly relating to individualism and autonomy, in order to be worthy of multicultural accommodation in contexts like Canada, according to Kymlicka. The range of diverse cultural groups deemed permissible is flattened by this commitment, and what value diversity holds is, again, instrumental and particular in this way. There is no intrinsic defense of diversity furthered within Kymlicka’s liberal multiculturalism,

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18 Indeed, even the value of one’s own culture depends on its institutional, liberalized and national character within Kymlicka’s theory.

19 However, while there is no intrinsic value of diversity defended within Kymlicka’s theory, in addition to defending cultural membership due to its autonomy-building role, Kymlicka does consider the potential value cultural diversity holds for the majority, by expanding the range of cultural experience and adding richness and flare to the majority culture’s enjoyment and consumption, noting that “protecting minority cultures is increasingly recognized to be an expression of overall enlightened self-interest” (Falk, qtd 1995a 121). I would suggest this approach fails to defend diversity intrinsically, however, as this view constructs the value of diversity more shallowly and instrumentally than my own C.S model – here culture adds ‘flare’ and an air of the exotic to the majority culture, which still stands at the moral core of the citizenry, supplemented by ‘minority’ cultures. Culture’s value is cast as an instrumental benefit to the majority, rather than an intrinsic value to its own members and as potentially having epistemological value to all. In contrast, my C.S view requires a more respectful and far-reaching inclusion of alternative cultural views that his support for self-rule for minority nations may even reduce cross-cultural diversity, as Parekh and Young both suggest. Kymlicka, also in contrast to my own approach, remains skeptical of this argument in public debate on the grounds of any epistemological and moral necessity. Furthermore, although somewhat applicable to the case of polyethnic rights, Kymlicka’s approach views the ‘cultural diversity argument’ to have the weakest appeal when dealing with the claims of minority nations. Here, less cultural exchange may occur, although legal separation need not occur for cultural separation to be solidified through accommodations for minority nations. Thus, as Parekh suggests, Kymlicka is more concerned, from a liberal perspective, with the value diversity holds within cultures, because such internal diversity facilitates individual choice – creating more options and expanding the range of options open to individuals – than with maintaining diversity across cultures. Indeed, Kymlicka acknowledges that this approach may reduce diversity, because he suggests that the benefit cultural diversity may offer is not equal to the cost of protecting minority cultures, and will likely be rejected for this reason by the majority.
and cultural membership is largely collapsed into national membership in his theory, again
limiting the general value of diversity and at times reducing the potential for cross-cultural
exchange through his emphasis on ‘deep and stable’ cultural differences and on the value of
‘institutional completeness’ within a single cultural context. Such criticisms from Parekh help tie
into my own C.S model’s advantages as an alternative approach, which explicitly emphasizes the
value of diversity for epistemological reasons, as well as ones more intrinsically related to the
constitutive nature of cultural contexts in the production and understanding of personal identity
and in establishing conditions for self-respect.

Finally, Parekh’s critique rests on emphasizing the normative and theoretical
inconsistency of Kymlicka’s hierarchical and group-differentiated schedule of cultural rights,
which arguably is in contradiction to his general understanding of having access to one’s cultural
context as constituting a primary social good in the Rawlsian sense, that is, what any rational
agent would want and need in order to effectively pursue their self-chosen life plan, regardless of
their other needs and desires. Such a general commitment, Parekh notices, seems to be in
contradiction with Kymlicka’s separation between the rights of self-government and autonomy
owed to minority nations, and the lesser and integrationist schedule of cultural protections offered
to ‘polyethnic groups.’ If, as Kymlicka argues it does, culture operates as a primary good, Parekh
wonders, how can merely referring to the ‘voluntary’ nature of immigration be enough to waive
such an important good (2006, 103)?

In this way, Parekh emphasizes that there remains a disconnect between the normative
argument Kymlicka provides based on culture’s autonomy building role for all subjects, and the
pragmatic limits he places on this general theory in the case of non-national groups. In addition
to highlighting this contradiction alongside Parekh, within my own C.S account, I seek to trouble
the degree to which many patterns of immigration may seen as be ‘voluntary’ in a complex and
interwoven global environment shaped by economic exploitation of the Third World/South by the
First World/North, and so greatly impacted by past and enduring legacies of colonization, imperial expansion, and slavery. In this way, I would challenge the ‘principled’ nature of Kymlicka’s suggestion that these groups can rightly expect only fair terms of integration, rather than any self-government or more robust schedule of cultural accommodations. Finally, Parekh reminds us that, “just as immigrants come voluntarily, the receiving country too admits them voluntarily (1997, 62). As such, he goes onto say, it is “difficult to see why the latter is freed of such obligations as its consent entails” (Parekh 1997, 62).

I would echo these criticisms, and yet, ultimately, it would seem these contradictions in terms of consent, and that of the general value assigned to cultural membership as a primary good

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20 I make this choice of terminology following Chandra-Talpade Mohanty (2003, 3), who herself draws it from Zillah Eisenstein (1998). However, even when used to distinguish between privileged, affluent nations and economically and politically marginalized and exploited nations and communities, such labels are problematic and should be read tentatively, in light of complex histories and discursive practices and through attempts to resist a homogenizing of complex and diverse subjects both within and across the ‘Third World/South’ and the ‘First World/North.’ Following Arif Dirlik’s (1997) formulation of the North/South, I also find it useful to think of these distinctions as somewhat metaphorical, relating to economic marginalization and living conditions, rather than simply or always geographical, and thus, recognizing the existence of ‘Third World’ conditions within the ‘First World/North,’ for example. While necessarily used carefully, such categories retain a political and analytical value, as they represent not only disparities of wealth and power, but recall histories of colonization and ongoing economic and cultural imperialism (see Mohanty, 227, 2003).

21 Embarking on a prolonged discussion of the nature of global (in)justice and global interconnectivities of oppression, domination, exploitation, colonization, imperialism and development, is beyond this project. However, some influential theoretical discussions of the nature and scope of ‘global justice’ as a response to economic exploitation of the Third World/South by the First World/North and/or to complex patterns of imperialism, colonization and global capitalism can be found by Rawls (1999), Young (2006), Abizadeh (2008), and Pogge (2011). Among these, I would especially highlight Young’s model of social connectivity and responsibility within the context of global justice. For alternative strategies for theorizing and practicing transnational solidarity and attending to co-implications of transnational power and oppression in the era of global capitalism, see Chandra-Talpade Mohanty (2003, especially 221-51).

22 Immigration is often discussed and valued quite instrumentally, and indeed, is typically defended in terms of the economic contributions of immigrants. At the same time, however, immigrant groups are frequently used scapegoats in times of economic crisis or upheaval. When immigration is defended only in narrow terms of economic contribution, other contributions from immigrants, and reasons why immigration might be defended – the importance of family life, for example – are often ignored or marginalized (Thobani 2000). Recent trends within Canadian immigration policy towards increasing temporary work visas and placing moratoriums on sponsorship applications seem to support this critique all the more.
which may yet be ‘voluntarily’ waived by immigration – are not resolved so much as they are sidestepped in Kymlicka’s theorizing. Rather than being addressed within the bulk of Kymlicka’s theory, such concerns about how ‘voluntary’ immigration may be, and regarding the uneven burden on immigrants to integrate into a majority culture, while this majority culture has comparatively limited obligations to adapt to the incoming cultural patterns of the immigrant groups, are largely elided through a privileging of national cultures above others, and through the ‘forward-looking’ assumption that immigrants will be able to effectively integrate into and pursue autonomous life plans within this national context and culture.

I hope that such criticisms from Parekh, as well as those made earlier by Benhabib, may help to demonstrate that alternative methods of theorizing culture, difference, and the conditions of a just multicultural polity more generally, are needed. I find the beginnings of such an alternative approach in the combined insights of critical realism and post-colonial, critical race feminism, and seek to further synthesize these insights with the recommendations of Young (1997a) in her response to Kymlicka’s theory.

In her comment on Kymlicka’s *Multicultural Citizenship*, Young writes,

I find that Kymlicka does not follow through on [his] pluralizing project… He stops with a duality, rather than a plurality. I shall argue in this comment that the dichotomy between nation and ethnicity is *too categorical*, and that the categorical distinctions Kymlicka sets up as following from this distinction create *too rigid and even contradictory an account of multicultural citizenship*.

(1997a, 49 my emphasis)

In addition to producing what is generally too rigid a dichotomy between nations and ethnic groups, Young suggests that Kymlicka’s distinction between fairer terms of integration and inclusion for ethnic minorities, versus powers of self-government and special representation for

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23 The idea within in Kymlicka, again, seems to be that it is not strictly *your* culture, but only having access to an institutionally complete national culture that really matters, at least in the sense of building autonomy. The assumption is that an institutionally complete national-liberal culture can and will accommodate and welcome integration (rather than strict assimilation) of immigrants, and there is a corresponding assumption that such a national culture will be superior to other, less institutionally complete, or ‘illiberal’ cultures.
national minorities, is inevitably separatist on the national minority side (1997a, 50). She writes, “the objective of polyethnic rights is… to promote the integration of ethnic minorities into large society, whereas self-government rights of national minorities have a separatist tendency” (1997a, 50).

On one level, however, Kymlicka might reasonably reject this critique, arguing that extending self-governing powers and symbolic recognition of national distinctness within multinational federal states will in practice serve as a stop-gap against – rather than an incentive towards – separation, reducing dissatisfaction and resentment within the minority nation by recognizing many of its claims for such distinct powers and positive recognition. While I am sympathetic to this aspect of Kymlicka’s argument, it is important to distinguish here between separation in the sense of legal sovereignty, on the one hand, and as creating limitations on cultural interchange, on the other. In the case of the latter, I agree with Young’s criticisms, which are similar to those made by Parekh, who, again, suggests that Kymlicka makes a better case for the value of cultural membership than he does for cultural diversity and dialogue.

While important, these objections are not the main focus of my own critique, and in order to get to the root of it, I will now turn to Young’s general conclusion that Kymlicka’s account is “unnecessary dichotomous” (1997a, 50). As Young writes, Kymlicka “sets up two categories which are opposing and mutually exclusive in their characteristics. All cultural minorities are supposed to fall on one side or the other of this dichotomy, even though Kymlicka points out that some groups do not fit this classification” (1997a, 50). Such a dichotomy may have the effect of widening perceived gaps between the cultural groups which fall on either side of it, producing the kind of bounded and holistic view of cultures Benhabib (2002) criticizes, and perhaps obscuring some group’s real needs, while, again, hierarchically privileging the category of the nation.

Additionally, there are many groups that do not neatly satisfy either the definitions of a full national (societal) culture or of a ‘voluntary’ polyethnic immigrant group. Instead of constituting a few hard cases that one would inevitably have to leave out of general theorizing
about cultural difference, Young argues, those groups left out of Kymlicka’s model will in fact form a quite large portion of those rightfully seeking a more substantive experience of cultural justice and equality under multiculturalism. She concludes that, “slaves, transported forced labor, political and economic refugees, guest workers, colonial subjects, are all anomalies on Kymlicka’s classification, but together they account for a large portion of the forebears of contemporary multicultural minorities” (1997a, 50).

Young problematizes Kymlicka’s account, then, for being unnecessarily dichotomous, excluding many of the groups most in need of cultural accommodation and self-government powers, relying too heavily on the concept (and value) of the nation, and finally, for having separatist tendencies with respect to national minorities and overly integrationist ones with respect to ethnic groups. In his theorizing in *Multicultural Citizenship* and elsewhere, we can recall, Kymlicka argues inclusion is best suited for polyethnic groups because this is what, by and large, these groups are actually demanding, and he attempts to distinguish between voluntary integration and forced assimilation. In response, Young rightly suggests, “Kymlicka fails to distinguish here between inclusion in economic opportunity and political decision-making, and inclusion in the dominant national culture” (1997a, 52, my emphasis). To this I would also add that Kymlicka focuses more on minorities ‘liberalizing’ to adapt to the majority national culture than he does on transforming this national culture to allow for more substantive contributions and alternative approaches from cultural ‘minorities,’ leaving the onus for change too greatly on the side of incoming citizens, rather than the ‘national culture,’ which voluntarily admits them.

In light of these objections, Young concludes that Kymlicka’s desire to develop “two mutually exclusive categories of cultural minorities is misguided, and that it is far better to think

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24 Like Benhabib, Young suggests the focus of multicultural accommodation and self-government should be aimed at combating historical injustice and ensuring greater justice in the future, rather than simply justified by ‘inherent’ rights to national self-determination, the unique autonomy-building role of institutionally complete and geographically concentrated ‘national’ cultures, or their supposed ‘deep’ and ‘stable’ cultural differences (1997a, 53).
of cultural communities in a *continuum*, or perhaps a set of continua” (1997a, 50-51, my emphasis). For Young, “thinking of difference among cultural groups as a matter of degree rather than kind… [is likely] to fit the facts better and to support more nuanced moral arguments” (1997a, 51). To briefly demonstrate the advantages of such a continuum model, Young notices that cultural groups will vary both in terms of the degree to which they satisfy the definition of a ‘societal culture’ Kymlicka provides, and in the degree to which a cultural group “dwells within a larger society because of the voluntary actions on the part of its members,” or through more involuntary action, whether it be out of political, cultural, or economic necessity (1997a, 51).

Finally, the extent to which groups will wish to integrate into the larger society is also a matter of degree, as is the degree to which later society welcomes such participation (Young 1997, 51).

Allowing for variation, while not automatically assigning a lesser schedule of cultural rights to a group falling on the wrong side of dichotomous categories, will thus capture a fuller picture of those groups which may be rightfully owed accommodations and space within multiculturalism.

In defending her continuum model, Young writes,

I advocate… a softening and pluralizing of the differences among cultural minorities for many reasons… It allows more possibility for considering the specific issues of justice at stake for different groups, because it can take more into account of the history of how the group became a cultural minority, to what degree the process was chosen and to what degree the group has been welcomed into the economic and political life of the society. It also allows more differentiation of respects in which a group seeks or ought to have integration, and respects in which its members seek to remain separate. I believe that a softening and pluralizing of this distinction may also enable a conceptualization of the possibility that persons, and not only societies, can be multicultural, or at least bicultural.

(52, 1997, my emphasis)

I find this concept of multicultural subjects, and not simply states, to be a very compelling formulation, a positive commitment to which, I hope, may help offset the potential for ‘essentializing’ or over generalizing objections to my central use of culture.\(^\text{25}\) Importantly, this use of a continuum model, through a focus on justifying cultural accommodations along the lines

\(^{25}\) More will be said about the multicultural nature of subjects in the next chapter.
of past injustice and in efforts towards improving contemporary conditions of justice, also helps move away from a central reliance on the concept of the *nation* as having a uniquely privileged cultural role. Indeed, according to Young, such a continuum model may allow us to eliminate the concept of the nation altogether, at least in terms of Kymlicka’s central usage of it as representing a bounded and institutionally complete people with “inherent” rights to self-determination distinct from, and superior to, other cultural groups (1997a, 52-53).²⁶

Yet, in Kymlicka, as has been shown, pride of place is continually given to national minorities within multiculturalism, perhaps due to the state-centric and nationalistic biases within liberal theory.²⁷ Whatever the rationale, as Young emphasizes, Kymlicka’s dichotomous model reduces the potential rights owed or offered to non-national minorities, and leaves out many of the most disadvantaged and oppressed of such ‘minorities’ struggling for recognition of their political, economic, and cultural marginalization; groups which may simultaneously experience a lack of positive appreciation of their collective difference, traditions, practices, and histories. Such a dichotomy assumes a rigid distinction between cultural groups, leaves many of the most pressing cases for multicultural accommodation and self-determination out of the picture, and narrowly defends ‘isolationist’ accommodations for national minorities, and ‘integrationist’ ones for non-national cultural groups, thus putting “into question the very possibility of a multicultural society,” according to Young (1997a, 51). In other words, Kymlicka’s model divides groups artificially, excludes many of the most pressing cases, and, as Parekh also argues, makes a

²⁶ While moving away from this reliance on the concept of nations, Young is not rejecting the potential for self-government powers to be extended to cultural groups. Instead, Young advocates for a shift away from institutionally and territorially focused conceptions of self-government, suggesting that “as the world becomes more and more integrated, and government regulation potentially refers to so many kinds of issues and jurisdictional layers… many self-government rights need not be tied to a bounded territory, and it is possible for a group to have self-government rights with respect to some issues and not others” (1997a, 53).

²⁷ An important exception to the dominance of liberal *nationalism* within contemporary liberal theory has been articulated by Chandran Kukathas (2003).
stronger case for cultural (we may read this as national) membership than it does for the overarching value of cultural diversity and dialogue.

As an alternative approach, aimed at combating many of the above weakness of Kymlicka’s theory, I offer my own C.S. model, drawing from critical realism, critical race and post-colonial feminism, and supplemented by Young’s insights. Because I follow Young in advocating for a continuum model, and place critical weight on social location as a means of evaluating and negotiating complex claims for rights, redistributions, and/or structural reforms and cultural decolonization, my C.S. approach is best thought of as offering a set of operating procedures for a robust process of cultural dialogue and exchange, rather than determining prima facie what will be decided and which groups (in the broad and dichotomous forms Kymlicka describes) will be privileged or given more weight, normative or otherwise.

In other words, I do not attempt to offer a new set of criteria ranking broad and supposedly bounded categories of cultural difference, which leads to an artificial separation between groups, particularly between nations and their Others, whether ‘majority’ or ‘minority’ nations are at stake, and minimizes internal contestation and difference. Within Kymlicka’s model, this dichotomy assumes too easily that immigration based on economic or political necessities produced through complex and interwoven global connectivities of power and privilege can be thought of as ‘voluntary,’ or as sufficient to waive the vital right of all cultural subjects to have access to public and political opportunities for rich expressions of their cultural identity and modes of belonging, along with any substantive access to legal or institutional pluralism for these groups. Like Young, I argue that self-government rights and other multicultural accommodations must not be generated from accounts of either the supposedly

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28 I draw my understanding of process of decolonization from Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who argues that “decolonization involves profound transformations of self, community, and governance structures – it can only be engaged through consent and resistance to structures of psychic and social domination. It is a historical and a collective process, and as such can only be understood within these contexts” (2003, 7-8).
“inherent” rights of nations, or like Parekh (2006, 2008), from their instrumental autonomy-building role. Nor should these accommodations be reduced to mere integration in the case of ‘polyethnic groups.’ Instead, I follow Young in suggesting that such powers and accommodations ought to be justified through arguments relating to their crucial role in contributing to a rectification of injustice or greater promotion of justice in the future, and through my own C.S model, I further seek to promote such accommodations as a matter of necessary epistemic cooperation (1997a, 53).

On the other hand, such a dichotomous model as Kymlicka’s, as Young and others have pointed out, leaves too many groups (refugees, guest workers, former colonial subjects, African Americans, and others) out of the picture, and is inconsistently biased towards nations. And so, rather than attempt to generate a more accurate or comprehensive set of categories, a project likely to fall victim to the dangers of ‘naming’ that Bannerji (2000) and other post-colonial scholars have articulated,29 I argue that a focus on the dialectic nature of personal identity and subjective experience, along with attention to the structural positionings and historical patterns of movement, oppression, and injustice shaping and producing cultural ‘groups,’ would better serve a substantively egalitarian and non-appropriative theory of multiculturalism.

Thus, I propose a model for theorizing about cultural rights in terms of a continuum rather than a hierarchical and opposing set of categories. Such a model, following Young, deals with difference in terms of degree, rather than kind (1997a, 51). Thinking of difference in terms of a continuum allows for a fluid conceptualization of both cultural identity and cultural accommodation and/or integration by viewing difference as a matter of degree and of relational interactions along and across this continuum, rather than separated into separate and complete ‘silos’ of diversity. Thus, rather than breaking cultural groups into monolithic wholes, each with a separate and hierarchical schedule of rights, my C.S model pushes for a contextualized, case-

29 See chapter four and chapter seven.
by-case assessment of cultural accommodation through intercultural dialogue and political contestation. The evaluative criteria of such dialogical processes, as a rough procedural guide, ought to be based on *the epistemic value of the contribution, social location, and historical injustice*.30

Through these criteria, I attempt to add content to Young’s general recommendation that cultural difference ought to be conceptualized along a continuum. I propose adding procedural guidelines for a dialogical process which may help identify groups in need of multicultural accommodations in a way more substantive and inclusive than relying on Kymlicka’s process of dichotomous and top-down identification would allow. Relying on a continuum model, guided by social location, epistemic cooperation, and historical injustice, within such a dialogical model of multiculturalism, may help to avoid top-down ascriptions of which groups are rightfully considered cultural, and may instead provide more space for groups or group members to identify *themselves* as cultural – or not – as opposed to utilizing top-down and rigid categories, which may often be ill-fitting to their situation.

A continuum model, by allowing for the flexibility to not exclude groups prior to dialogue, also avoids the danger of foreclosing subjects or groups from making distinct and epistemologically valuable contributions based on their cultural identity and experience. Young’s own recommendations, while extremely valuable, are also very general, and brief, as they were articulated within a short reply to Kymlicka after the publication of *Multicultural Citizenship*. By incorporating Young’s recommendations into my C.S. model and adding to them, I attempt to expand and give concreteness and specificity to Young’s continuum approach. I will further outline the principles and advantages of this C.S. model for intercultural dialogue and contestation of difference, theorized along a continuum, in the following chapter.

30 More will be said about each of these in the next chapter.
Chapter Seven: Dialogue and Dialectics

To the extent that the ideological framework through which a person views the world adequately explains that world’s social, political, and economic workings, or to the extent that the identity she claims accurately describes the complex interactions between the multiple determinants of her particular social location, that ideology or identity will be epistemically (not just “strategically”) justified – it will constitute “objective” and reliable knowledge. Whether an identity has more (or less) epistemic value than a previous ideology or identity is not something that can be determined in advance – ideologies and identities must be compared with other (competing) ideologies and identities, evaluated for logical consistency, and tested empirically against the world they claim to describe.

Paula Moya, Learning from Experience (2002, p. 91)

As was indicated in the previous chapter, I favor a continuum model for theorizing about cultural difference, categorizing groups according to the relational degree and extent to which their experiences fall on along this continuum, ranging in terms of both the types of accommodations\(^1\) needed and the level of inclusion desired, rather than predetermining what is

\(^1\) In the remainder of this text, I will refer to cultural ‘accommodations,’ and cultural ‘claims’ somewhat interchangeably. What I mean to encompass within such referents, however, is quite extensive. Do I simply mean to refer to the claims of group X for cultural recognition, or for more robust powers of cultural maintenance and reproduction? Or am I talking about the evaluation of a particular cultural practice (an exemption for dress, the inclusion of minority religious holidays or symbols within state institutions, alternative histories in school texts, approaches to family life, and so on), or appeals for greater cultural and possibly legal pluralism? The easy answer to all of these questions is yes. When I speak of “cultural claims,” I mean to encompass all of these, along with, I would add, claims relating to broader issues of structural racism, exclusion, and oppression based on ‘cultural’ distinctiveness, spoken from grounded cultural perspectives. Here, I would consider or include issues of employment discrimination, deskilling and decertification, and immigration policy as at least partially constituting ‘cultural’ matters. I am thinking particularly about racially exclusionary practices within immigration, struggles for family reunification, and issues relating to the ‘sponsorship’ class and its effects of gender dynamics in ‘cultural communities’ formed through processes of immigration, racialization, and culturalization in Canada, to name just a few instances of structural oppression facing those marked as culturally and racially Other. I would also consider as ‘cultural,’ those claims dealing with both symbolic and material exclusions from the ‘national’ imaginary and the full expression of citizenship, exclusions which may operate from a variety of marginalized cultural groups, ethnic or otherwise. Oppressive cultural norms relating to age, ability, sexual orientation, gender roles, and so on, may be considered here. In principle, however, I do not want to attempt to anticipate what types of claims may be made beyond these general directions, for fear of foreclosing the inclusion of claims not yet considered under the auspices of multicultural dialogue, before such dialogue has even begun. The manner in which my method focuses on broad recommendations, rather than the specific evaluation of particular claims, is thus at least partially principled, but is also a product of limited scope and a desire not to speak for, or attempt
owed based on dichotomous and hierarchical kinds of cultural difference. Theorizing cultural difference along such a continuum allows for the substantive inclusion of a wider range of culturally diverse groups, and as such, works well in conjunction with my own conceptualization of multiculturalism as a form of epistemic cooperation, one facilitated through dialogue, testimony, and the widening of the public sphere. By grounding a defense of cultural diversity in part through an emphasis on the epistemic value of this diversity, and thereby viewing multiculturalism as a form of epistemic cooperation, my model attempts to give political space for the contestation of cultural norms through intercultural dialogue, testimony, and exchange, and assumes that there will be internal debate and difference exhibited within both ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ groups.²

A continuum approach to cultural difference, by not narrowing the range of multicultural accommodation to those groups which can be made to fit into either the categories of voluntary ‘polyethnic’ immigrant groups or national minorities, helps to expand the range of difference which may be included within such dialogue. This widening is crucially important, I argue, as it allows for the greatest possibility of valuable epistemic contributions to be made from culturally distinct speakers and social locations.

The contention at the core of my C.S defense of multiculturalism as a form of epistemic cooperation and critical transformation, combining insights from critical realism, critical race and postcolonial theory, is that differently located subjects will have access to a range of epistemically superior or inferior perspectives on matters of social justice and in contributing a diversity of valuable approaches to the good life, both with potentially objective merit. To

² Importantly, as was emphasized in previous chapters, both ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ groups are marked as cultural, rather than assuming a divide between a culturally impartial majority and a culturally determined minority. While based in part on a commitment to the politically/socially produced and relational nature of cultural difference, within my C.S model, I simultaneously argue for the constitutive role, and at times intrinsic value, of cultural membership for all subjects.
capture the potential of such divergent knowledges, I argue, the public sphere must be widened to include perspectives previously considered ‘private’ or particular, and to facilitate cultural interchange, as a form of epistemic cooperation, through dialogue and testimony. In this chapter, I will further defend the normative and epistemic value of such dialogue, and outline some basic guidelines for its practice and potential success, while responding to anticipated objections to the centrality of my use of culture from post-multicultural and post-colonial scholars.

I begin by expanding on the criteria of the potential epistemic value of the cultural perspective, social location, and historical injustice, which were briefly introduced in the previous chapter as procedural guidelines for such a process of multicultural dialogue and epistemic cooperation:

1) The epistemic value of a cultural perspective: there is within my C.S. model a foundational, guiding assumption that cultures are epistemically valuable, not only to their members, but to others as well. While foundational to my argument, I include this first criteria under the proviso that what objective value a particular set of cultural beliefs/practices/knowledges may have, or what objective insights these perspectives may offer on structural injustice and oppression, or even the good life more broadly, must itself come through dialogue and open-ended debate, recognizing that it is, of course, difficult to establish at the outset how such value may be determined. Despite these limitations, I argue that it is necessary, as a precondition for this intercultural dialogue and debate, to consider what is being lost through silencing and the flattening of difference, forcing it into liberal language and private expression, and to proceed from the general commitment to the epistemological value of cultural diversity, and the radical expression of this diversity, and other forms, in the public and political realm. In particular, within such dialogue, I would highlight the importance of testimony or voice, looking

3 I employ this term in roughly the same manner articulated by Lynn Sanders (1997) in her piece, “Against Deliberation.” Sanders defines personal testimony in opposition to consensus-seeking deliberation, and, rather than limiting talk to what is considered “rational and moderate,” processes of testimony and the telling of particular, personal narratives bring with them “no assumption of... finding a common aim, no expectation of a discussion oriented to the resolution of a community problem. Testimony is also radically egalitarian: the standard for whether a view is worthy of public attention is simply that everyone should have a voice, a chance to tell her story” (1997, 372). Sanders concludes her essay by writing, “instead of aiming for a common discussion, democrats might adopt a more fundamental goal: to try and ensure that those who are usually left out of public discussions learn to speak whether their perspectives are common or not,
specifically at what kinds of claims the group in question is actually making, including considerations regarding who is speaking, what they are asking for, and whether there is a critique relating to a specific set of injustices – historical or otherwise – backing up the claims being made. This emphasis on personal testimony is connected to the critical realist commitment to the potential for objective epistemological contributions to be made from subjective experience.

2) Social Location: What is the objective social location from which claims are being made? Is it one of privilege or marginalization in the context being discussed? How is the speaker structurally located, vis-à-vis members of both their and other cultural groups? This move pushes for a recognition of the internal hierarchies within a given cultural ‘community,’ and rather than treating cultural groups as internally homogenous wholes, emphasizes the need to listen to distinct perspectives within such a community and potentially offering a range of rights both within and across cultural groups. Despite this recognition of internal difference – in social location, in commitment to the ‘core values’ of a cultural community – my model does not deny that some general claims may be made for particular groups, assuming these can actually be identified, and procedures are in place to help evaluate the authority of the voices speaking for the group. Here, a few of the relevant questions to ask are – are the speakers actually representational? Are the practices at stake central, or do they serve a narrower set of interests? and those who usually dominate learn to hear the perspectives of others” (1997, 372-73). Such a position echoes much of what I am trying to accomplish in my C.S. model, particularly the concern with lending greater space for the expression of particular, often marginalized, voices, without the caveat that these be aimed at seeking common goals or that they be articulated under hegemonic criteria of what counts as ‘reasonable’ or public. The ‘radically egalitarian’ aspect of the theory, may, however, be limited in some cases based on an assessment of social location or structural positioning. Importantly, as Sara Ahmed observes, the potential success of testimony requires conditions under which these personal narratives may get a ‘just hearing’ (2004, 200). More about the nature of testimony – its value and limits – will be said in the next chapter.

4 In her defense of group-based representation as a corrective for the underrepresentation of historically and contemporarily marginalized groups, Melissa Williams (1998) defines legitimate and effective representation through connected concepts of “objective” and “subjective” group identity. For Williams, “‘Objective’ sources of group identity include a history of state-sponsored discrimination against the group and the continuance of contemporary patterns of social, economic, and political inequality along group lines. ‘Subjective’ sources of group identity include a shared memory of that discrimination and a conviction of shared political interests in the present” (1998, 14, my emphasis). According to Williams, then, while “objective” group identity helps highlight particular groups with strong justice-based claims based on past and present structural inequality, “subjective” group identity “creates an identifiable group interest which group members can claim to represent more effectively than nonmembers” based on shared social locations and similar experience of marginalization which may result (1998, 14, my emphasis). Although not speaking of cultural groups in particular, this model may present one
3) **Historical injustice:** What is the specific history of the group (not just for a ‘minority nation,’ but for other minority cultures as well) and what is this group’s contemporary relationship to structures of oppression, domination, and exclusion, both locally and internationally?

Taken together, my three criteria are thus meant to suggest that meaningful multicultural dialogue, properly aimed at combating structural oppression and furthering substantive epistemic cooperation, will be best facilitated and advanced by paying critical attention to the social location of the speaker, the specific content of the claims being made on behalf of the group and/or the particular cultural practices or perspectives being advanced by group members, and finally, to the historical injustice/present oppression of the speaker or group.

Importantly, my model’s foundational emphasis on the potential for an epistemic contribution to be made (and have objective merit) from distinct cultural perspectives does not understand the value of cultural diversity in shallow terms of aesthetics and food alone, as it typically manifests in liberal ‘song and dance’ multiculturalism. I am concerned not with developing a mere enrichment model, but one focused on correcting for injustice, illuminating privilege, uncovering willful and racialized ignorance, and establishing greater epistemological authority for dissenting voices and for those generally considered outsiders within, or marginal to, the ‘national’ community and culture.

By beginning with a dialectical conception of subjects who are constitutively embedded in their cultural context, my model assumes the culturally mediated nature of all subjects, rejecting an illiberal/liberal or Western/non-Western dichotomy between those considered effective means of identifying speakers who may effectively represent a group identity, speaking from shared experience and particularly, expressing a shared commitment to furthering the political interests and well-being of the group. Within my own discussion of social location, and the at times radical differences that may be found within one’s reflective positionality – derived in part from experiences of that shared location – however, I wish to emphasize that representation will remain a tricky concept to determine, one that is perhaps best found through debate and the process of dialogue itself, testing the representative authority of a given speaker based on the reactions and interpretations of other group members, with the grounding assumption that all testimony claiming to represent a group must be taken as tentative and partial knowledge.
culturally determined, and those ‘rational’ subjects deemed able to individually transcend cultural particularity to develop ‘reasoned’ principles or commitments. Through this commitment to the culturally constituted nature of all subjects, my model rejects attempts to move away from articulations of a robust politics of identity and difference towards a decentered conception of free-floating selves within loosely shared political projects, as recommended in some post-modern and post-multicultural critiques of multiculturalism and social movements more broadly. Here I am thinking for example of Seyla Benhabib’s arguments supporting a move away from group identity towards group needs within cultural politics (2002, 16). Much in the same way Wendy Brown does in her influential critique of identity politics as inevitably reproducing ‘wounded attachments’ and further victimization (1995, 75), Benhabib and other post-

5 In the liberal model, transcendence is thought to be possible through internal rational deliberation, choosing, and distancing. The ‘external’ acts only on an instrumental – rather than dialectically constitutive – backdrop for choice. Importantly, such transcendence, rather than a product of dialogue with significant others, is typically seen as the result of individual efforts, as the triumph of individual will over socialization or external ‘interference’ more broadly. In my model, in contrast, this separation between internal and external is challenged through a dialectical model of identity formation – and ‘truth’ is not found through inward transcendence but through outward tracing of this dialectical process.

6 Indeed, much of critical realism, from which I draw my account of dialectical cultural selves, has been written in part as a response to the dominance of postmodern theory within literary and ethnic studies departments from which scholars like Mohanty and Moya base their own experiences. While positivism and liberal bias within mainstream political science in Canada remain more pressing concerns within my project, postmodern critiques of these strands of thought remain prominent, and ultimately lacking, in my view.

7 Even more provocatively, consider Anne Phillips’s suggestion that we must attempt to develop an account of multiculturalism without culture (2007).

8 For Brown, the call is to supplement or replace a politics of identity, premised on “the language of ‘I am’ – with its defensive closure on identity, its insistence on the fixity of position, its equation of social with moral positioning – with the language of ‘I want for us’” (1995, 75). As Ahmed notices, while drawing from Nietzsche, whose own critique suggests a way to move forward through ‘forgetting’ the wound, giving up the investment in it as a central source of identity, within Brown there remains a recognition that fully ‘forgetting’ such wounds would be “inappropriate if not cruel,” although the call to move from a politics of identity to a politics of desire remains within Brown’s project (Brown 1995, 74). In response, I would echo also Ahmed, who presses further than Brown, suggesting that, “forgetting would be a repetition of the violence or injury. To forget would be to repeat the forgetting that is already implicated in the fetishisation of the wound. Our task might instead be to ‘remember’ how the surfaces of bodies (including the bodies of communities…) came to be wounded in the first place. Reading testimonies of injury involves rethinking the relation between the present and the past: an emphasis on the past does
multiculturalists make reference to what I call will the ‘what we want, not who we are’ distinction, suggesting that theorists and policy makers should be concerned with what a group’s political demands are, instead of focusing on what a group is (2002, 16).

What insights from a critical realist perspective seek to make clear is that one cannot make sense of, or adequately justify, the claims of cultural and other collective social groups without attending to the latter as well as the former. As Paula Moya writes, “[t]o the extent that we are interested in transforming our society into one that is more socially and economically just, we need to know how identities work in order to effectively work with them” (Moya 2006, 99, my emphasis). In other words, understanding the rights and political demands of cultural groups (no matter how internally heterogeneous, crosscutting, contested), entails careful attention not only to the nature of the demands at hand, but also to the emotional, epistemic, moral and practical value of the group identity (and its content) for its members. The potential dangers of this group identity – particularly when ascribed from the outside – must also be carefully traced. When particular cultural practices are being considered within political and theoretical debates over the legitimate scope of multicultural accommodation, these debates must be attentive to the centrality of the practice being debated, its contextualized meanings within the cultural group, and finally, to the identification of members with a given practice, and with the community itself, as potentially important or perhaps constitutive of their identity.

9 While I remain skeptical of these recommendations, Chandra-Talpade Mohanty (2003), who suggests that collective solidarity is best constituted through common struggle rather than simply any ‘common’ identity, or even common oppression, makes one challenge to my focus on identity that I do find compelling. While I am sympathetic to this recommendation to an extent, I would suggest that even under such a formulation, the struggle itself must have some shared objective, i.e. combating commonly identified oppressive conditions that will be defined by the group. More will be said about the need to link identity, experience, location, and common struggle as collective grounds for a progressive, politicized solidarity in the concluding chapter, where I will attempt to sketch a brief defense of the local as a challenge to nationalism and as a site for radical multiculturalism and difference to thrive.
In other words, a subject’s self-understanding as part of a given cultural group, and their positionality with relation to the specific meanings of that membership for their identity, along with its implications for their interactions with others, all shape the manner in which claims of justice will inevitably be articulated. Attempting to transcend such particularity, as I have argued in previous chapters, is both practically impossible and normatively/epistemically undesirable. Making sense of what people want, and why, I argue, must include some reference to who these people are, where they are socially and culturally located, how their identities have been produced in relation to others and their perceptions, and finally, how individuals consciously construct their own sense of self through dialectical interaction with respect to these locations and perceptions.

Such evaluation must also, and importantly, entail a contextual/historical analysis of past/present injustice leading to a perceived need for added protections or powers, as well as, again, attempting to understand the contextual meanings and overall importance of particular practices and ways of life within the community at stake. Attending to this effectively involves tracing the narrative development of the cultural group – both as its membership is internally experienced (attending here to subjective perspectives and knowledges), and externally identified (and here to the outward referents of social location, a history of injustice, and hierarchies of race and culture, considering how and when they have been used, and to what ends).

This view does not necessarily lead to a static or reified set of conclusions relating to what a culture is or must always be, but rather, seeks to make space for multiple forms of cultural participation, membership, and identity. While my model is premised on the need for public and political dialogue to provide an effective space for epistemic cooperation and cultural interchange, aimed in part at the transformation of both subjects and society, my commitment to the potentially intrinsic value of cultural membership holds that some attempt must still be made to provide room and respect for those who wish to participate in their cultural contexts by
endorsing ‘traditional’ or even ‘authentic’ roles and practices, and by expressing these publicly.\textsuperscript{10} Hybridization, or the development of ‘multicultural subjectivities,’ to borrow from Young’s (1997a) register, is worthy one goal and likely outcome of intercultural dialogue, but it is not the only one, and I argue such hybridization and transformation need not occur in all cases for the process to be a just and valuable one. There will of course be much debate as to what these allegedly ‘traditional’ forms of cultural expression are, as there will be whenever ‘central’ or ‘authentic’ cultural roles and practices are concerned. This complexity and contestation does not eliminate the possibility that some practices may be identified as more or less significant than others within a particular cultural community, however. And, provided these decisions are reached in a manner members have agreed on, they may well be followed without endangering the well being\textsuperscript{11} of the cultural members in question.

\textsuperscript{10} I see such a qualification to be a necessary step back from liberal attempts to enforce culturally particular standards – particularly the instrumental connection between cultural membership and autonomy – on minority cultural groups under the pretense of multiculturalism. This instrumental and self-interested conception of autonomy and group membership is one I seek to fundamentally challenge throughout this project. As Bhikhu Parekh suggests, valuing cultural membership only through a liberal lens has the potential to subvert cultural communities ‘inner balance and identity’ from the outside, reshaping the value these communities may hold for their members along culturally particular standards, and such a beginning to multicultural exchange greatly limits its radical potential (2006, 108). My own model, of course, implicitly assumes the value of both dialogue and some more direct form of democratic decision-making, not just in political decisions but within economic spheres as well. These values, too, are culturally particular, but, unlike the formal practice of liberal-democracy in Western countries like Canada, the vision of democratic decision making and dialogue I mean to promote here involves substantive contributions from a wide range of collective, cultural perspectives, rather than viewing the democratic process as an instrumental competition between individual citizens as ‘clients’ or self-interested free agents. And, of course, while remaining critical of most liberal of interpretations of values like democracy, it is important to note that while, support for democracy is not unique solely to liberalism, my commitment to the epistemic necessity of cultural interchange cannot in good faith suggest that all aspects of liberal culture may be completely without value, at least not before these too are subject to substantive critique and debate. More will be said about the relationship between my own C.S. model and liberal principles in the conclusion.

\textsuperscript{11} In this way, I again want to contrast evaluative criteria based on a thinner conception of ‘well being,’ against Kymlicka’s insistence on the promotion of ‘autonomy’ as a marker used to determine the permissibility of a cultural community, particularly in the case of non-national cultural groups. I borrow this measure, and much of the rationale behind it, from Parekh, who
Despite what may then be referred to as a ‘strong’ commitment to multiculturalism, and efforts to meet a variety of cultural groups and perspectives ‘on their own terms’ – rather than inverting claims into distinctly liberal language or otherwise culturally particular rationale at all times – my C.S model does not begin by attempting to separate, classify, and rank different categories of cultural difference, as Benhabib accuses all ‘multicultural theorists’ of doing (2002, 18). Instead, my model proceeds from the combined insights of subjective, culturally mediated experience, objective social location, and a contextualized analysis of historical and ongoing injustice in order to make sense of the particular claims of cultural groups on a case-by-case basis. In this way, again, I am more concerned with developing a general theory signaling to the epistemological and moral value of a strong politics of cultural diversity and dialogue, placing particular groups or communities, and the claims made from these cultural locations, along a continuum. Recalling Young (1997a), such a continuum model suggests that cultural groups will vary in terms of the degree of integration or autonomy desired, along with seeing much variety in terms of the degree of personal identification that individual members may have with a cultural practice or perspective, all of which must be evaluated against social location and broader structural/historical factors facing the group or subjects in question. As was argued in the previous chapter, I favour this continuum model above attempts to establish a hierarchy of cultural kinds, as Kymlicka’s liberal culturalist model recommends.

Put differently, my C.S approach starts from the general premise that cultural membership is a valuable source of both subjective identity and potentially objective insight, both into present matters of oppression/injustice, and as a guide to exploring questions relating to human flourishing and the good life more broadly. From that premise, I argue that theorists of cultural diversity, policy makers, and fellow citizens alike must collaboratively assess the particular claims of cultural groups (including discordant and conflicting voices from within also usefully emphasizes equality over autonomy, while acknowledging that such values will always have culturally contextualized meanings and operations (2006, 127).
particular cultural ‘communities’) in light of their social location and historical treatment, along
with pursuing other efforts to further this general commitment to the overarching worth –
epistemic, political, moral – of cultural diversity.

Mine is thus a contextualized, mid-level approach, which starts from an abstract and
universal commitment to the epistemological benefit of cultural diversity and the perhaps intrinsic
value of ‘being heard,’ 12 but seeks to justify and operationalize this principled commitment in
practice through dialogue, testimony, and the opportunity for radical public contestation of values
and beliefs, making space for these exchanges through a widening of the civic sphere to
encompass cultural, subjective, and other presumably ‘private’ identities and perspectives. 13
Incorporating these criteria into a continuum model (rather than one of dichotomous kinds) has
the value of offering a more open-ended approach – one that does not rank, limit or exclude
particular groups in terms of what claims they might make and what accommodations they may
hope to expect prior to dialogue itself, understood as an ongoing process of epistemic
cooperation, testimony, and critique. And again, all of this must be evaluated through tracing
historical and contemporary processes of injustice and oppression, particularly captured in an
analysis of social location.

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12 The value of ‘being heard’ is particularly important when these voices and perspectives are
those that have been historically silenced, marginalized, and indeed denied even the bare
minimum of access to epistemic credibility.
13 In emphasizing a need to reconceptualize public and private spheres, particularly the need to
bring what is thought to be private into the public, and political sphere, it is also important to
remain cognizant of critiques challenging the primary focus on the ‘private’ as a site of exclusion
and oppression, particularly within ‘white bourgeois feminism,’ as the experience of the private
and public spheres are often radically different across racial and class-lines. As critical race and
postcolonial scholars have noted, the ‘private’ sphere of middleclass, typically white, women may
often become the ‘public’ sphere of work for nonwhite workers. And as an escape from the
racisms and exclusions of the public, the private sphere may constitute a site of refuge and
solidarity for marginalized subjects, rather than acting as a site of (exclusively, or predominantly)
oppression. For some important critiques emphasizing the need to theorize about the public and
private while attending more carefully to issues of race and class, see Sunera Thobani (2000),
Chandra-Talpade Mohanty (2003), and Charles Mills (2007).
Furthermore, because so much of my C.S. defense of cultural diversity is based on the epistemic benefit that arguably comes from providing space and epistemological authority to multiple and divergent voices, this approach recognizes and seeks to utilize *internally* heterogeneous voices/perspectives from within particular cultural ‘communities,’ rather than underplaying, flattening, or otherwise ignoring these differences. To say that distinct cultural perspectives, knowledges, and approaches to selfhood and the good life are valuable morally and epistemologically, in other words, encourages the recognition, rather than the dismissal, of conflicting and contested cultural practices, and equally sees value in multiple and contested interpretations of these practices’ legitimacy, centrality, and overall worth.

In this way, I am trying, within my C.S. model, to avoid the dangers of reification and homogenization of difference that post-multicultural critics like Benhabib (2002) highlight, as well attempting to resist the risks of depoliticization and state-centric interventions into ‘cultural’ communities, which Himani Bannerji (2000) and other critical race and post-colonial feminists have identified as endemic to discourses of diversity contained within multiculturalism ‘from above.’ Recalling chapter four, Bannerji’s general criticisms of discourses of ‘diversity’ are, 1) that such discourses reduce all difference to neutral expressions of “descriptive plurality,” abstracted from power relations; 2) that this relationship to ‘description’ encourages the need to “put in or retain a concrete, particular content for each of these seemingly neutral differences” (2000, 36). By Bannerji’s lights, within such neutral or descriptive accounts of diversity the “social relations of power that create the differences… just drop out of sight” (2000, 36). Against such depoliticizing discourse, especially within a neo-colonial context such as Canada’s, Bannerji’s critique encourages theorists and politicians alike to reject the assumption that there is a core national ‘we’ representing “a unified non-diversity,” against which peripheral cultural ‘minorities’ *naturally* revolve (2000, 42).

I attempt to follow through on these recommendations within my C.S model, by looking at difference as politically constructed and dialectically mediated in contexts of structural white
supremacy and colonial dispossession, and thereby rejecting mere ‘descriptive’ accounts of ‘natural’ difference, while equally seeking to challenge the central reliance on nations in Kymlicka’s liberal theory. My outward-looking focus on social location, and this dialectical understanding of identity, resists sliding into talk of concrete essences, as does the emphasis on contesting homogeneity (in either minority or majority cultures) through recognizing the substantive epistemic contributions coming from subjective experience, which is expected to vary greatly within and across groups. In other words, such a reliance on the value of subjective experience assumes a variety of perspectives will be generated by differently located individuals within a particular ‘cultural community,’ individuals whose identities are relationally produced through interactions with and perceptions of other such communities, including the ‘majority’ or ‘national’ culture as well. This majority is, again, itself assumed to be hybrid, heterogeneous, and riddled with class, gender, and sexual inequality and injustice.

I argue that liberal articulations of multiculturalism like Kymlicka’s, by privileging national minorities and majorities, problematically work to reproduce and enforce the centrality and imagined homogeneity of the nation, pitting some national ‘we’ against the ‘diverse’ cultural Others to be evaluated, accommodated, and managed by this national ‘we.’ Following Bannerji, then, the need to break away from talk of nations and their Others is another motivating factor in my support for considering degrees of difference along a continuum, as Young recommends, rather than favoring Kymlicka’s reliance on hierarchical (nations being the central, superior category) and dichotomous kinds.

Furthermore, through my emphasis on the differing epistemic insights to be found among privileged and marginalized social locations, and attempts to establish that epistemologically privileged insights that may come from those in oppressed locations, insights which may ultimately have transformative power, I am trying to at least partially translate discourses of

14 In the case of Canada, such an imagined internally unified national ‘we’ may be instead thought of as the dual Francophone ‘we’ and Anglophone ‘we.’
'culture’ back into concrete issues of social, racial, and economic injustice, reversing the oft criticized trend in multicultural theory to do the opposite (Bannerji 2000, 44). Here, again, there is a dialectical interplay assumed to occur between how cultural groups are formed in productive relation to other groups and external ascription, and how cultural members identify with a given community and how they interpret its central values and approaches to the good life. Cultural groups are not determined from the outside, any more than cultural members are determined from within these groups, but rather, are produced in dialectical relation between how they are identified by others and how they are actively interpreted and related to by their members.

If immigrants in particular have been “ethnicized, culturalized and mapped into traditional/ethnic communities” from the outside, as Bannerji and others have suggested they have been in the Canadian context, then a radical multiculturalism from below must begin by tracing how these processes operate at both the structural and personal level (2000, 45). This is what my C.S dual commitment to analyzing both social location and the subjective, individual experience of (or positionality with respect to) that location attempts to do, through a dialectical conception of identity and subject formation. Radical multiculturalists need not take the cultural groups or communities produced and reproduced by official discourses of multiculturalism ‘from above’ as ‘given,’ or ‘natural,’ but must rather pay close attention to how this ‘difference’ has been shaped and produced by and through the Canadian socio-political context, and under the

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15 In this way, what I propose may be thought of as ‘inverted’ multiculturalism, or multiculturalism from below, to borrow from Bannerji (2000). Here, I am concerned not with state-centric models for categorizing and managing diversity or difference, imagined to be ‘natural’ and free from power-relations, but rather, with beginning from politicized dialogue and testimony, rooted in context and personal experience. I also suggest that externally produced conditions which act on culturally located social groups, and structurally marginalized individuals identified (wrongly or not) as members of those groups, must still be thought of as ‘cultural’ concerns, although not in any ‘authentic’ sense.

16 Here I am also thinking of Thobani’s critique of liberal multiculturalism as it operates in Canada to ‘recommunalize’ racialized subjects as members of patriarchal and traditional/backwards cultural communities (2007, 149, 159, 162).
broad cultural dictates of liberal individualism, global capitalism, and neo-colonialism. And, again, I take ‘cultural groups’ to be at once the relational products of this socio-political landscape, and yet also constituting very sites of belonging, positive identification, and collective memory, resistance, and solidarity for members of such groups, and potentially across groups as well.

If, then, official multiculturalism has helped create and solidify racial and cultural hierarchies in Canada, proponents of radical multiculturalism must recognize this and attempt to form strategies in our theorizing and political processes to reject and destabilize categorical distinctions between nations and Others, and between ‘liberal’ and ‘illiberal’ minorities, which together work to produce a multiculturalism focused on the management and containment of difference in a static and statist manner that exaggerates differences between groups, while minimizing internal difference and fetishizing racialized immigrant Others as the origin of all difference, and particularly of harmful forms of difference contributing to instability, criminality, and disease. While such a process is complex and fraught with dangers (of commodification, of co-optation, of further depoliticization and reification of cultural identities, and of furthering a ‘reductionist sociology’ of bounded cultural groups), I remain hopeful that methods such as my C.S approach, with its attention to both the socially constructed (but constitutively embedded) experience of culture and group membership, may help to set some general grounds for how to proceed in theorizing about difference and diversity in Canada, as well as outlining some general conditions for an egalitarian and substantive multicultural dialogue.

17 Of course, important postcolonial thinkers including Bannerji (2000), Mackey (2002), Thobani (2007), Razack (2008), and Dhamoon (2009), to whom I am greatly in debt, have already begun much of this work in the Canadian context.

18 Further articulations of such a radical multicultural strategy would greatly benefit from a more explicit attention to issues of class struggle than I have been able to give here. While a critique of the harmful and inherently exclusionary aspects of the liberal subject and the impoverished principles of equality and justice derived from it has been the primary focus of this text, the relationship between capitalism and liberalism, in addition to liberalism and colonialism, is an
To attempt to safeguard this form of intercultural dialogue from turning into the one-sided commodification of minority cultures by a dominant majority group, picking and choosing what cultural practices are interesting, aesthetically pleasing, and so on, I wish to emphasize that the terms and limits of such dialogue must not be set by the ‘majority’ alone. To this I would go one step further, suggesting that the general framework for establishing equitable conditions for dialogue requires a radical widening of the public/civil sphere to encompass those perspectives which are typically marginalized and/or privatized. In this way, I reject the liberal assumption that, in order to ensure fairness and stability, individuals must attempt to perform as neutral, impersonal and reserved ‘public selves,’ and seek to keep group differences (or perspectives drawn from the experience of difference, whether chosen or ascribed) in private.

While I thus follow the familiar feminist adage that ‘the personal is political,’ I further suggest that ‘the political is personal,’ and as such, maintain that politically and epistemically area requiring greater exploration and attention than I have been able to provide, or is typically seen in mainstream discussions of liberal multiculturalism.

19 In her work, Thobani has importantly emphasized that perceiving one’s own ‘distance’ from the cultural practices conversely deemed repulsive, annoying, or backwards may give as much pleasure to dominant subjects as the appropriation and consumption of ‘pleasing’ cultural content can (2007, 169-70). This type of distancing must also be problematized and resisted.

20 While the terms and limits of multicultural dialogue must not be decided exclusively by a privileged majority, it is possible that democratic processes could guide decision making here, assuming representation is assured for marginalized cultural and social groups, and efforts have been made to interrogate the uneven terrain of political power and cultural privilege positioning subjects and groups in these contexts. Generally, however, I seek to at least partially detach such dialogical processes from the (nation)state (particularly the colonial nation-state in contexts like Canada). I will expand on this qualification in the conclusion.

21 In my own reading, I have come across this phrase several times, used both approvingly and critically, particularly within literature relating to critical pedagogy and within post-colonial feminism. It is cited critically by Chandra-Talpade Mohanty as a shift within feminism away from the structural and political towards an exclusive focus on the individual and behavioural, and while aware of this danger, I maintain there is value in both sides of the formulation (2003, 214). To say ‘the political is personal’ need not only mean that the political is collapsed entirely into the subjective or individual, with the exclusion of the structural, but rather to emphasize that the personal/subjective/individual and political/structural/collective are inevitably and dialectically linked, and that the personal, subjective, and emotional are not only effects of political structures of power and domination, but that these aspects of the personal must be seen as epistemically legitimate and productive forms of political engagement. On the reverse, my use of the ‘political is personal’ means to attend to the emotional and cognitive costs and risks at
valuable perspectives will often and rightly involve a great deal of emotion and passion, derived from lived experiences and strongly felt attachments, rather than through attempts to transcend these experiences to adopt abstract or ahistorical principles based on what any ‘rational agent’ may agree to. While this meaning may be well captured in the sentiment of ‘the personal is political,’ I would press further to suggest that emphasizing that ‘the political is personal’ has additional significance, particularly within a critical realist approach to experience and emotion. In using this phrase, I do not mean to collapse structural and historical patterns (which help constitute the political) entirely into issues of individual behavior (one narrow definition of the personal), but rather, to remain cognizant of the personal, experiential, and emotional dimensions of the political, while also attending critically to the personal impacts and shifts – particularly in terms of one’s sense of identity – which may result from political engagement and critique. In this way, I suggest that political transformation involves both emotional and cognitive shifts and costs, as well as structural change and awareness of both contemporary and historical patterns of oppression, exploitation, and injustice.

Moreover, as was briefly discussed at the beginning of the chapter, while valuing cultural diversity as a matter of epistemic necessity, the merit of contributions from distinct cultural perspectives cannot be judged prior to such intercultural and public, political dialogue. In other words, while greater space and privileged epistemic authority may at times be granted to a particular group or individual based on their social location, and its presumed likelihood of

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stake for individuals engaged within political critique and transformation, which, in conjunction with critical race critiques of epistemologies of ignorance in particular (see chapters one and two), requires not only structural change but may also necessarily include some form of emotional and cognitive ‘therapy,’ as Charles Mills suggests, to enable individuals of all kinds, but particularly those who are members of privileged social groups, to recognize and come to terms with obfuscating relations of power and privilege that naturalize the status quo. Similarly, by linking moral growth to emotional growth, Satya Mohanty’s critical realism suggests a need to focus on both the personal as political and the political as personal. In recognizing the emotional costs and the personal risks, to one’s sense of self and/or place in the world, at stake within political engagement and transformation, however, I do not mean to simply collapse the political into the personal, or to deny or downplay the historical and structural dimensions of the political in favour of an exclusive focus on individual behavior and feeling.
producing unique moments of insight into structures of injustice and domination to which those so-positioned are subject, there is to be no prima facie bar on participation by anyone. Nor is there to be an obligation to speak, or to speak from a single or unified ‘cultural’ perspective.

Thus, measures like the epistemic value of a cultural perspective, the objective social location\(^{22}\) of the speaker, and the historical injustice\(^{23}\) helping to produce a particular group/location, are not meant to define or reify cultural groups or their members, but rather, are designed as procedural guides to help settle claims and determine the scope of the protections, rights, and redistributions (of wealth, of political representation, of land) that may be warranted. Deciding on the permissibility of a particular cultural practice, of course, will require a different set of additional evaluative factors\(^{24}\) than negotiations aimed at restructuring immigration policy to make it more less racially exclusionary, for example, or attempts to provide self-government rights and/or extend local control over political decision making to a particular cultural group, or set of groups. Much of what will be decided, then, can only come through the process of dialogue itself, and the outcomes may be respected if the process itself is done in a just and egalitarian manner, as is often suggested by theorists of deliberative democracy and intercultural dialogue.\(^{25}\) What my C.S model attempts to provide is a more just epistemological framework

\(^{22}\) Asking, for example, is there an observable correlation between the subject’s experience of their cultural identity, and a social location attached to structural oppression?

\(^{23}\) Asking, in the case of immigrant groups and refugees, what are the patterns that prompted a particular group’s immigration or settlement in Canada? What are the intersections of race, gender, and colonial projects of nation-building and imperialist global expansion? In the case of non-immigrant cultural groups, a different set of questions may be asked, such as, what cultural norms or social practices prompted the development of this ‘sub’ or ‘counter’ culture? What standards have served to exclude particular sets of behavior, ability, or belief, prompting this development? How do these exclusions currently operate, and how did they function to relationally produce distinct cultural groups historically?

\(^{24}\) Such evaluative factors might include the demonstrated allegiance to the practice by members, along with its potential for harm.

\(^{25}\) For example, defenders of deliberative democracy like Joshua Cohen suggest that, rather than clearly indicating beforehand what outcomes are expected come from such deliberation and dialogue, the legitimacy of the outcome of deliberation will be derived from the process itself, through the assumption that, “free deliberation among equals is the basis of legitimacy” (1996,
within which to conceive and begin such dialogue, and, again, my three conditions are best seen as guiding factors or procedural constraints, rather than determinants of outcome.

And again, while the radical multiculturalism my C.S. model advocates for begins with the principle that a diversity of cultural perspectives (including conflicting ones from within a single ‘group’) has epistemic merit, it is not up to the majority to unilaterally decide, picking and choosing which practices or values this majority finds interesting, attractive, or praiseworthy. Such a view of multicultural dialogue itself presumes too great a unity within the ‘majority,’ and homogeneity of its members as a collective set of actors. Instead, minority (or perhaps, more accurately, marginalized) cultural perspectives are meant to serve in large part as critical interjections into the ‘majority’s’ imagined neutrality, homogeneity, and universality. The perspectives of the culturally imperialized, marginalized, and otherwise oppressed, then, can help challenge and unsettle majority privilege, and work to uncover and/or highlight structures which contribute to that oppression and injustice.

There is, additionally, a broader epistemological benefit expected, however.\(^{26}\) Even when not exclusively concerned with combating injustice and oppression, epistemic contributions made by culturally distinct groups to questions relating to the ordering of a good society, conceptions of self, family, consumption, work, and human flourishing more generally can still be expected to produce valuable insights extending beyond any particular schedule of rights or protections explicitly addressing the maintenance of specific cultural values or practices. While potentially producing broader and potentially even objective epistemological insights relating to the nature of

\(^{72}\) Of course, attending to unequal power relations, material conditions, and access to epistemic authority remains crucial to the success of such processes.

\(^{26}\) In part, my choice to foreground the benefits of a substantive form of multiculturalism as epistemic cooperation relies on assumptions regarding curiosity as a basic capacity common among human beings. In the eighth chapter, I will briefly draw on an account of ‘wonder’ articulated by Ahmed (2004) to provoke a sense of passion or desire to move toward that which is surprising or ‘new,’ but yet that which may also serve to reveal historical and contextual truths through such feelings of wonder. While such emotions do not operate uniformly or universally, I would argue that the general inclination towards exploring the surprising or curious is at the very least, a trait common to the human species.
the self and the good life, such dialogical processes remain geared towards reducing marginalization and exclusion by encouraging greater political participation through a widening of what is considered ‘political’ and a dismantling of the private/public distinction as it functions to privatize difference and reinforce the status quo of white, middleclass, heteronormative dominance in liberal democracies like Canada.

In my C.S. approach, then, I aim for a greater politicization of these (multiple, shifting, but at times constitutive) cultural perspectives and identities, rather than calling for either a reification or essentialization of them. Indeed, by building in a component that explicitly conceives of such radical multiculturalism as having an oppression-combating and transformative role, my C.S. model attempts to put the political and contextually contingent nature of these identities at the forefront, while still emphasizing their epistemic and subjectively constitutive value.

In this way, promoting cultural and social difference is not simply a question of romanticizing or essentializing these categories; it holds real epistemic value for all persons (Mohanty 1997, 242). Diversity not only enriches the overall pool of knowledge, it allows for new and specific ways to critique and challenge assumptions within and across groups. Rather than essentializing group difference and privatizing this difference as eternal or incommensurable, furthermore, this approach may actually serve to reduce the potential for minority experiences to become essentialized and privileged, that is, placed somewhere beyond the understanding of the so-called majority, or likewise outside the scope of critical interrogation.27 In particular, the cognitive component of the critical realist approach to subjective experience, which I defend within my C.S model, assumes that the there is a common capacity to understand and even empathize with the so-called Other, but that this capacity must be fostered in a critical and active political life. The suffering or disadvantage of one member of a particular

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27 Here recalling Benhabib’s (2002) critique of the ‘reductionist sociology’ of culture within much multicultural theory (see chapter six).
collective or ascriptive identity may not be identical to the experiences of other members of that group, whether in the majority or the minority, nor will understanding always be fully possible across groups. However, by bringing these personal, particular experiences out of the private realm and into critical debate in public, to be understood and assessed against the individual’s objectively identifiable social location and the broader historical context, my C.S approach to multiculturalism aims to expand the potential for greater cross-cultural dialogue and transformative exchange within these contexts.

In terms of my three criteria, attending to the importance of social location may help guide who should speak to an extent within such dialogue, but mainly serves to justify extending greater epistemological authority to some over others, and can point to instances when increased representation of a particular group is needed. In this way, mine is both a procedural and a substantive account. It is substantive in the sense that my C.S model defends cultural diversity as a necessity and an epistemic good. It is procedural in the sense that I argue producing equitable conditions for multicultural dialogue within contexts like Canada requires that liberal standards be loosened and at times rejected, while more broadly arguing that the process of dialogue itself must begin from the dual guiding assumptions that 1) structural positioning yields distinct and epistemologically useful perspectives derived from group membership and subjective experience based on same; and 2) patterns of historical and contemporary injustice, oppression, and political marginalization and economic exploitation are all crucial contextual factors that help shape the scope and content of genuine multicultural justice today.

As for how the grounds of such intercultural dialogue will be established concretely in order to ensure conditions of respect and epistemological equality, I am hesitant to leave such dialogue entirely up to democratic decision-making processes, or mere top-down consultations, which may privilege elites and contribute to skewed and/or oppressive representations of ‘cultural’ traditions and practices. Democracy cannot be a tool for cultural and racial justice unless, first, the terms of democratic negotiation are altered to reflect something other than the
language and norms of the ‘majority’, and second, unless marginalized and excluded groups are given not only special rights of group representation on state decision making bodies, but patterns of hierarchical socialization and (often) unconscious aversion are combated. Asymmetries not only in political and economic power but also in hierarchies of epistemic authority and culturally biased standards of competence, judgment, and rationality must also be confronted and rejected.

Young’s (1990) model of democratic pluralism gets close to this, but doesn’t explicitly address the need to consider issues of epistemological authority, which I view to a necessary (pre)condition for the project’s success. Meaningfully expanding epistemic authority to excluded or marginalized perspectives begins with the critical realist insight that those most directly and negatively impacted by structural oppression and injustice may have privileged epistemic insight into how these structures operate as a result. Operationalizing this insight entails illuminating and dismantling patterns of privileged, and at times, willful ignorance, which allows members of

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28 Again such a ‘majority’ maybe be better thought of as a privileged minority with pretensions of representing a common or even universal ‘rational’ perspective.

29 Weighing in on the issue of special group representation for the culturally marginalized, Susan Okin suggests multiculturalists may want to attempt gender parity within those representative bodies, but this is not an ideal realized in the ‘majority,’ and I see no reason to impose it on ‘minority’ groups exclusively (1999, 24). Such a practice, while perhaps well intentioned, smacks of civilizationist doctrines separating a supposedly gender-equal western We from an inherently patriarchal and violent non-western Them.

30 Ultimately, my model has significant overlap with advocates of ‘deliberative democracy,’ (see Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson, 1996, 2004; Bruce Ackerman and James Fishkin, 2002, 1996; Benhabib, 1996), ‘democratic pluralism’ (see Young, 1990), or ‘discourse ethics’ (see Jurgen Habermas, 1996; Benhabib, 2002). Although similarities exist, my C.S. model distinguishes itself through a conscious rejection of the goal of consensus (at least as a first step) and a distancing from attempts to frame one’s position in ‘neutral,’ ‘impartial’ terms aimed at a ‘common’ good or appealing to a ‘public’ set of values, or phrased in a manner any ‘reasonable person’ could accept. In this way, my C.S. model is closest to Young’s ‘democratic pluralism,’ although my model is more explicitly focused on the epistemological benefit of an actively supported multicultural politics of difference. Despite this difference in emphasis, however, I echo many of her recommendations, from conceptualizing difference along a continuum, to promoting greater representation of culturally marginalized social groups in the political and economic decision-making structure (including greater democratization of workplace, special group representation in government bodies), and also her emphasis on potential for difference to flourish in the ‘being together of strangers’ within cities (1990). More will be said about these recommendations in chapter eight and the conclusion.
structurally privileged social and cultural groups to universalize their particularistic perspectives and interests as that of any ‘rational’ individual and/or model citizen. A critical realist emphasis on the potentially objective epistemological value of subjective experience helps establish, first, how such a process may be best facilitated, that is, through extending greater authority to these subjective values/experiences, and second, how its value may be understood, as aimed towards combating structural oppression rendered ‘invisible’ by patterns of formal equality and opportunity, and at enhancing the overall pool of knowledge of a multicultural community. This commitment to the epistemological worth of subjective experience couples with other principles of my C.S. model to ultimately call for greater political and social scope to be given to the public expression of many different beliefs, values, and approaches to the self and the good life.

Such recommendations attempt to provide balance (or help negotiate) between the socially produced and/or constructed nature of culture and identity, on one hand, and the lived and often strongly felt attachment one may have to a particular culture and culturally mediated sense of self, on the other, both of which have important political implications. Additionally, the social, political, and economic implications of cultural membership and identity – particularly in cases where ‘cultural’ attributes may be ascribed, inaccurate, stereotyped, or function to cast ‘culture’ as a mere stand in for race – may also prove quite materially and personally damaging, and so too must they have very real protections.

To avoid homogenizing assumptions within either ‘majority’ or ‘minority’ cultural groups, and resulting accommodations that are insensitive to internal diversity, I employ social location as a way to capture the complex and dialectical mediation of identity through institutional structures (of oppression and privilege) and cultural contexts. My model assumes that different aspects of one’s positioning (gender, race, sexuality, age, class, and so on) will be more relevant depending on the issue at stake, but recognizes further that all aspects contribute to one’s overall social location. Agency remains in the dialectic process of reflective and self-conscious relation to one’s social location, or ‘positionality.’ And with this agency, comes the
explicit recognition that a given individual’s relation to their social location, their attitudes, and loyalty or sense of genuine belonging to a particular group identity will vary greatly, despite the potential for a commonality of experience to be derived from this common social mapping (or structural positioning), perhaps at times even contributing to a genuine sense of loyalty, common membership, or solidarity based on these experiences.

Thus, we are not determined by social location, or even by the broader historical, political, social or cultural context – but all subjects are dialectically constituted through these contexts, as we make sense of ourselves and justify our values and beliefs within them. Such mediation makes our socially constituted identities no less real, however. Indeed, I argue it is only through a careful tracing of the complex cultural, historical, and structural forces impacting and shaping identity that individuals and groups may begin to make sense of themselves and their world enough to communicate meaningfully in a political dialogue that allows for substantive, at times radical, expressions of difference.

At this stage, a reader may rightly ask whether cultural identity can in fact be both intrinsically valuable and a political and social construct, as I have implicitly argued through my dual commitments to the constitutive and intrinsically valuable contributions of cultural membership to subject formation, alongside the political, historical, and socially constructed nature of the ‘culture(s)’ to which one might belong. Does the whole thread of social construction in my argument not deny the full experience of ‘authentic’ identity to those who may view their cultural or religious membership as ultimate and constitutive?

I hope to avoid this danger by relying on a dialectic conceptualization of identity formation, one which assumes that, while subjects are produced by their social contexts, their identities will be formed out of a dialectic between structural positionings and ascriptive identifications, and their own relational positionality towards these external forces (Moya 2006, 97). Further, while subjects are constituted within contexts, the dialectical conception of subjects and cultures I defend suggests that these contexts are themselves also relationally reproduced and
transformed by subjective perspectives and the dialectic interplay between these structures and social categories. In this way, one’s identity is inescapably tied up in contexts, but individual subjects have a productive and transformative role to play within them, and such subjects may derive great personal satisfaction and intrinsic value from ongoing membership in the contexts to which they have creatively contributed, and within which their sense of self is given broader meaning and significance.

Such a dialectic conception of the self thus helps make clear that while identities are the relational products of ascribed social categories (positionings) and one’s subjective, personal relation (positionality) to these positionings, they are nonetheless real. By emphasizing that both the positioning of subjects through asymmetrical social categories attached to social locations, as well as one’s subjective relation to them, are crucial and dialectical contributors to one’s identity, the critical realist position I adapt within my C.S. model is able to provide an account of subjects who are neither essentialized into reified and ‘natural’ essences, nor individualized as transcendent of their cultural contexts, as in the case of the ideal (and I argue inherently exclusionary) liberal subject. Instead, the critical realist position I defend conceives of subjects as constitutively embedded within, but not wholly determined by, their particular cultural contexts, and yet for whom social positioning inescapably contributes to a creative and powerful interplay between subjective identity and one’s outer world, through which one’s values and commitments are made comprehensible to one’s self and others. In this way, I argue cultural membership can be both constitutive of identity (and may actively contribute to a positive sense of belonging without which subjects cannot make sense of themselves, nor their own commitments, and as such, its maintenance may be therefore intrinsically valuable to one’s positive sense of self), and yet still socially and politically produced. In lived experience and felt attachments, these cultural mediations will often prove not only constitutive, but also worthy of one’s loyalty.

Rather than a naturalized account of stable and divergent cultural essences, then, my model considers all subjects (opposed to simply ‘minority’ non-Western ones) to be culturally
mediated, as opposed to being culturally determined, while emphasizing the need to interrogate
the political and structural conditions which relationally produce and give substance to these
cultural mediations. As has been seen in previous chapters, however, a strong criticism of
‘official’ multiculturalism is that it has become a way of conflating ‘race’ with ‘culture,’ thus
smuggling in essentialist assumptions about the differences between ‘races’ through the more
politically correct language of ‘cultural distinctness.’\(^{31}\) Such ‘culturalization’ of race, this critique
suggests, helps explain the striking absence of the concept of ‘race’ from mainstream Canadian
Political Science,\(^ {32}\) and, ultimately sustains rather than challenges racialized hierarchies through
the use of race-neutral language, thereby obscuring structural racism through narratives of
naturalized cultural difference, or personal preference and choice. In this model of
multiculturalism, efforts to combat structural oppression are replaced by discussions of symbolic
recognition and limited, top-down toleration of cultural difference.

In attempting to avoid these dangers, my model, despite focusing on illuminating
hierarchies of cultural and racial privilege that so often intersect, does not hold to the rigid use of
the concept of culture as a stand in exclusively for race, or as a referent applied exclusively to
non-Western groups, concerned as I am to extend the definition of ‘cultural’ membership to ‘non-
ethnic’ and non-national groups such as Deaf or queer collectivities as well. By conceiving of all
subjects as culturally mediated and relational, located on a continuum of difference, rather than
hermetically sealed within a single group or category, moreover, I aim to democratize culture’s
meaning, in a sense, demonstrating both its ubiquity and its constitutive role in all subject
formation. Such efforts to democratize culture’s meaning are at the core of my critical synthetic

\(^{31}\) For just a few such criticisms of multiculturalism see Bannerji (2000), Phillips (2007), and Rita
Dhamoon (2009).

\(^{32}\) For two recent articulations of this critique of the ‘culturalization’ of race, used in part as an
explanation for the striking absence of discussions of ‘race’ within mainstream Canadian Political
Science, see Deborah Thompson (2008) and Nisha Nath (2011).
defense of cultural membership as dialectically constitutive of personal identity, and of multiculturalism as a necessary and valuable form of epistemic cooperation.

In the following chapter, I will attempt to further promote this position through a critique of impartiality as an ideal of public discourse and institutions, which again relies on a conceptualization of the autonomous, independent liberal subject, a subject I have argued is both culturally particular and inherently exclusionary. In contrast to this liberal subject and the standards of impartiality meant to govern its conduct in the public/political realm, I will outline some common capacities (for example, the capacity for empathy and wonder) and features of human life (including common struggles and importantly, shared spaces and places) that may help make the radical exchange of culturally particular knowledges possible and epistemically valuable. This second point, relating to the importance of shared space, will be expanded on in the conclusion of this project, wherein I will argue that such process of dialogue must begin in concrete, material spaces that are shared by at times radically different cultural subjects. The final task of this project, then, will be to point to areas deserving of future research within multicultural theory, and here I will briefly outline and defend a conception of cities and indeed neighborhoods as potentially productive sites for such dialogical interaction and contestation.
Chapter Eight: Impartiality and Difference

A theory in the flesh means one where the physical realities of our lives – our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings – all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. Here, we attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience:

We are the colored in a white feminist movement
We are the feminists among the people of our culture
We are often the lesbian among the straight
We do this bridging by naming ourselves and by telling our stories in our own words

Cherrie Moraga, *This Bridge Called My back* (1981, p. 23)

… no story is neutral [but] rather than neutrality, a story should strive to advance open-mindedness, self-criticism, historical sensitivity, and broad democratic participation in the stories we tell of ourselves and our world


In my second chapter, I briefly began a critique of impartiality as a central principle of liberal theory, suggesting that the ideal of impartiality in the public realm – and the connected goal of state neutrality – is practically impossible, morally repugnant in the ways in which it is oppressive and silencing of difference, and, finally, that it is epistemologically shortsighted. In his own work on cultural difference, Kymlicka has recognized and attempted to compensate for the first of these criticisms, at least with respect to state neutrality, acknowledging the fact that the state cannot help but privilege the majority cultural group through language laws, national holidays and public symbols. While this recognition is an important step forward within liberal theory, I find that Kymlicka’s solutions\(^1\) are inadequate, and indeed, guilty of amplifying the second and third aspects of my own critique of impartiality. In this chapter, once again using

\(^1\) Specifically, the solutions Kymlicka offers to address the impossibility of culturally neutral states include the allowance and endorsement of nation-building within the majority, provided national minorities are granted similar institutional powers, and the provision that ‘polyethnic’ groups ought to able to retain their cultural traditions in private and to express their particularity within some carefully controlled public displays (detached from politics and discussion of power). See Kymlicka (1995a, 1998, 2001).
Kymlicka’s liberal defense of multiculturalism and the neutrality of liberal principles as my point of departure, I will seek to link this critique of impartiality as a goal of liberal-democratic states to a defense of radical public and intercultural dialogue guided by principles of testimony, and my own three procedural C.S criteria. As outlined in chapters six and seven, these are – first, attending to the potentially far-reaching epistemological value of the distinct claims and beliefs being put forward; second, tracing these claims outward with reference to the social location of the speaker; and third, locating the speaker within their historical context, particularly concerned with identifying histories of injustice and oppression from which they may speak.

First, I will outline Kymlicka’s (1989b) defense of what he terms ‘justificatory’ neutrality within liberal states, and connect this discussion to past criticisms made against the uncritical privileging of liberal principles within Kymlicka’s work, denying both their neutrality and their ability to provide justice to subjects living under them. Here, as in past chapters, I will ground my critique in an interrogation of the exclusionary liberal subject at the center of such liberal principles, questioning this subject’s universality and the supposed neutrality of the principles meant to defend the freedom and equality of this subject. Moving beyond Kymlicka somewhat in the second section of the chapter I will offer a sympathetic rehearsal of Iris Marion Young’s (1990) critique of the ideal of impartiality, connecting this critique to Kymlicka’s defense of state neutrality and individualism through a challenge to the liberal commitment to the public/private split, which supports state neutrality as well as the ideal of the impartial public reasoner, ideals which are both operative in Kymlicka’s work, even within his defense of multiculturalism.

From this critical discussion, in the third section of the chapter, I will put forward a preliminary and tentative defense of radical multicultural dialogue guided by testimony, spoken from lived experience and beginning from the assumption that such subjective knowledge potentially holds important political and epistemological implications that can extend far beyond an individual speaker or the cultural group they may claim to represent. Here I will combine insights from Lynn Sanders (1997), Young, Sarah Ahmed (2004), and my own C.S. model to
defend the epistemic value of such testimony or narration from personal experience. Finally, within this discussion, and drawing again from the work of Young and Ahmed, I will outline principles of rhetoric, greeting, and wonder which may help to facilitate genuine, respectful epistemic cooperation within multicultural dialogue in stratified contexts such as Canada. The common human capacities for both critical reflection and emotions such as wonder, I argue, may potentially help motivate subjects to engage in, public, political processes aimed at sharing knowledge across difference through the telling of personal stories and the critical interrogation of them. By acknowledging the epistemological weight of every day experience and thus expanding what is considered at least potentially public and political, such an understanding of radical multiculturalism thus has the potential to promote the sharing of transformative stories of struggle, oppression, and dispossession, stories of cultural values and approaches to the good life, and stories of community, resistance, and empowerment.

*Liberal neutrality and the limits of the political*

When articulating his liberal defense of group differentiated rights, Kymlicka has partially relinquished liberal commitments to complete state neutrality – at least in so far as denying that equality must equal sameness in treatment, and through his acknowledgement that the state will inevitably privilege the culture and interests of its own majority. However, Kymlicka retains much of the public/private split (a liberal commitment often used to justify and facilitate public neutrality) when it comes to debating and deciding political matters for (non national) minority groups, who may wish to retain their cultural distinctness in private and even express it in public, which is permissible, but only so long as this is done in non-political, typically non-religious ways.² At the same time as he maintains this division for ‘polyethnic’

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² Although Kymlicka does not explicitly emphasize this exclusion of the political and religious aspects of identity from the public ream within his work, I suggest it is a logical and implicit conclusion stemming from his theory and general liberal commitments. Indeed, as noted in the sixth chapter, in the case of voluntary immigrants, Kymlicka’s suggests much of their cultural distinctness will be practiced in private, within the family and voluntary associations (1995a, 14).
immigrant groups and their descendents in the Canadian context, Kymlicka assumes not neutrality in the public realm, but the promotion and integration of the majority ‘societal’ (i.e. national) culture into state institutions and the spaces of public life, so long as this majority culture is constrained by and expressed through liberal principles, and is responsive to the claims and critiques of all citizens. Here, ‘voluntary’ immigrants are expected to receive fair terms of integration, expressing their cultural distinctness (should they wish to) in private, and in (often state sponsored) festivals and other ‘song and dance’ style multicultural forums, which are typically detached from discussions of fundamental values, political decision-making, and power (Kymlicka 1995a, 14).

My objection to Kymlicka’s approach to neutrality in the state is first, that it does not go far enough – still allowing for the cultural majority to control the manner and limits of public expressions of cultural distinctness made by members of minority groups, by restricting this expression to liberal language and non-political forums – and; second, that it goes too far – privileging the national majority without interrogating the legitimacy of this group’s claim to power or that of the state that represents its interests, a step that is critical to take in settler states like Canada. The problem of assuming the superior value – and natural ‘gravitational pull’ – of liberal principles, while not couched in the pretensions of complete neutrality, thus remains endemic to Kymlicka’s multiculturalism (2007a, 75). National minorities, highly privileged over other less geographically concentrated and institutionally complete groups though they may be, are typically cited positively by Kymlicka only when they – as in the case of Quebec – seem to boast a more robustly liberal set of institutions and cultural values than even the majority nation. And polyethnic groups – ranked below minority nations – as I demonstrated in chapter six, are expected to adopt the language, liberal principles, and broadly defined cultural values of the

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3 Throughout his work, Kymlicka limits his discussion to the citizen, as the central or sole actor considered within debates on multicultural rights and accommodations. Here, nations are ‘societal cultures’ and can serve as critical contexts for choice to all members of the nation, whether they were native born or voluntarily joined the nation through immigration (1995a, 2001).
majority. When debating on fundamental values and political issues in public, or when arguing for accommodations of their own cultural practices and beliefs or making other political demands, these ‘newcomers’ are expected to do so in the language of liberal constitutionalism in Kymlicka’s work (2007a). Once again, this is what Kymlicka means when he refers positively to liberalisms ‘double-edged sword,’ which allows for expressions of diversity, but within strictly defined liberal constraints (2007a).

Rather than claiming to adopt complete cultural neutrality as a public/political value, then, Kymlicka is more honest – recognizing and indeed defending the (English Canadian) majority’s right to promote its own language and culture within the state and public realm, so long as immigrant groups are offered fair terms of integration and are not actively discriminated against. In response, I would suggest that the very premise of his theory (the exclusionary, ‘autonomous’ liberal subject he seeks to defend and offer cultural rights to) makes the realization of these formal commitments to equality and inclusiveness unlikely if not impossible. I have attempted, in previous chapters, to demonstrate the inherent limitations of this subject, relying as it does for its autonomous independence on the encumbrance and instrumental use of others in gendered and racialized terms.

In earlier work, Kymlicka (1989b) has written explicitly on the subject of liberal neutrality, noting that “a distinctive feature of contemporary liberal theory is its emphasis on ‘neutrality’ – the view that the state should not reward or penalize particular conceptions of the good life but, rather, should provide a neutral framework within which different and potentially conflicting conceptions of the good can be pursued” (1989b, 883). In this piece, Kymlicka proceeds to address criticisms made of this concept from outside liberal theory, particularly those

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4 For a full defense of English Canadian nation-building, see Kymlicka (1998).
5 Although this is an older article, Kymlicka has never explicitly repudiated the position outlined throughout, and indeed, his concept of ‘societal culture’ has subsequently been criticized by Joseph Carens as being wedded to a particular version of liberal neutrality which promotes only the value of choice while permitting no judgments (particularly by governments) relating to the specific objects of choice (2000, 57).
concerned with connections drawn between neutrality and individualism within liberal theory, while defending a concept he terms ‘justificatory neutrality,’ rather than committing to the stronger (and, he recognizes, unrealizable) principle of ‘consequential neutrality’ (1989b, 883).

According to Kymlicka, while consequential neutrality requires that government action should privilege no particular conception of the good life and indeed, should have neutral consequences, justificatory neutrality more modestly “allows that government action may help some ways of life more than others but denies that government should act in order to help some ways of life over others” (1989b, 883). In other words, through the promotion of liberal principles like civil rights, Kymlicka recognizes, governments cannot claim to be neutral in the consequences of their policies, but while government action will ultimately serve to benefit some ways of life more than others, governments should not strive to do so actively. For example, Kymlicka argues, freedom of speech and association allow groups to pursue and advertise their ways of life, and this will ultimately privilege some groups over others. This is the case simply because, Kymlicka suggests, some groups will prove more compelling than others, as not all ways of life are equally valuable and individuals are presumed free to choose different life plans that are more or less attractive to them within liberalism (1989b, 884). Here Kymlicka refers to the public sphere within well functioning liberal democracies as “a marketplace of ideas,” suggesting that, “how well a way of life does in this market depends on the kinds of goods it can offer to prospective adherents. Hence, under conditions of freedom, satisfying and valuable ways of life will tend to drive out those which are worthless and unsatisfying” (1989b, 884). Thus, rather than neutral consequences for all groups, this version of state neutrality which Kymlicka endorses simply requires neutrality in the justification of government policy, but allows that

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6 Permissible governmental action under procedures of justificatory neutrality requires that government policies will be fair to all, and protect the rights and freedoms of individual citizens regardless of ‘arbitrary’ moral features like race, class and gender. While these are admirable commitments, they remain formal and inadequate for this reason. When attached to an
some approaches to the good will inevitably win out over other’s in public competition for members (1989b, 884).

While there is more to Kymlicka’s position than just this, I am concerned with this aspect of his argument specifically. For my purposes, it is centrally important to emphasize that liberal ‘justifications’ are not themselves neutral, as Kymlicka seems to suggest. Instead, they support one particular view of the subject and the corresponding basic needs and primary goods this subject is assumed to require in order to flourish. In addition to arguing that Kymlicka’s preferred ‘justificatory neutrality’ is in fact not neutral in justification (again, because it relies on a non-neutral account of what persons are and the conditions they need to flourish), I am also suggesting that its consequences are harmful – covering over substantive inequality and oppression, atomizing subjects, creating hierarchies of citizenship and naturalizing economic domination and ongoing colonial dispossession.

Within his piece, Kymlicka addresses similar criticisms, breaking them down into three related objections, typically coming from Marxists and communitarians, who charge liberal neutrality and its corollary defense of equality of resources (emphasizing personal responsibility) over equality of welfare with promoting an atomistic, possessive individualism, which is hostile to collective deliberation and therefore harmful to human flourishing. In the following section, I will consider two of these three objections – first, that the liberal subject is overly atomistic, and second, that liberal neutrality within the state is an ideal hostile to collective decision making – and outline why I find Kymlicka’s responses to them inadequate.  

7 exclusionary liberal subject, they mask substantive inequality and oppression in the name of this formal equality of individual citizens.

7 While interesting, Kymlicka’s defense of ‘equality of resources’ within liberal theories of justice is too far outside the focus of my argument to warrant inclusion. Put briefly, rather than defending a ‘thicker’ conception of the good through a promotion of equality of welfare, an equality of resources model is preferred by Kymlicka, because, he argues, liberalism requires subjects to be responsible for their own ends, which Kymlicka suggests is necessary in order to spare others the harmful consequences of some individuals’ lack of foresight and self-discipline (1989b, 885). Importantly, then, the liberal commitment to equality of resources which Kymlicka defends,
For Kymlicka, while not neutral in the consequences of its policies, the liberal state, “does not justify its actions by reference to some public ranking of the intrinsic value of different ways of life, for there is no public ranking to refer to,” and in this way, such a model of justificatory neutrality remains, “consistent with the legitimate nonneutral consequences of cultural competition and individual responsibility” (886, 1989b). While committed to the freedom of individuals to decide among cultural practices and approaches to the good life within the public “marketplace of ideas,” as Kymlicka puts it, this approach ignores the way in which the majority’s standards are implicitly naturalized and normalized in the public consciousness (1989b, 884). As Parekh (2006) has also noticed, even if the liberal state does not explicitly endorse one conceptualization of the good life in its policies, simply by forcing all groups – including and especially cultural minorities – to defend themselves in strictly liberal terms, this approach can have the effect of inverting the value of a culture to its members, relying on an instrumental autonomy-building role, rather than the other aspects of the culture or approaches to the self that may be central. Kymlicka himself is quick to dismiss the concept of socially produced and disciplined subjects who may be influenced by informal means of cultural reproduction and assimilation, arguing instead in favor of a commitment to freedom of choice, and thus downplaying the coercive impact of non-state actors (1989b, 891).

drawing from Rawls (1971) and Dworkin (1981a, 1981b), is focused on personal responsibility as a way of mitigating ‘expensive tastes,’ rather than on interrogating historical and structural oppression and claims of justice resulting from these, abstracting from the most pressing forms and sources of inequality, while potentially naturalizing the structural injustices and inequalities of the status quo. In other words, this approach supports a very narrow conception of equality, and promotes the types of historical occlusions of racialized injustice articulated by Mills in the third chapter. Here I also echo Young’s (1990) critique of the naturalizing and obscuring effects of the ‘distributive paradigm’s’ approach to justice.

8 In other words, the liberal commitment to equality of resources assumes that the state is not responsible for compensating those with expensive tastes, but only with securing formal equality and as wide range of freedoms for the individual as is possible without causing harm to others. This emphasis on personal responsibility over issues of structural oppression within liberal theories of equality and justice is a weakness that many critics of liberalism, including Young (1990) and Mills (2007a) have noticed.

9 As I have argued in previous chapters, such liberal principles must themselves be marked as cultural, rather than neutral or universal.
Part of the problem here, I would argue, is the narrow scope of political power as it is typically defined within liberal theory,\textsuperscript{10} that is, the articulation of the state as the only legitimate source of coercive power and of the individual as needing protection from this state and other citizens as obstacles and potential threats to their negative freedom.\textsuperscript{11} Contrary to the abstract and narrow view of power presented by Kymlicka, the cultural ‘marketplace’ is not, in reality, an even playing field for all cultural groups, such that they may compete fairly and win or lose entirely on their own merits. On the contrary, the dominant cultural group’s values are embedded within the state apparatus not only, as Kymlicka recognizes in his later work, through public education, language laws, national holidays and public symbols, but through liberal principles themselves – through commitments to a capitalist economy, representative democracy, individual rights, and formal equality. Together, these meta commitments help form hegemonic visions of the authentic or rightful citizen of the nation, namely the autonomous and independent chooser who will make use of primary goods (including cultural contexts, in Kymlicka’s later formulations) to pursue their own individual conceptions of the good life.

In colonial contexts like Canada, however, access to this exalted subject position is restricted on racialized as well as gendered terms, as previously chapters have shown. In his own defense of liberal neutrality, however, Kymlicka ignores the power imbalances at play and the cultural particularity of liberal principles supporting this vision of the self, suggesting simply that ‘good’ approaches to conceptualizing the self and the good life will be successful in the cultural marketplace, later qualifying this position through his liberal multiculturalism by suggesting that

\textsuperscript{10} In her critique of ‘liberalism’s family values,’ Wendy Brown has made a similar argument relating to the problematically narrow scope of the political within liberalism, noticing that the “sole domain of the political in liberalism is the state,” and, as such, the state is “conceived as the sole domain in which political power is at play; civil society, to the extent that it is acknowledged as a domain of power, is understood as a field of natural power and natural social relations” (1995, 145). This limitation of the political to the state and further restricted to ‘impartial’ expressions in the public is one I seek to challenge both within this chapter and throughout my project.

\textsuperscript{11} For critical discussions of negative freedom within liberal theory see Berlin (1969), and Taylor (1979).
in order for this type of competition to be fair, some minimal state supports are needed to help minorities who may see the basic primary good of their cultural contexts ‘cost’ more to retain and defend than those in the majority (1995a).

While Kymlicka does not address this objection to the liberal subject, he does consider communitarian objections that this idealized liberal individual promotes a conception of the subject that is inevitably and harmfully atomistic, connected with the critique that liberal neutrality is unable to provide the basic conditions subjects need to lead flourishing lives, because it fails to protect the distinct cultural communities which give these lives meaning. In responding to this objection, Kymlicka attempts to position himself as a non-atomistic liberal by acknowledging the need for meaningful ‘public’ options to be presented between competing conceptions of the good life, and arguing in favor of the protection of vital cultural contexts to facilitate choice and human flourishing. This is clearly reflected in his later articulations of liberal multiculturalism and liberal nationalism, and in this early piece as well, Kymlicka suggests that liberal neutrality hopes fundamentally to improve the range of options available to autonomous individuals seeking flourishing lives, arguing that “the cultural marketplace is valued because it helps good ways of life displace bad” ones (1989b, 895).

Indeed, according to Kymlicka,

The best reason for state neutrality is precisely that social life is nonneutral, that people can and do make discriminations among competing ways of life in their social life, affirming some and rejecting others, without using the state apparatus. If individuals are unable to make these judgments in social life, then state perfectionism might be the appropriate way to enable people to discriminate among different conceptions of the good (although it is unclear how moving from the cultural marketplace to the state would remove the disability).

(1989b, 895-896, my emphasis)

While I have previously argued that the instrumental approach to cultural contexts that Kymlicka’s theory promotes continues to be vulnerable to the charge of detached – although not strictly atomistic – individualism, it is also important to note that although it is the only one he
presents, state perfectionism is not the only alternative option to state neutrality. The type of open-ended, radical critique of the state apparatus and the status quo through protest, dialogue and contestation that my own C.S. model defends may ultimately produce something else entirely. That is, rather than promoting state perfectionism, my alternative model favors radical critique of existing political structures and tentatively recommends shifting to more direct forms of democratic engagement, guided by local/collective decision making, which may ultimately produce drastically different institutions than those which presently operate, without assuming coercive state perfectionism at the national level (so often the implicit political unit assumed in liberal theories like Kymlicka’s) is the only possible alternative option to liberal democratic neutrality.

This dichotomy assumed between state neutrality and perfectionism, presented as the only options by Kymlicka, is endemic to liberal theory, and leads into the final objection to state neutrality and individualism considered by Kymlicka – that such principles are biased against collective decision-making. In other words, Kymlicka notes, liberalism is often charged with wrongly separating individuals from collective deliberations about the good life by endorsing an individualistic belief that judgments about the good should be made by isolated individuals and not reflected by or directed through state policy (1989b, 896). For Kymlicka, this objection wrongly fails to distinguish between “collective activities and political activities” (1989b, 897, my emphasis). It is of course true, he writes, “that participation in shared linguistic and cultural practices is what enables individuals to make intelligent decisions about the good life,” but Kymlicka questions why such collective participation necessarily be organized “in and through the state, rather than through the free association of individuals” (1987b, 897). According to Kymlicka, a liberal society

12 More will be said about these recommendations in the conclusion, although they will remain tentative and preliminary.
does create opportunities for people to express and develop… social aspects of individual deliberation. After all, freedom of assembly, associate, and speech are fundamental liberal rights. The opportunities for collective inquiry simply occur within and between groups and associations below the level of the state – friends and family, in the first instance, but also churches, cultural associations, professional groups and trade unions, universities, and the mass media. These are some of the “organized public spaces of appearance” and “communication communities” of a liberal society.

(1989b, 897, my emphasis)

In a sense, I agree with this response from Kymlicka, although for different reasons. As will be developed further in the conclusion, and has already been touched on in chapter six, my project is in part set up as an implicit critique of the liberal democratic nation-state. In this sense, I share Kymlicka’s recommendation that much ‘collective inquiry’ ought to take place ‘below’ the level of the state, in various public spaces and forums, at least initially. However, in promoting more local, direct processes of democracy in both economic and political spheres, alongside the public and politicized practice of intercultural dialogue and testimony, I suggest such associations and debates remain highly political – even when not actively directed by the state – and as such, should ultimately contribute to concrete decision-making. While seeking to problematize the legitimacy of a colonial state apparatus like that of the Canadian federal government and its provincial units, at present, given hierarchies of wealth and status, without some form of external support, making space for such associations and concrete sites of public dialogue is a political project that cannot but privilege already dominant subjects with the time and power to organize such associations voluntarily. Again, this alternative approach rests in part on a difference in how Kymlicka’s model and my own conceive of political power, entailing a rejection of the liberal model, which suggests the political is the sole domain of the state, and civil society or social life is simply an arena of freedom better left unhindered by state influence,
this ‘marketplace of ideas’ Kymlicka refers to throughout his piece, where only ‘natural’ imbalances in power operate.\textsuperscript{13}

Due to this differing understanding of power and the limits of the political, Kymlicka suggests that ‘collective deliberation’ over competing conceptions of the good through civil society should remain social rather than political,\textsuperscript{14} because the alternative is a “state perfectionism [which] would in fact serve to distort free evaluation of ways of life, to rigidify the dominate ways of life, whatever their intrinsic merits, and to unfairly exclude the values and aspirations of marginalized and disadvantaged groups within the community” (1989b, 900). Here, Kymlicka cites three objections to collective deliberation, as directed by the state, suggesting that such deliberations would be vulnerable to the tyranny of the majority, could potentially produce a “dictatorship of the articulate,” and would likely further marginalize the culturally disadvantaged, “whose beliefs and aspirations are not understood by the majority” (1989b, 900). I will consider similar objections later in the chapter, when defending my own model of intercultural dialogue facilitated through testimony, but interestingly, while mentioning the potential for a ‘dictatorship of the articulate,’ Kymlicka fails to fill in this concept, leaving unmentioned inequalities of epistemic authority based on cultural, gendered, racialized hierarchies that currently operate in liberal public spheres (1989b, 900). Further, the suggestion that minority cultural groups would be disadvantaged within collective decision making, due to the fact that the majority simply will not or cannot “understand” their beliefs and aspirations, implicitly and problematically assumes

\textsuperscript{13} The family and the economy, for example, typically operate as fields of natural, rather than political power within liberal theory (Brown 1995).

\textsuperscript{14} Benhabib (1992) has articulated a rejection of this imagined divide between the social and the political in a manner I find useful. For her, it does not make sense to separate any struggles for justice as either/only being political or social, because “all struggles against oppression in the modern world begin by redefining what had previously been considered “private,” non-public, and non-political issues as matters of public concern, as issues of justice, as sites of power which need discursive legitimation” (1992, 100). For Benhabib, the struggle to make something public is always a struggle for justice, and as such, is always political, I suggest (1992, 94).
that divergent conceptions of the good life cannot be substantively shared, and so should remain ‘social,’ ‘cultural,’ or otherwise private rather than public and political.15

Maintaining the efficacy of this public/private split, Kymlicka argues that, rather than unfairly forcing disadvantaged groups to make claims with reference to the standards of the majority in set times and venues to facilitate political deliberation over state policy, state neutrality “ensures that the culturally subordinate group has as many options as possible concerning that interaction [with the dominant group], and that the costs of that imbalance for the subordinate group are minimized” (1989b, 901). Kymlicka concludes that, “If we look at the history of our society, surely liberal neutrality has the great advantage of its potential inclusiveness, its denial that marginalized and subordinate groups must fit into the historical practices, the ‘way of life,’ which have been defined by the dominant groups”—yet this inclusiveness seems to rest on the fact that such minorities are ‘left alone’ and not forced to defend their ways of life to the dominant groups, in Kymlicka’s account (1989b, 902). What this defense of liberal neutrality and rejection of collective decision making in the political realm neglects is the recognition that, rather than leaving open the question of how much or little cultural minorities may wish to express about their values and beliefs, liberalism implicitly cuts off the option of bringing culturally distinct values forward as political, and casts many claims of justice as also personal, private, rather than as matters of structural exclusion and oppression.

Ignoring imbalances of time, epistemic authority, and other socio-political resources, Kymlicka ultimately concludes his defense of liberal neutrality by emphasizing that liberals “believe that people naturally form and join social relations and forums in which they come to understand and pursue the good,” going on to suggest that, for this reason, the state “is not needed

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15 In the third section of this chapter, I will attempt to demonstrate how models of testimony and dialogue can potentially resist this slide into privatizing what is considered publicly incommensurable or incomprehensible, even while recognizing that complete understanding across differences in social location and history through an imaginative reversal of positions cannot be expected.
to provide that communal context and is likely to distort the normal processes of collective deliberations and cultural development” (1989b, 904). What this approach neglects is once again the issue of power as it circulates outside of official state apparatuses, leading to the failure of liberal models such as Kymlicka’s to ask who has the time and money to join and participate in such associations if they are left entirely up to the voluntary choice of ‘free’ individuals in the private sphere, or, just as importantly, who has the political power and voice to see the results of such informal discussions translated into voter decisions and policy change. The ‘voluntary,’ social sphere of civil society is not free from power and domination, and much of the coercive forces that operate within it and discipline subjects are products of cultural, racial, and gendered hierarchies embedded within ‘neutral’ terms of liberal justice and the liberal subject itself, as it operates as the hegemonic ‘ideal’ citizen in liberal democracies like Canada’s.

Furthermore, as noted in the introduction, even Kymlicka’s limited commitment to ‘justificatory’ neutrality is qualified by his later work on the promotion of English-Canadian nation-building16 in ways that disadvantage many ‘outsiders’ to this nation, both ‘internally’ and ‘externally’ located (1998). In his defense of multiculturalism Kymlicka (1989a, 1995a) has argued that complete state neutrality with respect to culture is impossible, recognizing that the majority will inevitably see its own cultural symbols, practices, language and traditions partially reflected in state institutions. This lack of cultural neutrality is permissible in his account

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16 When troubling this right to nation-building on the part of the dominant English-Canadian majority, it is also important to emphasize that, in the promotion of ‘English-Canadian’ national identity, the language and many of the symbols and traditions (of Parliament, for example) remain imperialist in nature, linking back to the legacy of British takeover of Aboriginal territories through colonial dispossession and the seizure of power from the French colonies through conquest. While only a portion of the English speaking majority remain closely linked to these early ‘settlers’ and to British culture, these public symbols remain prominent within the federal government and the colonial reminders they represent may work to symbolically exclude both ‘internal’ – that is, forcibly incorporated minority nations – and ‘external’ – particularly nonwhite immigrant groups coming from other ex-British colonies – Others from the national imaginary. More tangibly, the institutions themselves, and not simply the symbolic rituals and images, which share this colonist legacy and are the product of it in large part, are unlikely, particularly in the case of Aboriginal groups, to inspire trust or any positive sense of belonging. For a more full presentation of this critique, see Eisenberg (1998).
provided that minority nations receive similar powers, and that new immigrants are not
discriminated against within any national community, and are free to express their cultural
specificity in private and in select public forums. Where Kymlicka retains a commitment to the
more minimal justificatory neutrality may come through the perception that while a state cannot
be culturally neutral, a well-ordered liberal state must still attempt to remain neutral with respect
to promoting any particular conception of the good life, as though notions of the good may be
substantively detached from the pragmatic necessity of having a common national language, or
the celebration of particular religious or cultural holidays within the nation-state.

Such a position is only comprehensible as a reflection of the familiar liberal commitment
that the right may be substantively separated from the good, holding that the principles of liberal
constitutionalism may remain, at least in their justification, neutral with respect to the good,
protecting the freedom of individuals to pursue a variety of life plans, be these culturally
informed or otherwise, in private, while expressing the non-political aspects of these lives and
values in public. I have argued that the subject at the core of these liberal principles is neither
universal nor a position pragmatically attainable for all, relying as it does on the exclusion of
cumbered and exploited bodies for the realization of its autonomous life, while also being
culturally particular to the Western liberal tradition. Principles of liberal constitutionalism
protecting the individual rights and formal equality of this subject – or, indeed, more narrowly,
for citizens able to access this subject position – are neither neutral in their consequences nor their
justifications, then. And while I am arguing against neutrality as a positive political value, for
both epistemological as well as pragmatic reasons, to suggest these principles can be neutral,
without interrogating their uneven justifications and effects, ultimately serves to obfuscate
hierarchies of power, both material and epistemological, falsely presenting an even playing field
on which various conceptions of the good can compete for recognition and converts in style of
Kymlicka’s ‘marketplace of ideas’ (1989b).
While not written within his explicit theorization of liberal multiculturalism, then, Kymlicka’s defense of justificatory neutrality, masking the culturally particular and exclusionary liberal subject at the center of supposedly ‘neutral’ liberal principles of individual rights and formal equality, helps fill in some implicit assumptions within his theory. While written early in his career, I suggest this commitment to the superiority of liberal principles, and the pretension that these liberal principles can be neutral – even in their justification, if not their consequences – remains consistent through Kymlicka’s work, and lends some insight into what Kymlicka might mean – in practice – by ‘fair’ terms of integration, at least insofar as helping to clarify and define the limits of cultural expression and critique in the public realm, that is, in political debate and dialogue. No matter what level of cultural distinctness one may wish to retain in private and in the supposedly non-political civil sphere, the individual rights of the autonomous liberal subject remain the benchmark of any permissible practice and community, recalling again Kymlicka’s celebration of liberalism’s ‘double-edged sword,’ which gives multicultural rights to minorities, so long as they express and defend their practices in liberal terms when speaking in public or making claims on the state.17

Even when acknowledging the non-universality of liberal principles, in the sense that these are attached to a particular historical development of ideas about justice and the self, Kymlicka still has maintained that liberal values, when operating within well-functioning democratic and legal institutions and promoted through civic education and political socialization, will have a strong ‘gravitational pull,’ generating their own sources of support, even from those ‘newcomers’ who did not originally share these values (2007a, 75). As Charles Taylor (1992) has famously recognized, then, Kymlicka seems at times to be quite aware that, rather than neutral, liberalism itself is a ‘fighting creed,’ but this lack of complete, transcendent neutrality is offset by

17 For an excellent critique of the manner in which liberal multiculturalism disciplines subjects to express themselves in strictly liberal language and to ‘display’ the liberal qualities of their cultural practices and beliefs, see Gerald Kernerman (2005).
the flexibility and seemingly natural appeal of liberal principles, which Kymlicka is confident will ultimately prove compelling to most individuals, when given the chance to practice these values within a tolerant and multicultural societal culture, or nation-state. To help ‘level’ the playing field and provide fair terms of integration, again, external protections for cultural minorities may be necessary, but only so long as the ‘internal freedoms’ of the individual are guaranteed (Kymlicka 1995a, 2000). The problem with this commitment remains the highly individualized, culturally particular, and exclusionary nature of the subject these freedoms are meant to protect and defend, and the racially hierarchical and subtly imperialist manner in which evaluations of given cultural communities and practices are often made.

These constitute some initial reflections and objections to the ideal of liberal neutrality as it operates within Kymlicka’s work on the state level. Moreover, as Young (1990) argues in her critique of the ideal of impartiality, to achieve this ideal on the individual level between moral reasoners, the subject must become detached from personal interest, emotion, and the body in ways that serve to further exclude those voices and bodies already alienated from the public.

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18 For a critical interrogation of the racialized and imperialist nature of such evaluations, see Sherene Razack (1998, 2008). In particular, in Casting Out, Razack draws connections between Western defenses of women’s rights, the ideal of secularism, and neo-liberalism, as these can function together as a form of management of racial-minority populations who are scripted as “premodern and requiring considerable regulation and surveillance” (2008, 148). She writes, “Secularism as a policy regulating the conduct of citizens requires and produces a normative citizen who is unconnected to community, a figure who achieved definition only in comparison to racial Others, the latter presumed to be trapped in the pre-modern by virtue of their particularistic tendencies” (2008, 148). When couched within narratives of ‘rescue’ for endangered Third World/South women who are seen as the victims of their oppressive and violent cultures, the secular, neutral liberal state becomes the best source of protection for these imperiled subjects, taking on imperialist and racist connotations. The notion that the secular state provides the best protection for individual equality and freedom, Razack emphasizes, contains the idea that, “the normative citizen is one without group-based loyalties, a figure for whom communitarian identities are best left at home. This ‘unbiased liberal subject’… is extremely important for neo-liberal state formation and economic development… That the unbiased liberal subject achieves definition through comparison to the racialized subject (viewed as communitarian, hence biased) should give us greater pause when we invoke the idea of a free-floating citizen” (2008, 160). I follow these criticisms in my own rejection of liberal neutrality and indeed, my own critique of the liberal subject itself as ideally unified, unbiased, and individualized, is much indebted to Razack’s work.
sphere and denied epistemological authority through their ‘difference.’ I will partially rehearse Young’s position and combine it with my own in the next section.

Objections to the liberal ideal of the impartial reasoner: Interjections from Young

For Young,

the ideal of impartiality in moral theory expresses a logic of identity that seeks to reduce difference to unity. The stances of detachment and dispassion that supposedly produce impartiality are attained only by abstracting from the particularities of situation, feeling, affiliation, and point of view. These particularities still operate, however, in the actual context of action. Thus the ideal of impartiality generates a dichotomy between universal and particular, public and private, reason and passion. It is, moreover, an impossible ideal, because the particularities of context and affiliation cannot and should not be removed from moral reasoning. Finally, the ideal of impartiality serves ideological functions. It masks the ways in which the particular perspectives of dominant groups claim universality, and helps justify hierarchical decisionmaking structures.

(97, 2000, my emphasis)

Thus, Young argues, the ideal of dispassionate and detached moral reasoning has served to naturalize the perspectives of white, male, middle-class, heterosexual and able-bodied subjects as universal and thus rational and impartial, while excluding those persons typically associated with the body and feeling – particularly women, Blacks, Aboriginals, and Jews – from the universal by marking these subjects as irrational, overly emotional, and their interests as private and particular, rather than common. Such persons are often seen as incapable of realizing the ideal of detached impartiality when viewed through these racialized and gendered logics, and their claims will be lent less epistemological weight as a result. On the other hand, shunning this ideal themselves, some members of these excluded groups may simply choose to express themselves differently, speaking from particular experiences and knowledges derived from their embodied difference and feelings, potentially causing them to withdraw from public life rather than express themselves through an imposed and false impartiality which masks the racialized and gendered nature of these norms (Young 1990, 97).

These criticisms should lead us, Young argues, to question the ideal of impartiality itself, and to move away from attempts to retain the public/private split (1990, 97). By her lights,
“[b]ecause such a universalist ideal continues to threaten the exclusion of some, the meaning of ‘public’ should be transformed to exhibit the positivity of group difference, passion, and play” (Young 1990, 97). The twin liberal goals of a neutral state and of the ideal citizen as an impartial, autonomous moral reasoner both rely on a strong commitment to the public/private split, and the ability of subjects to keep fundamental beliefs private and dispassionately distance themselves from these beliefs in public. Throughout this project, this has been a divide I have sought to challenge, suggesting that maintaining this division within the self is both practically impossible, as well as morally and epistemologically shortsighted and harmful.19

Rather than false neutrality and forced, unattainable detachment from the particular and affective aspects of embodied life, my C.S model calls for the expression and contestation of radical difference in the public, promoting testimony and dialogue within sites of local, democratic dialogue and decision making.20 Such dialogue, I argue, ought not be guided by idealized procedural constraints such as impartiality, consensus, or even a conception of the ‘common good,’ but instead by my three procedural criteria, that is – social location, historical injustice, and the potential for such expressions of difference and insights from this difference to have broader epistemological value, either as critiques of the status quo or alternative interpretations of the basic conditions of human flourishing.

Such an approach does not attempt to define a conception of the self as impartial, detached, and internally unified, but rather as shifting, heterogeneous, culturally and socially

19 As noted in the fifth chapter, for Young, maintaining such a rigid divide between public and private realms contributes to a split subject who may behave naturally and emotionally in private, but who must harmfully limit themselves in terms of “professional,” dispassionate or impartial expression and comportment in public (Young 1990, 140).
20 In her work, Nancy Fraser (1990) has distinguished between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ publics, both of which have important political functions. Weak publics may operate as fields of empowerment and opinion formation (particularly in the case of marginalized groups), while strong publics are connected more directly to concrete decision-making. I find this formulation useful, and within my defense of multiculturalism as a process of epistemic cooperation and a means of combating structural injustice, both forms of ‘publics’ ought to be facilitated and related to each other dialectically.
embedded, and dialectically formed. And while seeking to challenge what is excluded from the public realm by being marked as partial and particular through the false naturalization of dominant perspectives as impartial, I do not seek to eliminate this divide entirely. Instead, following Young, I would argue that we should see the private as the arena in which the individual retains the right to exclude, rather than simply where all those excluded from the ‘public’ must go (1990, 119-120). The choice, then, is here. What may be brought into the public is not defined by a ‘common’ set of values and standards, or attempts to bracket the personal and particular to achieve impartial universality, but is determined only by what an individual chooses to voice publicly, and what they similarly choose to keep private. While a critical realist approach assumes greater epistemological authority will be granted to certain voices speaking from oppressed or otherwise uniquely insightful structural perspectives, it cannot entail an obligation to speak from such a perspective, or to reveal any more or less than the individual wishes.

Through this more flexible, open-ended commitment to what may be included within the realm of the public and political, then, I seek to challenge exclusions in the name of false neutrality, rather than impose the obligation to speak from experience or to ‘educate’ the privileged about relations of oppression they may be sheltered from recognizing through their willful ignorance.21 Far from fair or neutral, I argue that at present, the very rules determining what constitutes a public versus private concern are highly biased towards a particular and liberal conceptualization of the self and the good life, and in this way, any competition under supposedly ‘neutral’ standards is rigged in favor of this internally unified, impartial, autonomous liberal self from the beginning. A self whose unity, once again, relies on the exclusion of what ‘chaotic’ difference cannot be reduced to sameness, and whose public independence relies on the gendered and increasingly racialized encumbrance in ‘private’ spheres of domestic labor.

21 See chapter three.
In making this critique of liberal ideals of impartiality and neutrality, then, I am arguing first that liberal principles themselves are not neutral in either justification nor consequence with respect to the good, and second and more importantly, that these principles are fundamentally exclusionary and harmful, relying on an impoverished conception of the self as their foundation. Thus, while I reject impartiality or attempts to reach it within public policy and dialogue, I also seek to challenge the particular content of many liberal principles when these are linked closely to a defense of this impoverished and exclusionary ideal of the self.

The detached, dispassionate impartial reasoner abstracted from context and feeling is neither a possible nor an admirable subject position to attain, I argue, and debates regarding dilemmas of injustice, oppression or simply the necessary conditions for flourishing human lives and the ideal society, are ultimately harmed rather than helped by attempts to adopt such an impartial and detached position. As Young suggests,

> The attempt to adopt an impartial and universal perspective on reality leaves behind the particular perspectives from which it begins, and reconstructs them as mere appearances as opposed to the reality that objective reason apprehends. The experience of these appearances, however, is itself part of reality. If reason seeks to know the whole of reality, then, it must apprehend all the particular perspectives from their particular points of view.

(1990, 102, my emphasis)

In this way, we have strong epistemic as well as moral reasons for valuing the particular over the universal, which ultimate masks and excludes more than it encompasses and protects.

Indeed, with Young, I would emphasize that particularities of feeling, desire and commitments do not disappear or cease to influence subjects simply because these aspects of the human condition are cast as outside of universal reason when labeled as merely subjective and thus unforgivably biased. Rather than disappearing from ‘impartial’ dialogue, these particular and affective aspects of the self “lurk as inarticulate shadows, belying the claim to comprehensiveness of universalist reason” (Young 1990, 103). When claiming otherwise, and insisting on a dispassionate, ‘reasonable’ public impartiality, difference and particularity are not eliminated, “but only expelled from the moral realm,” and, as a consequence, “the concrete
interests, needs, and desires of persons and the feelings that differentiate them from one another become merely private, subjective” (Young 1990, 103). In such a model, these ‘private’ interests and needs become ‘unshareable’ and ‘incommunicable,’ and those already disadvantaged by and alienated from dominant cultural groups, that is, those denied access to power will see this condition exacerbated by the imposition of impartiality which too often masks the particularly of the dominant group’s own values and cultural traditions (Young 1990, 103). In recognizing the impossibility of fully leaving feelings and desires behind, I would argue it is better to attempt to bring these particular and embedded influences and intuitions to the forefront, tracing their meanings and the cultural, social and historical forces that have helped dialectically shape one’s identity and fundamental commitments. Speakers in a radically plural dialogue such as the one I promote within my C.S model of multiculturalism might do better, then, by owning and openly expressing their particularity rather than trying to transcend or suppress it. Ultimately, it is both impossible and inadvisable to attempt to leave behind one’s social, cultural and historical context when attempting to debate and make sense of any substantive moral issue. These contexts will always subtly and at times even unconsciously influence one’s position on matters of justice, equality, and the good. Moreover, when attempting to motivate subjects to engage in dialogue and political debate over such issues, eliminating the passionate and particular may do little other than serving to distance subjects from these issues, causing a lack of investment in the proceedings. As Young writes, It is impossible to reason about substantive moral issues without understanding their substance, which always presupposes some particular social and historical context; and one has no motive for making moral judgments and resolving moral dilemmas unless the outcome matters, unless one has a particular and passionate interest in the outcome. (1990, 104, my emphasis) Rather than urging for abstraction away from context, personal beliefs and moral commitments in public realm, then, my C.S model calls for the radical expression of difference and a plurality of values and beliefs to be facilitated through dialogic interaction and the giving of
testimony in the public realm. In so doing, I echo Young in maintaining that “[u]niversality in the sense of participation and inclusion of everyone in moral and social life does not imply universality in the sense of the adoption of a general point of view that leaves behind particular affiliations, feelings, commitments, and desires” (1990, 105, my emphasis). In attempting to exclude the particular and affective, impartiality, rather than promoting inclusion and fair terms of social and political interaction, merely reproduces the relations of domination and oppression it seeks to eliminate/transcend by justifying or obscuring them, particularly when the ideal of impartiality simply universalizes and naturalizes the particular history and values of the majority or privileged subjects as those ‘reasonable’ standards any subject could and would agree to (Young 1990, 115).

In this schema, “[i]f oppressed groups challenge the alleged neutrality of prevailing assumptions and policies and express their own experience and perspectives, their claims are heard as those of biased, selfish special interests that deviate from the impartial general interest” (Young 1990, 116, my emphasis). To combat this false perception within liberal theory that links particularity exclusively to selfishness\(^{22}\) and petty bias, I have argued in previous chapters in favor of the broader epistemological value of subjective knowledge and belief coming from everyday experience and critical reflection on one’s social location through my positive adaptation of critical realism. I have attempted to operationalize this general commitment to the epistemic value of the subjective knowledge – derived in part through dialectical interaction with one’s cultural community, minority or otherwise – through my procedural three criteria, meant to help guide dialogue, particularly aided through processes of public testimony. While much of this argument in favor of intercultural dialogue was made in chapters five and seven, I will now say more about how testimony may help facilitate the sharing of these subjective cultural knowledges and

\(^{22}\) For an excellent critique of the manner in which neo-liberalism in particular is hostile to collective efforts of social movements, particularly ‘identity based’ ones on the grounds that these justice seeking groups are simply ‘special interests’ selfishly and illegitimately seeking greater access to power at the expense of social cohesion and the common good, see Smith (2005).
critiques of injustice within such dialogue, while seeking to avoid the exclusions and ideological dangers of attempting to constrain this dialogue to speech presumably reflecting detached impartial reasoning.

_testimony, wonder, and greeting: conditions for dialogue across difference in heterogeneous publics_

In her piece, “Against Deliberation,” from which I draw my definition of testimony, Lynn Sanders troubles the insistence, found in much of deliberative democratic theory, that democratic discussion be rational, moderate, and not selfish, suggesting these procedural constraints, rather than being fair and neutral, implicitly exclude “public talk that is impassioned, extreme, and the product of particular interests,” thereby suppressing difference and further silencing voices that are often already marginalized within the status quo (1997, 370). Such an impartial position, as Young’s critique has also shown, is thus biased in favor of those already dominant and privileged within society, and as a result, this approach is not adequately sensitive to racialized and gendered inequalities of status and access of power (both material and epistemological), excluding the voices of many in the name of consensus and impartiality as a result.

The alternative approach Sanders offers, that of testimony, on the other hand, is defended on the grounds that telling one’s own story is important in part for its own sake, and that speaking from experience and expressing oneself in whatever mode is most comfortable, which may take more passionate or inarticulate forms than the standards of impartial and deliberative speech.

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23 While Sanders’s (1997) critique is explicitly directed towards mainstream deliberative democratic theory within the American academy, I believe it has relevance to broader debates relating to impartiality and intercultural dialogue. The deliberative democratic literature is a growing and important one, but fully addressing the range of positions within this literature is beyond my project. Applying my C.S. model of radical multiculturalism as epistemological cooperation expressed through testimony and dialogue to a robust critique of norms of deliberative democracy would in itself be an interesting and worthwhile project, but not one I am pursuing within this text. For those interested in pursuing this angle, some important and representative articulations of deliberative democratic theory have been made by Amy Gutmann and Denis Thompson (1996, 2004), Joshua Cohen (1996), Seyla Benhabib (1996), and Bruce Ackerman and James Fishkin (2002).
require, is an important step in making marginalized voices heard (1997, 370). Rather than a method for seeking what is common or agreeable to all and limiting public discussion to these ‘impartial’ reasons and justifications, testimony offers the potential for the expression of different perspectives in their socially and culturally embedded completeness, rooted in the speaker’s context, and in the particular, affective meanings of these experiences and beliefs to the speaker. Such expressions arguably have the potential to be more honest and to make the dialogue richer for their inclusion in their full and passionate particularly. Recalling Young, this may also be the best way to motivate individuals to participate in such discussions, by not forcing subjects to bracket their own concrete interests and moral commitments in favor of impartiality or detachment when speaking in public debates.

Objections to this type of radical expression of difference, particularly when not explicitly aimed at seeking consensus and some ‘common’ good, often take the form that such interaction will be unproductive at best and entirely incomprehensible at worst. In their reply to Sanders’s critique of deliberative democracy in favor of testimony, for example, Amy Gutmann and Dennis Thompson have argued that testimony without deliberation will express difference but leave it unresolved, and, by neglecting the need for consensus and discussion aimed at improving the common good, testimony alone will leave policy unchanged, thus stalling decision-making and ultimately sustaining the status quo, reproducing rather than disrupting structural oppressions and exclusions (1996, 137).

While in agreement with Gutmann and Thompson, at least insofar as characterizing the status quo of Western liberal-democracies as one largely defined through oppression and exclusion, I am troubled by the implication that it is the responsibility of the oppressed and excluded to put their claims into the language and tone of the privileged in order to be heard. No matter how pragmatic and well-meaning this objection to testimony may be, its implications remain highly problematic. It is equally questionable, I argue, that if phrased in the impartial and dispassionate terms of deliberative discourse, stories of injustice and oppression would prove any
more compelling to the privileged majority or more disruptive of the status quo. Indeed, such injustices are too often obscured by commitments to formal equality, impartiality, state neutrality, and, in the case of Canada, symbolic and shallow forms of multicultural recognition. Privileged ignorance is arguably facilitated, rather than disrupted, by such formal commitments to equality and abstraction from context and lived particularity, which occludes the need to interrogate structural oppressions stemming from these.

Ultimately, as Young suggests in her own critique of ‘deliberative’ restraints on public speech and dialogue,

If... the alternative to stalled decisionmaking is a unified public that makes decisions ostensibly embodying the general interest which systematically ignore, suppress, or conflict with the interest of particular groups, then stalled decisionmaking may sometimes be just.

(189, 1990, my emphasis)

While stalled decision-making may not serve to immediately disrupt or reform unjust policies and practices within the status quo, and therefore remains less than ideal, as a political strategy, this does not necessarily imply that the alternative is more attractive, particularly to marginalized subjects. Generating an illusory consensus simply in the name of making concrete decisions will not necessarily promote a more just world, but may simply gloss over enduring inequalities while legitimizing the oppressive structures and institutions of the status quo by giving them a democratic seal of approval.24

24 Offering an alternative approach that seeks to represent differences in perspective while not leaving stalled decision making as the only option, and therefore sustaining the injustices of the status quo entirely, Lisa Disch (1994) argues that decisions might be equitably made within democratic settings if “the decision publicly acknowledges its partiality. Specifically, the decision should include a public record of different groups’ varying interpretations of the situation as well as a record of how the decision will affect diverse groups. In this way, different standpoints are publicly recognized, even if they are not all equally served by the final decision. In addition, unlike policy decisions cloaked in the rhetoric of ‘general interest’ or ‘universal principles,’ those decisions that publicly acknowledge their partiality and exclusions will reveal their temporary, imperfect status and will thus encourage further discussion” (Stone-Mediatore 2003, 91, my emphasis). I find this an intriguing notion, and one worthy of further study.
As for the matter of communicability across at times radical differences in culture, social position, race, gender, class, sexuality, and so on, the critical realist position I adapt from Satya Mohanty and others provides the beginning of an answer, although it cannot promise full understanding across difference. If this were possible, that is, if full understanding and empathy across social locations were possible, then these positions would not be not actually be different (Young 1990, 105). That said, my C.S defense of radical multiculturalism as a form of epistemic cooperation defends the possibility of meaningfully sharing knowledge and facilitating understanding across difference. Such discussions, rather than seeking rational consensus, aim to enhance the overall pool of knowledge about justice and the good within diverse and stratified contexts, and to interrogate and transform unjust and oppressive structures and cultural practices where they may operate within the majority or otherwise.

Given the uneven costs and risks involved for both dominant and marginalized subjects when engaging in what ultimately aims to be a transformative dialogue – transformative of both self-perceptions and structures – the question of where the motivation to engage in such public and potentially painful discussions is a difficult one to answer. Drawing from both Young and Ahmed’s work, I rely in part on the power of emotions – particularly that of wonder – to both open up the hope and possibility for change and transformation and to inspire and motivate subjects to come together to learn from and be challenged by one another.25 As Ahmed suggests, “wonder energizes the hope of transformation, and the will for politics” (2002, 181). Similarly, Young has argued that without “a moment of wonder, of openness to the newness and mystery of

25 This discussion touches only the surface of a growing literature on ‘affect’ and should be taken to be tentative and exploratory rather than definitive. The recommendations that follow are best seen then as one attempt to work out how intercultural dialogue may be productive in practice, despite differences in culture and power, but are limited by my own cultural particularity as a Western, white subject, as well as by the scope of the project. While tentative, these recommendations also point in an important direction for future research, as more work into the area of emotions and the affect, and the relationship between these and culture, the political, and fundamental questions of what constitutes justice, would, to my mind, greatly benefit the theories and practices of multiculturalism in Canada and elsewhere. For an excellent introduction to this burgeoning area of study, see Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth (2010).
the other person, the creative energy of desire dissolves into indifference,” stalling dialogue and sapping the motivation to continue sharing across differences in experience and power (1997b, 56). An opening up of what counts as public and political more generally, within my C.S model, also aims to encourage active and creative participation and self-expression in public sites of such dialogue. Here, subjects would be encouraged to express their views and speak from experience in what styles they felt most comfortable and at home, not restricting dialogue to the rationalized and detached constraints of impartial ‘deliberative’ discussions.

A focus on ‘communicative’ rather than ‘deliberative’ democratic procedures is promoted within my model, then, and with Young, I suggest that such processes may be aided through the use of ‘greeting,’ ‘rhetoric,’ and ‘storytelling,’ in addition to more standard forms of critical argument (1997b, 68). These elements, Young argues, better capture and make productive use of the ‘embodiment and particularity’ of interlocutors, allowing for a plurality of positions and ways of expressing them to be meaningfully included. The first of these elements, ‘greeting,’ is meant to serve as “a logical and motivational condition for dialogue that aims to reach understanding” through the initial mutual recognition of one another in each person’s embodied particularity (Young 1997b, 70). Such expressions of welcome and recognition, along with farewells, can take the form of ‘mild flattery,’ ‘ego stroking,’ and even ‘deference,’ that in Young’s words may help ‘lubricate’ the proceedings. In discussions of structural injustice,

26 Young offers an expanded argument in favor of greeting, rhetoric and storytelling as politically productive modes of democratic communication within heterogeneous societies in her text Inclusion and Democracy (2000).

27 Styles and forms of greeting are, however, themselves culturally particular, and in this way, even such initial interactions meant to open the proceedings for intercultural dialogue will be spaces of negotiation and learning as all those participating must attempt to understand and greet one another on their own terms. This may prove a benefit, rather than a detriment to the proceedings, functioning as a way to begin learning from one another before more substantive political or economic issues enter the discussion, but the culturally particular nature of acceptable greetings, and indeed of potential responses to what is different or surprising through a positive feeling of ‘wonder,’ also signal to the tentative and preliminary nature of these recommendations. It is my hope that such practices would help to facilitate learning and sharing across difference,
where the exposure and interrogation of privilege may cause pain and generate anger among all involved, such expressions of warmth and flattery in greetings and goodbyes may help to humanize all participants to each other, may encourage a sense of openness to listen to what others have to say.\(^{28}\)

Importantly, while involving at times anger against and critical exposure of structural privilege, when possible the focus should be on responsibility (both personal and collective) rather than on shaming or blaming. As Young demonstrates,

Blame is a backward-looking concept. Calling on agents to take responsibility for their actions, habits, feelings, attitudes, images and associations, on the other hand, is forward-looking: it asks the person “from here on out” to submit such unconscious behavior to reflection, to work to change habits and attitudes.

(1990, 151)

While voicing anger and frustration in the face of oppression is potentially productive and empowering for marginalized subjects, guilt and blame remain backward-looking concepts, which are unlikely to prompt any political movement on the part of privileged subjects. Indeed, rather than promoting a critical interrogation of the structural injustices one may be implicated within, merely blaming dominant subjects for the oppressions through which they are privileged, while perhaps warranted in some cases, may ultimately prompt only a withdrawal or retreat from interrogating such matters of structural injustice on the part of these privileged subjects.\(^{29}\) On the other hand, emphasizing forward-looking responsibility and shared struggle against intersecting aspects of oppression that may be common across difference, and viewing this struggle as a

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\(^{28}\) Finding productive ways of expressing and responding to anger is crucial to the success of such a project. As Ahmed suggests, “Learning to hear the anger of others, without blocking the anger through a defense of one’s own position is crucial. Such a project requires that one accept that one’s own position might anger others and hence allows one’s position to be opened to critique by others (it does not then, like shame or guilt, turn the self back into itself by ‘taking’ that anger as one’s own)” (Ahmed 2004, 178).

\(^{29}\) For discussion of the dangers of such ‘retreat’ on the part of privileged, particularly white subjects, see Linda Alcoff (1991, 1998). See also Razack (1998).
collective, community-centered project, despite differences in identity and power, has the potential to be a transformative and energizing process for all subjects involved.

Creative use of testimony through storytelling may also help ‘lubricate’ these transformative, intercultural proceedings, which aid in mutual understanding through sharing from experience to express one’s own needs, desires, and motivations in their embodied particularity (Young 1997b, 72). Importantly, use of narrative forms of testimony aims to foster understanding of those who are different from one another without reducing this difference to similarity or sameness. By beginning from the particular experiences of those in social locations that are not reducible to one another, narrative helps reveal that such experiences are often unique to those occupying such locations, but at the same time, does not preempt understanding despite this lack of ultimately reducibility to sameness or equivalences of experience (Young 1997b, 72). Here, Young marks a crucial difference between listening to and learning from others, which is possible and necessary in such dialogue, and the less realizable and indeed ill-advised assumption that those speaking to each other from different social locations and experiences can fully ‘enter each other’s shoes’ (Young 1997b, 42).

As Young notices, too often when subjects attempt to put themselves into the position of another, they end up simply projecting their own ‘fears and fantasies’ onto that person, rather than truly taking on their point of view (1997b, 42). While the ability to emphasize with those different from oneself and to find common points of experience is also important and potentially beneficial to mutual understanding, a complete sympathetic reversal of positions is not possible, and is best not attempted. Rather than assuming that moral respect requires the ability to adopt the standpoint of others, Young favors an ‘asymmetrical reciprocity,’ which recognizes the

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30 This skepticism about the ability of persons to imaginatively occupy the position of others marks the most important difference between my C.S. model and standpoint theory, although both draw on the epistemological value of every day experience as central to politics and critiques of oppression and injustice.
common moral worth of subjects while not erasing asymmetries between them in terms of social location and their diverse histories (1997b, 41).

I find this approach a useful one, particularly well aligned with the critical realist emphasis I echo on the importance of lending greater or lesser epistemological weight to the speech of some subjects, given reference to their asymmetrical social locations and the at times privileged knowledge of the shared social world these subjects occupy that marginalized speakers may have as a result of these locations. Finally, this emphasis on listening to and learning from others, rather than assuming the ability to take on their point of view, promotes the possibility of a meaningful exchange of knowledge across difference due to its emphasis on ‘moral humility’ (Young 1997b, 49). Rather than assuming that the position of another can simply be creatively occupied and in this way fully known in advance, thus eliminating the need for the giving of testimony and respectful listening to such stories from experience, this approach keeps open the possibility for others to speak from their point of view, engaging in the “sometimes arduous and painful process in which they confront you with your prejudices, fantasies, and misunderstandings about them, which you have because of your point of view” (Young 1997b, 49). In other words, the only way to ‘know’ the other is to listen to them, rather than imaginatively adopting their point of view, and moral respect thus requires recognizing the limits of understanding across difference as well as this ability to listen attentively and critically evaluate what is being said.

Rather than common experiences and points of view, then, this communicative and radically plural approach to dialogue emphasizes learning and listening, made possible through common capacities – both for critical thinking and emotional growth. Here, asking questions and listening attentively and sympathetically to the answers given shows respect for and interest in

31 Along with Young, I remain committed to the value of asymmetrical forms of reciprocity, which she specifically contrasts with the defense of ‘symmetrical reciprocity’ offered by Benhabib (1997).

32 See Chapter five.
one’s fellow interlocutors, but does not assume those asking will know in advance the answers that will be given or can anticipate how the issues discussed look to the speaker (Young 1997b, 55). This lack of prior understanding of foreknowledge is where the dialogue may be again moved along by a “respectful stance of wonder,” involving openness across difference, where subjects await “new insight about their needs, interests, perceptions, or values” by listening to others differently located from them (Young 1997b. 56). As Young suggests, “wonder… means being able to see one’s own position, assumptions, as strange, because [they have] been put in relation to others” (1997b, 56). To avoid dangers of exoticizing the other by adopting a position of ‘distant awe’ towards them through wonder, one’s own relational strangeness must be emphasized, and the right to stay silent, that is, to not answer or to not answer questions in full must be protected (Young 1997b, 56).

Still, the motivation to continue such communications across difference relies in part on the incentive that one will learn something new, 33 that there will be enhanced understanding of one’s social world offered and insights brought forward from valuable and unique cultural perspectives within such processes as a vital form of epistemic cooperation. Conducting such cooperation through such testimony, as Sanders has argued, is both more egalitarian and potentially productive than deliberative processes, because there is a common assumption of everyone’s right to speak and be heard. As Young suggests, drawing from Sanders, “because everyone has stories to tell, with different styles and meanings, and because each can tell her story with equal authority, the stories have equal value in the communicative situation” (1997b, 33).

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33 When considering the motivational potential of wonder, I am particularly addressing structurally privileged subjects within liberal contexts like Canada, although these subject positions are themselves relational rather than fixed, and all subjects stand in degrees of co-implication within intersecting structures of privilege and oppression. No cultural group, moreover, has yet to fully capture an understanding of what societal conditions are most conducive to human flourishing, and as such, both the privileged and marginalized alike – themselves relational concepts – have things to learn from one another. In this way, all persons may be positively moved to engage with what is new and different through emotional responses like wonder, although the risks involved are uneven across social locations of relational power and penalty.
73). Here, again, the potential to be moved and motivated through curiosity and wonder becomes crucial to such a project’s success.

As Ahmed writes,

The surprise of wonder is crucial to how it moves bodies. The body opens as the world opens up before it; the body unfolds into the unfolding of a world that becomes approached as another body. This opening is not without its risks: wonder can be closed down if what we approach is unwelcome, or undoes the promise of that opening up. But wonder is a passion that motivates the desire to keep looking; it keeps alive the possibility of freshness, and vitality of a living that can live as if for the first time. This first-time-ness of wonder is not the radical present – a moment that is loveable only insofar as it is cut off from prior acts of perception. Rather, wonder involves the radicalization of our relation to the past, which is transformed into that which lives and breathes in the present.

(180, 2004, my emphasis)

In this way, wonder is part of a progression that can challenge and transform one’s thinking about matters of justice and other fundamental values when confronted with a new and different perspective or insight into the workings of both the present and the past. Such a progression, for Ahmed, involves three steps. First, one may respond to new or challenging information with a sense of assurance, thinking, “this is the way the world is;” second, may come disbelief, asking “how can the world be like this?” and finally, there may come a move towards a sense of wonder which prompts further inquiry and investigation as one seeks to determine how the world came to take such a shape, how it may be changed for the better. In a sense, then, as mentioned briefly in chapter seven, by emphasizing the potentially transformative power and motivating incentive of wonder, I am relying partially on an assumption regarding a natural inclination toward curiosity within the human species to provoke a sense of moving toward that which is surprising, that which may reveal historical and contextual truths previously masked or left uninterrogated as a result of one’s own limited experiences, biases, and preoccupations.  

34 The universality of wonder or curiosity as a means of moving subjects towards what is new or different, however, remains open to challenge and is itself subject to cultural variation, as well as being impacted by differences in power. Indeed, privileged subjects may react with anger, disbelief, or even disgust rather than wonder, particularly when being confronted with differences in experience and knowledge connected to structural injustices they benefit from.
The passion of wonder, ultimately, as Ahmed suggests, “is a passion that allows the historicity of forms of life to emerge,” and one that motivates a desire to interrogate these forms of life in relation to those who have lived differently, at least in part (2004, 183). Rather than being merely private or personal, then, emotions such as wonder “involve critical and public forms of inquiry,” Ahmed argues, understanding such emotions as mediated by social location and experience in much the same way conceived of by Mohanty and other critical realists (2004, 181). Recalling Mohanty’s rejection of emotions as merely one’s innermost possessions, isolated from broader social, cultural, and historical factors, Ahmed argues similarly that emotions must be seen as more than merely personal, for “when emotions are seen as only personal, or about the person and how they feel, then the systematic nature of their effects is concealed” and the productive force of such emotions, epistemologically or otherwise, is similarly limited in harmful ways (2004, 198). Using emotions productively, then, requires tracing their situatedness in particular cultural and historical contexts, relating subjects outward to a mutual interrogation of their past and present.

There are, again, risks expected in such processes of testifying across differences and hierarchical social locations. The can be no guarantee that telling one’s story means it will actually be heard, that is, listened to respectfully, sympathetically, and understood in full, nor will it necessarily make the speaker feel better, which, Ahmed argues, while not being in itself a sign that justice has been done, does matter (2004, 201). What Ahmed importantly emphasizes, then, is that ‘telling’ of a story of pain and injury is not necessarily therapeutic for the speaker, for, indeed,

The telling is also about witnessing, which makes demands on others to hear, but which does not always get a just hearing. Responses to testimonies of injury can ‘cover over’ the injury, for example, by claiming it as ‘our own’ (appropriation). We should not conclude that testimonial forms of politics fail in such failures to hear, or in such refusals of recognition. Testimonies about the injustice of colonization, slavery and racism are not only calls for recognition; they are also forms of recognition, in and or themselves.

(Ahmed 2004, 200, my emphasis)
Despite disparities of reception, then, telling one’s own story remains a powerful and political act, and although it opens the speaker up to exposure, ridicule, and the potential indifference of others, the reception of others ought not to negate the value of these speech acts as forms of recognition, particularly self-recognition.

As Ahmed suggests, “[r]ecognition of injustice is not simply about others becoming visible (though this can be important). Recognition is also about claiming that an injustice did happen;” and as Charles Mills’s critique of privileged ignorance reminds us, making such a claim asserting the reality of historical injustices can be a radical one in the face of willful forgetting of such injustices (Ahmed 2004, 200, my emphasis). Ultimately, “healing does not cover over, but exposes the wound to others: the recovery is a form of exposure” which is itself a form of work that does not end in the first moment of hearing, but may often need to be repeated, again and again (Ahmed 2004, 200). In this way,

Doing the work of exposure is... both political and emotional work. The demand for recognition can risk exposing too much, and ‘defenses’ against ‘hearing’ the claim are often already in place (which can include guilt, shame and anger as well as denial and indifference) and those defenses can, but do not always, block the message. Political struggle is about learning to deal with such blockages, and finding ways through them. (2004, 200, my emphasis)

As a means of overcoming such blockages, then, I consider the use of testimony, guided by my three procedural criteria, to offer the best chance of facilitating a productive multicultural dialogue, despite differences in epistemic, political, and economic power, and across differences in experience, cultural identity, and styles of communication. Constraints relating to deliberative, impartial speech, on the other hand, arguably sustain rather than challenge such blockages, particularly within the perspectives of privileged subjects, who often have structural incentives to continue to ‘see the world wrongly,’ as Mills (1997, 2007a) has argued. Taking a flexible and creative approach to public testimony arguably also contains the potential to enable subjects to speak from cultural experience without becoming essentialized as static representatives of their
‘difference,’ or dismissed as too irrational, culturally determined, or simply too different to be understood.

This flexibility within the cultural positionality of speakers or testifiers is possible in part because such an approach understands culture to be both a laboratory in which individuals experiment with and pursue different conceptions of what is valuable in a flourishing life, but also because it acknowledges that the dialectical interplay between distinct cultures and their members – as well as with ‘external’ relations, both cultural and historic – will shape all persons in different ways. And an emphasis not only on cultural aspects of identity, but one’s social location in its full and shifting complexity also seeks to resist the risks of essentialism and tokenism. While there remains a basic cognitive element to the critical realist conception of experience, such that critical engagement with subjective experience may be combined with more objective evaluation against the location of that person within their social world, this is not a transcendent process, acknowledging instead that the social environment itself shapes these capacities and experiences in different and important ways.

This account thus promotes a more layered conception of persons. It seeks to identify a fundamental set of human capacities – both emotional and rational – alongside particular cultural interpretations of same, allowing for a diversity of personal experiences that come together with these cultural interpretations to foster and limit the development of these minimally common capacities. These come together to shape a person’s system of values. The important move made by critical realism is to take all of these layers seriously, and, whenever possible, to unite them through a bridging of the subjective experiences and objective evaluations in public dialogue. In Mohanty’s work, indeed, objectivity is gained not by rejecting or transcending subjective ‘bias’

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35 As Parekh has observed, human beings “share several capacities and needs in common, but different cultures define and structure these differently and develop new ones of their own” (2000, 240). Access to ‘objective’ knowledge about persons and social reality arguably comes from interrogating these differences, attending critically to ways in which such divergent conceptions of how values and needs ought to be defined, and capacities fostered, are promoted within distinct cultural communities.
but rather through “examining the epistemic consequences of our biases” (1997, 157). This critical realist approach conceptualizes objectivity not as an ahistorical or universal set of truths, but rather, “as a goal of inquiry,” with an emphasis on the epistemological value of error and self-correction (Mohanty 1997, 147). Here, objectivity is a “social achievement,” based on dialogue, collective struggle, historical investigation, rather than attained through an individual search for purity and transcendence (Mohanty 1997, 147). Always partial, knowledge is understood as a social practice, one constructed historically, and the ‘truth’ of particular claims about a given context will consist contingently on the “fit” between the structure of these theories and the way the world is or can empirically be shown to be (Mohanty 1997, 188).  

Moreover, while insisting on the need for an expanded and explicitly political intercultural dialogue, my model is not meant to pit diverse or ‘exotic’ minorities against a presumably unified or homogenous ‘majority.’ Instead, my model advocates for the recognition and expression of difference and hybridity, both external and internal to a given ‘culture,’ and does so, in part, to unsettle such pretensions of unity and homogeneity within a ‘majority’ culture. In this way, the majority will not look down upon the claims and practices of some cultural group from an imagined point of impartial transcendence, cataloging and evaluating their cultural practices and traditions in isolation. Instead, the practices of the majority must be recognized or at times uncovered as culturally distinct, particular, and, in some cases, exclusionary. This is part

36 Such a model of objectivity again implies a realist – but not naively positivist – framework. Indeed, within his conceptualization of objectivity as a collective goal of social inquiry, Mohanty continues to work against a positivist conception of truth as certainty and one-to-one correspondence, arguing that ‘objectivity’ is always “theory-dependent rather than innocent, filtered through our values, presuppositions, and ideologies, rather than unmediated and self-evident” (2001, 803).  

37 While I tend to use the labels ‘intercultural’ and ‘multicultural’ interchangeably, ‘intercultural’ may better capture what I mean here than multicultural, which may indeed posit too rigid a set of distinctions between groups in a ‘billiard ball’ fashion, to borrow from James Tully’s register (1995). However, I favor the continued deployment of the term ‘multicultural’ due to its hegemonic usage in Canadian debates, as both a mode of critique and as an attempt to subvert the project of top-down, liberal multiculturalism with an experientially driven and context specific ‘radical multiculturalism’ from ‘below’ again, borrowing this second phrase from Himani Bannerji (2000).
of what is at stake in marking liberalism as cultural, and in combining a nuanced understanding of historical patterns of colonization, state building, and economic exploitation of racialized and culturally imperialized bodies and groups with critical attention toward the contemporary structural context and individual social location.\(^{38}\)

Importantly, rather than suggesting cultural subjects are at all times radically and inescapably different, the main point I am making is that limiting conditions based on ‘common values’ or ‘public’ speech must not be used in order to narrowly set the terms of the dialogue before it has even begun. In this way, consensus itself cannot be the explicit goal or test of success for such dialogue, which should first be aimed at a substantive expression and meaningful interchange of culturally mediated values and beliefs, spoken from a variety of social locations, allowing for internal dissent/contention from within particular cultural ‘groups,’ and, finally, geared towards demystifying occluded relations of power, privilege, and oppression which are masked by formal liberal commitments to liberty, equality, and (weak, shallow, commodified) cultural diversity.

However, while committed in principle to the efficacy of testimony, guided by my three procedural criteria – epistemic contribution, historical injustice, and social location – in helping to facilitate and motivate such cooperation, I am cognizant of the distance between these principled aims and the highly unequal and contested terrain on which such dialogue may take place. It may be the case that, at present, there is a lack of political will to both participate in dialogue and listen to the testimony and stories of marginalized cultural and racialized subjects on the part of the privileged majority, and that, due to the privileged ignorance\(^{39}\) that may shape these subjects thinking, there is also an inability to hear what is said in any meaningful way. Although the critical realist model from which my own C.S. approach borrows heavily brings with it the

\(^{38}\) Ultimately, the critical realist conception of cultures as theories of the good life helps recast liberalism as one such theory, rather than an objective yardstick against which conceptions of the good life may be impartially assessed.

\(^{39}\) Discussed in more detail in chapter three.
assumption that there are certain empirical facts about the world\textsuperscript{40} that can be identified with reasonable accuracy, this approach to the ‘real’ must continue to resist sliding into simplistic positivist naivety, recognizing that even such ‘realities’ of inequality and domination are highly contested, subject to distortion and that, even when accepted by dominant subjects as ‘real,’ such inequalities will not necessarily move all powerful subjects to question and reject their own privileged status, particularly in terms of relinquishing the economic and political power that is attached to this status.

Conversely, on the side of those marginalized and oppressed subjects, cast outside of the imagined Canadian nation based on race, class, sexuality, physical ability, and so on, there are greater risks in exposing their experiences and life-stories to such public scrutiny and dialogue, risks which make any compulsion to speak out highly questionable. While there is thought to be intrinsic value in speaking out, when one is not heard, this value may be greatly diminished. Certainly, to speak for oneself and to one’s own community is in itself an important and necessary political project for many marginalized subjects,\textsuperscript{41} but bringing such testimony into a potentially hostile ‘public’ for interrogation and evaluation may at present be an unrealistic and even counterproductive project. Given inequalities in terms of access, time, and political, economic and epistemic power and authority at present, it may be that processes of re-socialization on the part of the privileged subjects may be aided first by written narratives and testimony told from a distance in order for such subjects to become accustomed to this form of knowledge production as valuable and political, before face-to-face dialogue and testimony can receive ‘just’ hearing.

\textsuperscript{40} For example, these features of the ‘real’ may be reflected in measures of economic inequality, historical patterns of domination and colonial dispossession, and so on.

\textsuperscript{41} The importance of speaking for one’s self and community is emphasized by many Black Feminist and post-colonial feminists. For example, see bell hooks (1981, 2009), Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (1991), Patricia Williams (1992), and Patricia Hill-Collins (2010).
Despite these differences in both experience and power, which may preclude the possibility that those speaking from structurally marginalized subject positions will indeed receive just hearing for their testimony, it is my hope that emphasizing the need to complicate discussions of what rightfully constitutes a ‘public’ reason through a focus on the legitimacy of knowledge derived form every day experience may prove a politically productive approach to multiculturalism, one with the potential to facilitate and motivate further inquiry and cooperation across difference as a collective epistemic project. Importantly, such a reconceptualizing of what is rightfully considered public, and what constitutes a good ‘reason,’ must be complicated with greater attention and investigation into common human capacities for emotion – particularly emotions such as anger, pain, wonder, empathy and love. While not denying the importance of critical reflection and argument, then, I emphasize that politically productive public multicultural dialogue may be facilitated best through playful, creative expressions and passionate stories spoken from experience, rather than through the use of dispassionate and ‘impartial’ reason.  

While not rejecting the capacity for rational, critical thought as fundamental to the human condition, my account remains distinct from the instrumental conception of reason closely connected to the Western liberal subject, defined as self-interested and independent. Rather, I follow Mohanty in conceiving of reason as fundamentally evaluative and not strictly instrumental, such that divergent values can be critically understood and their worth appreciated by those attempting to meet each other in respectful terms and acknowledge layers of complexity of each other’s heterogeneous subject positions (1997, 251). Such a conceptualization of reason as evaluative and multiple, that is, subject to cultural mediation, has the potential to shift the focus of public dialogue away from the narrow range of acceptable difference provided for in liberal models, thus widening the lens of what is imaginable and objectively valuable outside of instrumental accounts of self-interested rationality. These distinctions are not always rigid, however, and more will be said in the conclusion about the connections between my own C.S. model and the liberal paradigm I seek to both interrogate and at least partially reject, despite drawing certain values of democratic engagement, reason, and dialogue closely connected with this paradigm.
Conclusion: ‘Cities of Difference’

Politics must be conceived as a relationship of strangers who do not understand one another in a subjective and immediate sense, relating across time and distance.

Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990, p. 234)

Who is speaking, who is spoken of, and who listens is a result, as well as an act, of political struggle. Simply put, but discursive context is a political arena. To the extent that this context bears on meaning, and meaning is in some sense of object of truth, we cannot make an epistemic evaluation of the claim without simultaneously assessing the politics of the situation.


The city calls to me and to you, and offers us a place to act politically, but it also dispels our fears and illusions about mastery. We actually can live there without becoming kings or summoning kings to our rescue.


Throughout this project, I have sought to critique the conceptual inadequacies and unintended harms stemming from liberal articulations of multiculturalism, particularly as represented by the prominent work of Will Kymlicka. Stemming from this critical investigation, I have defended an alternative, more radical and substantive approach to multiculturalism as a form of epistemic cooperation aimed in large part towards interrogating and transforming structural – particularly racialized and cultural – injustice. As a means of grounding these commitments, in these final pages I begin to sketch a tentative defense of cities, and indeed neighborhoods, as the most likely and productive sites in which to engage in such epistemic cooperation, thereby rejecting the strong national focus (and bias) in Kymlicka’s liberal multiculturalism. In doing so, I do not presume to end the debate on multiculturalism in Canada, but only to suggest a potentially useful way of re-directing this debate, recommending a change of course grounded in a rejection of the individualized liberal subject as the ‘neutral’ or universal standard against which all cultural and political principles are judged, and calling for a subsequent widening of the public sphere to encourage intercultural debate and local decision making, thereby challenging the trend
within this debate to focus exclusively on the liberal democratic nation-state as the primary institutional site of politics, democratic action, and belonging.

It is my contention that theorists of diversity and difference, along with policy makers and activists, need to focus efforts on building equitable spaces for genuine intercultural dialogue at the local level rather than the national level, in cities, and even more specifically, in neighborhoods. It is within these shared spaces that claims and ends can be most effectively evaluated against one’s identifiable social location, and contextualized in light of local experiences of, and interplay with, structural, historical, national, and international forces of power and privilege.\(^1\) By positing the efficacy of the local to promote meaningful discussion across difference, I argue such discussions are most likely to be productive when speakers are motivated to come together to promote mutual understanding and find solutions to common struggles, common not due to a shared sense of identity, but because these struggles themselves are located on shared ground, allowing subjects to confront each other in their full particularity, rather than as abstracted, impartial versions of themselves.

Importantly, when seeking to empower and extend epistemological authority to previously marginalized subjects within multicultural dialogue, it is not just the political culture – namely the dominance of liberalism – that needs to be challenged and transformed. Indeed, such discussions require concrete, public spaces to which all those living in a given context have substantive access, and which themselves must be created and fostered in ways that will likely go beyond the capacity of merely voluntary ‘civic’ associations. The creation of such material spaces for public contestation and dialogue is crucial because, as Gayatri Spivak has influentially emphasized, “The subaltern does not lack thoughts or voice but rather social institutions and cultural communities, including tradition-given narrative paradigms, that will support her projects

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\(^1\) I have developed this interest in concepts of ‘place-based consciousness’ linking local and global struggles in part from the work of Arif Dirlik (2001) and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003).
and make sense of her aims” (quoted in Sheri Stone-Mediatore 2003, 141-42). As such, there must be an effort made within local communities to create these supportive sites and institutions, and to open the minds of privileged subjects to listen and give marginalized voices epistemic authority within them.

As Iris Marion Young similarly concludes,

The injunction to “be just”... concern[s] less the making of cultural rules than providing institutional means for fostering politicized cultural discussion, and making forums and media available for alternative cultural experiment and play.

(1990, 152, my emphasis)

Whether or not the state creates such spaces – a role which is especially questionable in a settler context like Canada – they remain political, and must be considered and empowered as such from below, if not from above.

In addition to calling for the creation of concrete public forums and inclusive cultural, economic, and political institutions at the local, neighborhood level, the success of such a multicultural project, as I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this text, requires revolutionary rejection of the rational, unified liberal subject as universal. Following Young, I suggest that the subject must instead be thought of as “always split, heterogeneous,” seeing personal identity as dialectically formed, rather than culturally determined or completely autonomous/detached from context and community (1990, 152). Recognizing the dialectically layered, heterogeneous nature of the self is a necessary step toward seeking justice and understanding across difference, Young argues, in part because in order “[f]or people to become more comfortable around others whom they perceive as different, it may be necessary for them to become more comfortable with the heterogeneity within themselves” (1990, 153). Such a multiple and internally diverse conception of the self, however, must be distinguished from the ‘split-subject’ generated by the liberal public/private split. In the latter case, the separation is forcible, external, and excludes some bodies and voices considerably more often than others.
Within her own work, Young advocates for ‘consciousness raising groups’ to aid such a cultural revolution as a form of ‘social’ or cognitive therapy. Through such groups, “aspects of social life that appear as given and natural come into question and appear as social constructions and therefore changeable” (1990, 153). They may also be used to help make the privileged aware of how their habitual reactions and even some well-intentioned practices may contribute to oppression (Young 1990, 154). Importantly, “such activity cannot take place in the abstract,” for, as Young argues, “people will be motivated to reflect on themselves and their relations with others only in concrete social circumstances of cooperation where they recognize problems” operative in the spaces they spare, at least tangentially (1990, 150). Examples given by Young include “the political group in which gays and lesbians voice dissatisfaction, the company that never seems to promote women and therefore loses them, the school or neighborhood with racial conflict” (1990, 155). Here, the emphasis is not on shared identity but shared ground and common sites of struggle, for example, against ongoing capitalist exploitation and environmental degradation, connected on both on a local and transnational level.

Thus, there remains a need for the local to serve as a concrete site for such consciousness raising forums, although these processes ought also be linked to transnational struggles, and should not take place within ‘closed’ communities where outsiders are prevented from entering or having a voice in community discussions. Although this discussion brings up questions relating to definitions of community membership, citizenship, and sovereignty that cannot be addressed adequately here, at their best, such practices of local decision-making and intercultural epistemic cooperation have the potential to promote a positive recognition of specificity, and serve as a

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2 I have in mind here efforts to link local and global struggles against exploitative forces of capitalism, neo-liberalism and neo-imperialism discussed by Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003) in her work on transnational feminism, and that the need to promote greater recognition of the global scope and collective responsibilities of redistributive justice as outlined in Young’s (1990) global connectivity model.
challenge to the status quo through critical interjections that dislodge the universalist pretentions
of privileged groups.

In this way, this recommendation to refocus on cities and the local – in part aimed at
challenging the centrality of the ‘nation’ in multicultural discourses, particularly in Canada – also
helps push for a recognition of ‘internal’ difference among the dominant/imagined national ‘we,’
 presumed to represent the core national culture. Within the umbrella of the ‘Canadian nation,’
typically defined in terms of English-speakers and racially coded as white, asymmetries of
economic and political power, resources, cultural composition, geographical and climate
conditions must all be given greater theoretical and political weight in multicultural discussions, I
contend, along with attending to differences in terms of historical relationships to and within
nation-building projects, colonial ‘settlement,’ immigration patterns, and with respect to the
presence and population of Aboriginal nations. In order to pursue such work effectively, I
suggest, a contextualized approach with a strong regionalized focus and emphasis on personal
experience, such as that which my C.S model hopes to offer the beginnings of, is needed. This
requires a shift away from viewing the nation(state) as the primary focus of politics and
intellectual investigation of same.

However, at present, Canadian politics, and the academic study of it in particular, as
Gerald Kernerman (2005) so effectively demonstrates and many others have observed, is highly
biased towards and preoccupied with the concept of the nation. In particular, the search for a
unifying formula or some shared national identity dominates much of the academic study of

3 Regional differences and class disparity are two key areas neglected in much mainstream
multicultural theory in Canada, and within my own critique of this literature. How racism and
culturally embedded power imbalances function in regionally distinct contexts, I suggest, is
particularly in need of further study in CPS. At minimum, more work is needed in terms of
moving beyond comparative frameworks analyzing Quebec and ‘Canada outside Quebec’ as
monoliths, thereby ignoring internal differences of class, gender, race, and region within these
‘solitudes.’ One recent contribution from within CPS to breaking down these solitudes by
comparatively accessing distinct policy responses to diversity within major Canadian cities has
been made by Katherine A.H. Graham and Susan D. Phillips (2007).
Canadian politics, and critics of this preoccupation have observed that much of this discourse is premised on sustaining a sense that the nation is constantly in crisis – facing internal threats from Quebec and its other ‘diversities,’ and facing external threats from the United States. This sense of crisis helps limit the scope of multicultural accommodation, as diversity is posed as a ‘problem’ that threatens Canadian unity and social cohesion. For good examples of such critiques, see Richard Day (2000), Eva Mackey (2002) and Kernerman (2005).

This national focus, both theoretical and practical, is something that my project has sought to both implicitly and explicitly challenge. Much of this national preoccupation, as my earlier discussion of Kymlicka’s defense of liberal nationalism in the sixth chapter sought to make clear, has to do with the ongoing dominance of liberal theory within debates on multiculturalism in Canada in particular, and is arguably best challenged through a two-pronged rejection of both liberalism and nationalism itself. While articulating arguments in favor of a complete rejection of liberal nationalism is well beyond this project, the connections between liberal nationalism and subsequent defenses of sovereignty within racially exclusionary regimes of citizenship, along with other connected instances of racialized injustice and oppression in terms of access to employment, family unity, and so on, remain important ones to mark and interrogate, requiring more theoretical attention than they typically receive within mainstream CPS.

Indeed, as Kernerman has effectively argued, rather than conceived of as an explicitly anti-racist project focused on an interrogation of Canada’s colonial past and its racially exclusionary citizenship practices, past and present, much of the mainstream ‘Canadian conversation’ on cultural diversity pivots around the search for unity through the effective ‘management’ of diversity (2005, 15-16). The scholarly preoccupation within mainstream CPS with regard to questions of how to generate a formula for national unity through a particular management and – at times – celebration of diversity tends to distract scholars theorizing on matters of diversity in Canada from issues of structural oppression and enduring racialized
systems of privilege and exploitation. In this way, the operation of the Canadian conversation on multiculturalism (and beyond) arguably represents an important example of the potential for ideologically driven abstractions away from concrete matters of injustice and structural oppression embedded in the practice of idealized theory.

Although I have focused on addressing the manner in which Charles Mills’s work on this subject helps to explain gaps in Kymlicka’s theorizing on multicultural diversity specifically, applying a reading of Mills’s epistemologies of ignorance to the operation of the ‘Canadian conversation’ as a whole would itself be a useful project. While valuable, such a broader application of Mills’s critique has not been not the primary task of this endeavor and indeed, other scholars, including Richard Day (2000), Gerald Kernerman (2005), Debra Thompson (2008), and Nisha Nath (2011) have already begun work in this area; that is, challenging the national focus and preoccupation with questions of unity within mainstream CPS. Here, critical attention is directed not only toward Kymlicka’s liberal culturalist position, but also to the influential work of Charles Taylor (1991, 1993), James Tully (1995), and at times that of Alain Cairns (2001), as other leading representatives of the ‘Canadian conversation’ on multiculturalism, Canadian national identity, modes of belonging, and unity.

Within my project, I have instead been primarily concerned with interrogating the distinctive narrative of liberal progress told by Kymlicka, which offers a description of the historical, social, and institutional development of multiculturalism in Canada, while relying on a particular philosophical understanding of the relationship between the individual subject and their culture. As the third chapter has demonstrated, the development of ‘cultural rights’ within the Canadian context is made morally praiseworthy in Kymlicka in large part because of his attempts to link programs offering (multi)cultural rights to the full expressions of liberal justice. By protecting cultural contexts within which individuals autonomously pursue multiple versions of the good life, Kymlicka argues, liberal democracies like Canada’s can be said to have embraced a more consistent, inclusive and morally progressive understanding of liberal justice.
Ultimately, then, despite a secondary interest in the ideological buttressing of the racialized hierarchies which are endemic to the status quo and yet which are also covered over in the account of liberal progress into multiculturalism in Canada that Kymlicka offers, it is the particular relationship between subject and culture in Kymlicka’s liberal defense of multiculturalism that has been of primary concern to me in writing this project. Indeed, I have argued the ideological failings of Kymlicka’s idealized theorizing of liberal multicultural justice can best be explained through an interrogation of this subject and its cultural particularity and inherent gendered and racialized exclusions.

To that end, I have sought to highlight the inherently exploitative nature of the liberal subject – emphasizing that the autonomy this subject experiences is necessarily derived from the unfreedom or encumbrance of a typically gendered or racialized Other. I have also attempted to problematize the instrumental approach Kymlicka takes to cultural belonging as both disrespectful to and potentially oppressive of those who may wish to value and express their cultural membership for reasons not captured by liberal standards of value. I have argued that the imposition of liberal standards onto alternative – though relationally developed, externally mediated, and potentially overlapping – cultural frameworks is unjustly self-referential and epistemologically short-sighted. In Kymlicka, cultural contexts are owed to all individuals as a precondition for the meaningful pursuit of autonomous life plans, but only those cultural communities that prove their worth by displaying their sufficiently liberal character as such contexts for autonomous choice are deemed permissible and worthy of protection. This imposition of liberal standards greatly narrows the possible range of cultural contexts available and has the potential to violate the very premise on which they are defined in Kymlicka, namely as an extension of the primary good of self-respect, and ultimately obscures rather than exposes hierarchies of race and culture operating within ‘diverse’ contexts like Canada’s.
Despite these particular reasons for focusing on Kymlicka, in general, I suggest that his strong commitment to liberal nationalism⁴ and his hegemonic status within the ‘Canadian School’ has greatly influenced mainstream theoretical debates on these matters, helping to retain an abstract and philosophical focus in the operation of Canadian conversation on multiculturalism, which remains largely divorced from an interrogation of white supremacy and colonialism as fundamental forces shaping Canadian politics and the academic study of it.⁵ Shifting away from a national focus to the local, to cities and more specifically to neighborhoods, I contend, may help to counteract some of the occlusions of power and inequality perpetuated by this often abstract, idealist, and nationalist preoccupation in Kymlicka’s work and in the mainstream of Canadian political thought more generally.

Rejecting top-down, state-sponsored federal initiatives to foster national unity through mechanisms of diversity management and (carefully restricted) celebration, I tentatively call instead for such radical dialogue, testimony, and creative exchanges of experience and knowledge to be organized in public forums, neighborhood associations, demonstrations and confrontations in public spaces such as parks and protests on government buildings, and through increased local empowerment. While gaining the momentum and political will to begin such changes and reorganization of the political landscape may initially requite national representation, including special representation⁶ for certain cultural and racial groups, I am hesitant about the effectiveness

⁴ Kymlicka’s commitment to liberal nationalism is particularly evident within Politics in the Vernacular (2001), and in general, is demonstrated through his privileging of nations as ‘societal cultures’ deserving of accommodations and status above other groups and his arguments in favor of English-Canadian national building.

⁵ The work of Tully (1995) is arguably the strongest exception to this critique within the ‘mainstream’ of the Canadian conversation on matters of diversity and national unity, but for that reason, and others relating to Tully’s differing conception of the subject, and of culture as fundamentally political, addressing his work substantively is too far outside the scope of my project.

⁶ For more discussion of special group representation, see Young (1990, 2000), Kymlicka (1995, 2001) and Melissa Williams (1998). Due to the complexities of mass society, as Young (2000) has pointed out on several occasions when developing her critique of the communitarian privileging of face-to-face interactions, some level of representation will always be required.
of this form of political organization, and its ability to bring about radical change long term, particularly in (post)colonial contexts like Canada’s.

While engaging in radical, localized public dialogue will inevitably have risks for marginalized subjects and costs (both material and psychological, emotional) for privileged social groups. I argue it will have benefits as well. A ‘revolution of subjectivity’ is required, I argue, to improve the lives of all persons currently living under neo-liberal regimes of ‘possessive’ and self-interested individualism. Indeed, insofar as a cultural revolution of both structures and subjectivities (dialectically linked) aims to dismantle and resist structural forces of oppression and exploitation to which, ultimately, all but a privileged minority (white, bourgeois, physically and mentally able, heterosexual men) are subject to varying extents, the improvements to be gained will potentially also be shared, despite the uneven costs.

Such a revolution reconceptualizes subjects as dialectically produced by, and embedded within, constitutive yet multiple horizons of cultural membership and belonging. These are horizons which I argue produce multiple positive duties as well as individual and collective rights, here emphasizing mutual accountability and responsibility among those who share and live in these webs of cultural interaction, expression, and meaning. This vision of multicultural communities and selves comes with an emphasis on space and place, then, and at times must privilege the local for its potential to generate meaningful duties and networks of communication.

Indeed, no matter what the level of political organization, be it national or neighborhood based, not everyone can or will be ‘at the table’ and as such, some form of representation will always be necessary. Determining the correct nature of such representation is work for future projects and dialogue ‘from below,’ however, not something I am able to offer a clear formula for here.

For the purposes of this study, I am speaking primarily of those ‘exalted’ as ‘true’ citizens of Canada due, most often, to their whiteness, although intersections of class, gender, sexuality, age and ability must also be considered.

Of the kind Young (1990) speaks of, highlighting the need to think of subjects as heterogeneous, relational, and multiple, a version of which I have attempted to implicitly and explicitly defend through my critique of the liberal subject as ‘unified’ and inherently exclusionary and the promotion of a ‘dialectical’ conceptualization of identity within my C.S. model.

The notion of ‘possessive individualism’ as I mean it here was first articulated by C.B Macpherson (1964).
and contestation between those located in culturally distinct but geographically overlapping communities or identities. Importantly, such spaces of dialogue cannot be dominated solely by ‘traditional’ elites, whether representing minority or majority groups, and such dialogue must be premised on values of mutual respect, asymmetrical reciprocity, and humility. As I have suggested in the seventh and eighth chapters, considerations of time, epistemic authority, and political and economic resources also factor heavily into the potential success of such dialogue.

Taking such considerations seriously does not entirely eliminate the potential for epistemologically productive sharing across difference, but these differences in power and circumstances cannot be naively ignored, either. In other words, despite the potential for sharing across differences in both culture and power to be productively facilitated through dialogue guided by my three procedural criteria, along with principles of narrative testimony, my commitment to multiculturalism as a radical form of epistemic cooperation is best conceived of as situated within a broader social justice project which requires greater efforts to reconceptualize the public and private spheres, what qualifies as a ‘good’ or public reason, and to combat often unconscious or deep-seated prejudices and aversions to those ‘different’ from oneself. Success in such efforts requires a revolution of both (liberal) cultural norms and of subjectivity itself, and thus, this vision of multicultural epistemic cooperation remains, to an extent, utopian in the

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10 That is, who has the time, and resources, whether epistemic, political, or economic, to engage in such substantive dialogue in public forums, neighborhood associations, and so on. While I am in favor of formal efforts to facilitate such dialogue, I am also concerned with a general widening of the public sphere to include a more fluid and open expression of particularity and difference, cultural or otherwise, in the course of daily lives, encompassing economic, civil, and political spheres.

11 The success of such dialogue is also, of course, premised on common language. The limits of a dialogue communicated only English, or even English and French, in the Canadian case, must then be recognized. At minimum, I would suggest that there needs to be greater institutional support offered to those seeking language training, more efforts made to accommodate non-English/French speakers during this process, and that accent discrimination needs to be combated. For an example of how accent discrimination current operates within the Canadian economic sphere, see Gillian Creese (2007).
current political and economic climate, while potentially operating within concrete public sites in the future, if the necessary changes both structurally and cognitively – combating privileged, willful ignorance and aversion to those perceived to be different from oneself – are made.

It may be that creative, indirect or informal interventions into oppressive institutional and cognitive structures through testimony and dialogue ‘from below’ will help to open up the possibility and political will to create such material spaces of epistemic cooperation and attach these spaces more concretely and directly to processes of economic and political decision making, however. In this way, the recommendations of my model seek practical utility at present, calling for self-interrogation, a widening of what is considered public and political, and emphasizing the epistemological value of speaking from experience, while also promoting a utopian vision of multicultural epistemic cooperation that may help to inspire the creation of conditions under which this vision may be more fully realized.

Ultimately, this is a vision of community that is also explicitly based on recognizing the fact and worth of a politically heterogeneous and culturally diverse public, and, in this way, resists typical homogenizing tendencies within more strictly communitarian accounts of the ideal of community.¹² Nor do I envision autonomous communities forming silos with no interaction or obligations to one another. Rather, with Young (2000), I tentatively favor a combination of regional empowerment, emphasizing strong links of interdependence and co-responsibility both within and between communities, along with globalized regulatory bodies and forums of representation, moving away from a strong commitment to the nation-state as the primary site of politics and representation.¹³

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¹³ Such recommendations remain highly tentative, however, as the logistics of which require far greater thought and empirical analysis/planning. In addition to Young’s concept of regional empowerment linking local communities and global responsibilities and regulation, an interesting paper proposing something similar has been written by Ian Angus, who defends a model of what he calls “post-colonial federalism” which is characterized by “a de-centred political discourse and
As Young suggests, within such a model linking local empowerment and globalized accountability and responsibility, cities provide unique conditions for diversity to flourish and be productively shared in the ‘living together of strangers’ (1990, 237). That is, cities can (ideally) operate as spaces where difference can thrive without exclusion, where difference can be expressed as “a side-by-side particularity neither reducible to identity nor completely other” (Young 1990, 238). By focusing on shared space, rather than a shared identity, city life, defined as the living together of strangers, provides for some overlapping concerns and interests along with a diffused sense of belonging, not attached to a particular group membership or common cultural affiliation, but to the places in which one works and lives, thereby contributing to one’s sense of having an active stake in the structures which order every day life. Bound in complex relations of economic cooperation and distribution, transportation, exchange, communication, entertainment, and social provision, the being together of strangers, that is – of differently located social actors within city spaces – “entails some common problems and common interests, but

a plurality of interacting public spheres” (2002, 2). While Angus’s article does not go into great detail of how such a model would be realized in practice, I am intrigued by his brief formulation of an “umbrella state” which would “aim at protecting citizens from misfortune that often stem from nature, society and economy” while allowing for the “source of innovation and creativity [to] reside in civil society – including the development of community controls on investment and environmental impacts” promoting the autonomy and sustainability of local communities. While it stops short of the dismantling of the colonial Canadian state itself, and may thus prove an inadequate proscription to some, this is an approach to federalism that I suggest deserves more attention and research within CPS.

14 When making arguments in favor of cities as productive and indeed invaluable sites of political action, dialogue and resistance, where difference can thrive while potentially producing relationships defined through solidarity and collective responsibility, it is crucial to recognize and interrogate the processes of colonial dispossession which have shaped and continue to shape urban landscapes in settler states such as Canada, as Nicolas Blomley (2004) has emphasized. 15 While Young’s position most closely mirrors my own, other literature defending the democratic possibilities of cities and the local as a means of expressing and learning from difference, and simply as a meaningful site of political action and belonging more generally, that has helped inform my position includes the work of Jodi Dean (1996), Engin Isin (2000), Nicholas Blomley (2004), David Harvey (2008), and Warren Magnusson (1996, 2011). This call to move away from a central focus on the nation to the local has also been influenced by the work of Nancy Fraser (1990), who argues in favor of a move away from a single public sphere to multiple, heterogeneous subaltern ‘publics.’ The apparent affinity between multicultural theory and urban studies is another area that I suggest is deserving of greater attention and research within CPS.
[these] do not create a community of shared final ends, of mutual identification and reciprocity” (Young 1990, 238).

Instead, for Young, in the public life of an unoppressive city, ideally, “the differences remain unassimilated, but each participating group acknowledges and is open to listening to others. The public is heterogeneous, plural, playful, a place where people witness and appreciate diverse cultural expressions that they do not share and do not fully understand” (1990, 241). Difference is not assimilated in such living together of strangers, then, but is still potentially and productively shared, enriching all those who move within common public spaces and are subject to the diffuse but at times shared material concerns generated from these spaces. While more work in this area needs to be done in order to determine the viability of such recommendations, these reflections merely seek to point in the direction of productive avenues for future research, rather than providing definitive answers to emergent questions concerning the specific modes of representation, along with the design of institutional structures, that would be required at the local and global level, as well as concerns regarding sources of belonging, the nature of citizenship, and indeed questions concerning the legitimacy of borders and sovereignty themselves at any level of political organization, all of which can be connected to such a rejection of the liberal nation-state model.

Conclusion

While also attempting put forward an alternative model of multiculturalism as a form of epistemic cooperation best conducted at the local level, since the beginning of this project I have conceived of it fundamentally as a critique of the racialized hierarchies embedded within but simultaneously occluded by liberal multiculturalism – occlusions which I have argued are facilitated and sustained in part due to the exploitative, exclusionary nature of the liberal subject at the heart of liberal defenses of multiculturalism like Kymlicka’s. Throughout this project, then, I have critiqued the ahistorical and detached conception of the self which liberalism defends, troubling the possibility and ideal of impartiality as individual transcendence of context and
personal bias through rational distancing. In doing so, however, I am not rejecting people’s ability to act and think critically, but instead am only emphasizing that these capacities are always mediated by discourse and context. Thus, we can never gain full autonomy from others in terms of non-reliance on them for the formation of our sense of self and the fulfillment of our needs, both basic and complex. Importantly, then, critical reflection and self-interrogation cannot be achieved in isolation, but necessarily involves collective struggle, that is listening to, speaking with, and taking seriously the critiques and contributions of those differently located – be that racially, culturally, economically, politically, or geographically – from oneself.

In this way, my critique seeks a reopening and redirecting of a conversation begun in a variety of ways by communitarians, feminists, postmodernists, and post-colonial and critical race scholars, all marking and interrogating the limits of liberalism and the white, disembodied, masculinist, and autonomous subject of the liberal, Enlightenment tradition. I have attempted to draw many threads of these already interwoven critiques closer together throughout my project, and to apply them to the mainstream ‘Canadian conversation’ on multiculturalism by focusing on one of this conversation’s most prominent, comprehensive, and influential speakers, Will Kymlicka. I have argued it is not multiculturalism itself, but its liberal conceptualization and constraints that hinders the realization of a more racially and culturally just, egalitarian, and democratically robust society in settler contexts such as Canada.

Throughout this project, I have thus called for a greater interrogation of liberal principles and assumptions about the self in order to highlight and challenge – rather than cover over and naturalize – the culturally particular and harmful aspects of the liberal tradition. In so doing, I have attempted to clear the ground for a radical, substantive vision of multiculturalism as an epistemically and politically motivated project emphasizing the importance of sharing knowledge, belief, and values across differences in identity and structural positioning. I have done so, however, while remaining cognizant and critical of what are at times vast differences in racial, economic, political, cultural, and epistemic power, along with unequal levels of access to
public space and epistemic authority. All of these factors operate in heterogeneous and stratified contexts such as Canada’s, potentially blocking the possibility for understanding and cooperative dialogue to occur among differently located social actors. In making this critique, however, I cannot escape my own embeddedness within a liberal cultural ethos, but can only attempt to think critically within it.

Indeed, in order to develop my own alternative defense of multiculturalism as a form of epistemic cooperation facilitating both the public and politicized sharing of distinct (yet potentially overlapping and multiple) cultural knowledges, alongside the public expression of cross-cultural critiques of injustice and oppression ‘from below,’ I have both critiqued and relied on values closely connected to liberalism. The autonomous, independent, and ultimately exploitative and exclusionary conceptualization of the self arguably at the heart of liberalism is something I have sought to interrogate and reject. The public/private split, and the limits set on what counts as legitimately public and political, embedded in defense of impartiality or state neutrality, in particular, are restrictions I have marked as both culturally particular and epistemically harmful. While these remain substantive objections to and differences from the liberal model and my own, I have also assumed that persons have basic capacities for reason – although more rooted, contextual, emotionally informed, and multiple than in the liberal model – and have retained other assumptions about the operation of politics – such as the importance of democratic dialogue – which are closely connected to and implicated within the liberal tradition.

In part, this is a reflection on my cultural embeddedness, and my own limitations as a thinker and as an embodied subject raised and educated within that liberal tradition. Without essentializing what is an internally heterogeneous social group, if I am generally right about the dominance of liberal values and norms within the mainstream of white, English, middle-class Canadian life, and indeed the imagined Canadian nation more generally, then it is fair to say that these values and norms inform much about the cultural ethos I am constitutively embedded within. I may critically engage with and attempt to even reject many aspects of liberalism, but
complete transcendence is impossible, I have argued, and that is reflected in my own work and ongoing commitment to many values – again, particularly relating to the basic capability persons hold for rational action and critical reflection – associated with liberalism. To an extent, I simply wish to acknowledge and own this connection, to identify it and continue to interrogate it within my self and my work.

At the same time as I acknowledge this connection, I also maintain that values of common human dignity, the ability of all persons to critically reflect on their own ends within culturally mediated contexts, to speak and reason together, and to come together to democratically make decisions with collective political and economic impacts, are ideals not belonging solely to – and certainly never realized substantively within – the liberal tradition. While I am more suspicious of liberal ideals than Mills – who suggests these may be taken up when the racialized occlusions embedded within them are fully interrogated and rejected because, in part, liberalism is, if not the only, but certainly the dominant ‘game in town’ when doing political theory in North American democracies – I do not distance myself from all aspects of liberalism entirely (2007a, 102). Again, by grounding my argument on a critique of the liberal subject as exploitative and exclusionary, I have attempted to demonstrate why otherwise praiseworthy ideals and principles of liberal justice, and liberal commitments to multiculturalism in particular, are doomed to failure. It is not, then, the case that all aspects of the broad and varied legacy of the liberal tradition are without merit, but indeed that even its positive aspects are made substantively unrealizable and illusory by relying too closely and narrowly for their justification on a defense of this inherently harmful, hierarchical, racialized and gendered subject.

However, while emphasizing the need for ongoing interrogation of the racialized and gendered exclusions inherent to this liberal subject within CPS, I am myself implicated within the privileged, white, Anglophone majority of Canada’s imagined nation in ways which limit my suitability to direct a conversation on race and power in this context ‘from below.’ As a white and able bodied subject, both native born to Canada and a first language English-speaker, I am often
able to move through spaces of privilege quite seamlessly, and, despite attempts to critically interrogate my racialized privilege, I retain structural benefits as well as psychological ones from the color of my skin and from my accent. This is also due in part to my educational privilege and academic training, as I am trained and have achieved discursive success within a competitive, individualist and masculinist academic ethos embedded with implicit yet powerful racialized and imperialist hierarchies which continue to inform what constitutes legitimate knowledge and good scholarly practice.

I am also queer, a woman, and at least by way of birth and upbringing, Mennonite, although my family did not live on a colony, and the churches we attended were at times from different Christian denominations. Although I have left many of the ‘thickest’ aspects of this cultural and religious upbringing aside, I have not transcended these aspects of my identity, but see my thinking and sense of self informed by them even as I critically interrogate and at times transform their meanings for my own life. Growing up white and Christian within a nation which so often imagines itself to be white and Christian, I did not experience structural disadvantage due to this cultural/religious upbringing, and although tensions between my queerness and the religious commitments of my family and broader cultural community have brought with them emotional and material costs, these are not equivalent to and should not then be conflated with experiences of racialized oppression and exclusion.

I do not claim, then, any privileged ability to speak for or represent nonwhite subjects in Canada, so often cast as outsiders to the nation that my own skin color, linguistic abilities, and contingencies of birth have offered me implicit and symbolic inclusion within. Rather, my work begins from an interrogation of my own subject position, informed by efforts in both my academic and every day life to combat privileged blindness and ideological mystification in my own thinking and behavior through dialogue with others in order to notice and reject, when possible, those processes of epistemic and political power and domination I am racially offered inclusion within.
And while at times the best solution may be for white speakers to remain silent, to make room for non-white subjects to speak about matters of racialized oppression that their own experiences may give them privileged insights into, whiteness, either my own, or the whiteness of other select academics, is not a good enough reason for silence on this issue. Indeed, as Thompson (2008) has emphasized in her own critique of the failure of mainstream Canadian political science to interrogate race and racial oppression in Canada, ultimately we all study race, whether this is explicitly acknowledged or not.\(^{16}\) Importantly, following the recommendations of Linda Alcoff, I am committed to processes of speaking with and listening to others different from myself, rather than attempting to speak for such subjects, and this commitment is needed in order to avoid the dangers of ‘retreat,’\(^ {17}\) wherein privileged subjects can too easily abdicate responsibility for political action and interrogation of injustice on the basis that their own privilege means they can never ‘get it’ (1991-1992, 17-23).

Issues of racialized injustice, cultural imperialism, gendered inequality, sexual difference, as well as exclusions generated from differences in physical and mental ability, must be critically interrogated by all persons, not simply those who are clearly identifiable with one or another marginalized social grouping. This is the case because these are interconnected, intersecting issues and because internal differences and hybrid identities always cause overlap and internal conflict even among those who do actively identify with a given group. As Alcoff suggests, struggle for truth and efforts to rid oneself from prejudice must be engaged in collectively with others so that “aspects of our location less highlighted in our minds might be revealed to us” by those differently located (1991-1992, 25). In such a process, while no one should be obligated to

\(^{16}\) Importantly, the very decision to ‘move over’ or not speak about race and racism on the part of white subjects itself comes from a position of privilege. As Alcoff notes, “those not in a position of speaking cannot retreat from an action they do not employ” (1991-1992, 24).

\(^{17}\) An example of such ‘retreat’ is demonstrated by Adam Swift (2008) in his reply to Mills’s critique of ideal theory in Contract and Domination, wherein Swift suggests that white American theorists may avoid talking about racial injustice not due to privileged ignorance, but a principled desire not to speak for others.
speak, no one should be denied the opportunity to do so, either, and responsibility must be collective and forward-looking, rather than focused on individual blame and backward-looking guilt.

In a sense, then, I am writing and arguing from the lived experience of a white, English-speaking academic, trained within Western, liberal institutions, and doing so in order to highlight and critique the gaps in this education and the liberal presumptions it is so often founded upon, noticing moments of blindness towards the culturally particular and racially exclusionary nature of these systems which I have experienced as an insider within them. My own gendered difference, my sexual orientation, and the strong religious commitments – particularly the approaches to family life and community – within which I was raised have at times helped me identify some of these gaps, feeling a disconnect and discomfort within much of what is naturalized and taken for granted about persons and the good life within liberal cultural norms and institutions.

This is not to say, again, that my own experiences as a queer woman are equivalent to those of racially marginalized subjects, or even that they are representative of other white, English-speaking queer women living in Canada. But my own multifaceted and at times conflicting social location has helped me to notice and become critical of deficiencies within the so-called ‘universal’ subject position and principles of liberalism, and has helped me to draw connections between this abstract yet exclusionary subject and occlusions of racial injustice and white supremacy within both the ‘Canadian’ national imaginary and the mainstream academic study of it. I have attempted to emphasize the cognitive blockages endemic to willful, racialized and otherwise privileged ignorance within structurally dominant subjects in part because I am able to recognize these limitations within my own thinking, even as I continue to struggle against them. It is from this complicated and shifting position that I write and struggle against the
limitations of the liberal cultural tradition I was raised within, and given privileged access to in large part due to the whiteness of my skin.$^{18}$

By emphasizing that self-interrogation can only be achieved through dialogue with others and through collective struggle, rather than individual detachment and rational transcendence, the story I am trying to tell within these final pages, and indeed throughout this project, is informed not only by my own situated and dialectically formed sense of self, but by the work and words of others different – racially, culturally, geographically, and in a host of other ways – from myself. In making this critique of the liberal subject and of liberal multiculturalism in Canada, I remain indebted to the work of the feminist, post-colonial, critical race, and critical realist scholars I have learned from and attempted to critically synthesize within my own ‘C.S. model.’ These scholars have challenged and helped inform my thinking about the nature of race as a constructed system of political and economic domination, one which continues to shape ‘the real’ in de facto and powerful ways in settler states like Canada and the world order more broadly, along with unsettling intuitions I began with concerning the meaning of cultural identity and the political itself. I add my voice to theirs not in order to drown them out, but to carry on a crucial conversation not heard often enough – and too easily avoided – within the mainstream of English Canadian political scholarship and the liberal institutions of Canadian politics and academia themselves.

Mine is thus only one voice among many who have already begun or joined this conversation at the critical edges of CPS, and my aim here is to help direct the attention of the mainstream CPS toward these critical edges where the best and most productive work is already being done to interrogate the nature of politics and identity in Canada. Here, issues of justice,

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$^{18}$ As I write this, I am continuously reminded that I must be careful navigating the dangers embedded within such a project – remaining vigilant against any celebration of my own struggles toward anti-racism. Here I am thinking particularly of Sunera Thobani’s theory of exaltation, that is, the triumphalist narratives of multicultural tolerance valorizing the morally superior quality of the Canadian national within the Canadian imaginary on the part of white subjects.
national identity, unity, solidarity, democratic action, and cultural accommodation are being interrogated and discussed in light of – rather than simply abstracted from – the realities of gendered, racialized oppression and colonial domination which still inform and shape the Canadian political, cultural, economic, and academic landscape.

This work, however, still remains far from mainstream within CPS, and a substantive interrogation of racialized oppression, colonial dispossession, cultural imperialism, and other exclusions which are fundamental within the Canadian nation is still too easily avoided in large part due to the imposition of a formal ‘ground zero’ of equality at the abstract and idealized level of liberal theorizing, which I have argued often denies ongoing realities of injustice and oppression by individuating structural oppression as a matter of personal preference or private difference. My arguments throughout this project have sought to demonstrate that Kymlicka’s liberal culturalist model, as a hegemonic representation of the ‘Canadian School’ and a leading defense of multiculturalism as a liberal theory and practice, thus legitimizes and sustains – rather than causes – the status quo, covering over racialized inequality and injustice due to his central reliance on the formal equality of the liberal subject. This argument again recalls Mills’s critique of ideologically motivated abstraction within much of ideal and mainstream theories of justice, where the objection is not to abstraction in itself, but to the particular manner in which certain abstractions – particularly from the realities of colonialism and other forms of racialized injustice – distort the principles of justice and equality that are being theorized. Using the liberal subject as the standard against which the utility of these distorted principles can be tested, I have argued, only further limits their ability to deliver what they promise – be it justice, equality, or genuine multicultural inclusion and exchange.

I conclude, then, with the warning and reminder offered by Himani Bannerji that, whatever these are, whatever one’s subject position, and whoever is practicing it, liberalism cannot adequately meet human needs (2000, 119). In so doing, within the study of political science and theory in Canada and beyond, I call for a central return to and expansion of the
longstanding critique brought forward by feminists, communitarians, socialists, postcolonial and
critical race theorists, and indeed postmodernists as well, all coalescing around the inherent
limitations of liberalism as a theory of justice, the self, the good, and of human flourishing.
Following from this, I have suggested throughout this piece that if multiculturalism is to function
as something other than a form of containment for difference expressed through shallow and
symbolic celebration of power-neutral 'diversity, then it must break from the liberal restraints and
defenses of it currently championed by Kymlicka and his mainstream interlocutors.

If multiculturalism can instead be reconceived as a radical and ongoing process of
epistemic cooperation, geared towards sharing substantive knowledge across difference in a
manner which fundamentally interrogates rather than covers over racialized oppression, injustice,
and colonial dispossession, then the success of this project requires that the limitations of
liberalism must be recognized and resisted more substantively than they currently are within
mainstream Canadian political thought. If the arguments offered here prove compelling, my hope
is that they will contribute to a redirection of focus within Canadian scholarship away from a
central reliance on the supremacy of liberal values and the sanctity of the liberal individual as the
moral yardstick against which all speech and practices are judged, prompting renewed interest in
a widening and reconfiguring of what rightfully constitutes the political realm – as well as its
legitimate functions – in what we now call Canada, and beyond.
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